

DIVERSE COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT AT VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AGENCY: Missile Defense Agency

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

BACKGROUND: The Missile Defense Agency (MDA) is responsible for developing, testing, and deploying the Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS). The BMDS is designed to intercept threat missiles during all phases of their flight: boost, midcourse, and terminal. Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD) is an element of the midcourse defense that employs the Ground-Based Interceptors (GBIs) to intercept and destroy long-range missiles during the ballistic (midcourse) phase of their flight before their reentry into the Earth's atmosphere. In December 2002, the President directed the Department of Defense (DOD) to field a set of initial missile defense capabilities beginning in 2004. In support of this directive, MDA established operational Ground-Based Interceptor (GBI) launch facilities at Vandenberg Air Force Base (AFB), California, as part of an initial defense of the United States from a limited ballistic missile attack. This included installation of communications cables between support facilities and missile silos. These activities were previously analyzed in the *GMD Initial Defensive Operations Capability at Vandenberg Air Force Base Environmental Assessment (IDOC EA)*, August 2003, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

The MDA prepared this Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA), which is hereby incorporated by reference, to evaluate the potential environmental consequences of constructing and operating a diverse communications system to support the GMD at Vandenberg AFB. The SEA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and its implementing regulations, 42 United States Code 4321 et seq. and 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508, respectively; 32 CFR Part 651, *Environmental Analysis of Army Actions*; and 32 CFR 989, *Environmental Impact Analysis Process*. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to construct a diverse communications system at Vandenberg AFB to provide redundancy to the current GMD components.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

The MDA proposes construction of a diverse communications system at Vandenberg AFB to support the capability to launch defensive GBI missiles from Vandenberg AFB. A diverse communications system would provide redundancy to the current operational GMD communication system as well as physical separation between the two systems (diversity). The project would use existing Vandenberg AFB communications infrastructure wherever possible. Along the routes identified for the diverse communications system, there are six locations where existing communications infrastructure is either inadequate or unavailable for MDA use. MDA plans are to install new underground communications lines, manholes (MH), and handholes (HH) at these six locations for a total of approximately 31,500 feet of new lines.

In accordance with the Federal regulations for implementing NEPA, the SEA also analyzes the No Action Alternative, which serves as the baseline from which to compare the potential for environmental impact resulting from implementing the Proposed Action. Under the No Action Alternative, the MDA would not construct and operate a diverse communications system.

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SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES: Each environmental resource was evaluated for impact from activities associated with implementing the Proposed Action. No further evaluation was conducted for those resources where impacts from the Proposed Action are the same as those described in the GMD IDOC EA. Specifically, the SEA did not analyze air quality, water resources, geology and soils, infrastructure, land use, socioeconomics, and environmental justice because the GMD IDOC EA adequately described and evaluated impact, and the Proposed Action in this SEA is not expected to cause impact beyond those discussed in the GMD IDOC EA. The GMD IDOC EA found no significant impact to these resource areas from construction and operation of GMD IDO [now called Limited Defensive Operations (LDO)] at Vandenberg AFB. Therefore, the SEA evaluates the potential impact to only biological resources (threatened and endangered special-status species), cultural resources, and coastal zone management.

All Proposed Action activities would be conducted in compliance with applicable Federal, state, and local regulations and requirements. The following paragraphs summarize the potential effects on biological resources (special-status species) cultural resources, and coastal zone management at Vandenberg AFB.

Biological Resources (Special-Status Species). Surveys of the project site at Vandenberg AFB have determined the presence of federally endangered Gaviota tarplant, the unarmored threespine stickleback, and potential suitable habitat for the endangered El Segundo blue butterfly; those areas where coast buckwheat (the El Segundo blue butterfly's host plant) occurs. Surveys also determined the presence of the federally threatened California red-legged frog. On June 20, 2008, Vandenberg AFB received a Biological Opinion prepared by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), which the USFWS concurred with the Vandenberg AFB determination that the Proposed Action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the Gaviota tarplant because the MDA would implement measures to avoid adverse effects to the Gaviota tarplant and because only approximately 0.06 acre would be temporarily affected, mostly in habitats that are routinely impacted by maintenance and mowing activities. The Biological Opinion also concluded that the Proposed Action could adversely affect the El Segundo blue butterfly, unarmored threespine stickleback, and the California red-legged frog, but minimization measures would reduce adverse impact and therefore the Proposed Action would not jeopardize the continued existence of the El Segundo blue butterfly, unarmored threespine stickleback, or California red-legged frog. The USFWS was able to reach this conclusion because:

1. Implementing the Proposed Action would only result in temporary adverse effects to the El Segundo blue butterfly, unarmored threespine stickleback, California red-legged frog, and their respective habitats;
2. The MDA would implement a frac-out contingency plan to minimize the effects of a bentonite plume in the event of a frac-out, which should reduce the downstream effects to the California red-legged frog and unarmored threespine stickleback; and
3. The MDA has included measures in the Proposed Action to minimize and reduce the adverse effects on the El Segundo blue butterfly, unarmored threespine stickleback, and California red-legged frog.

Cultural Resources. Eight archaeological sites were identified within 100 feet of the various diverse communications project routes. Three of the sites were determined to be outside the area of potential effects. Of the remaining five sites, Vandenberg AFB determined the proposed project would have no adverse effects on three sites and no effect on the other two sites. Vandenberg AFB would continue to consult with the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians on this project. Vandenberg AFB determined that archaeological and Native American monitoring

would be required during the cable installation at one of the sites. The California State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the finding of no adverse effect on March 24, 2008.

Coastal Zone Management. Under the Proposed Action, the MDA and USAF would comply with Federal Coastal Zone Consistency regulations (15 CFR Part 930) and the California Coastal Zone Management Program. Vandenberg AFB anticipates that the proposed activities will be consistent with the goals of the California program because the proposed activities: (1) would not have a significant impact on physical and natural resources, (2) would not require implementation of new restrictions to beach access or other recreational areas, or (3) would not adversely affect the visual qualities of the coastline. As part of coordination and consultation with the California Coastal Commission, a Negative Determination was sent to the Commission for their review and comment. The California Coastal Commission concurred with the Negative Determination and agreed in their June 2, 2008 letter that the proposed Diverse Communication System will not adversely affect coastal zone resources.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT: MDA published a Notice of Availability of the SEA and Draft FONSI for public review and comment in local newspapers, placed copies of the SEA and Draft FONSI in local libraries, and posted copies of the SEA and Draft FONSI on the MDA internet site at <http://www.mda.mil/mdalink/html/enviro.html>. The public comment period closed on August 20, 2008 and no comments were received.

CONCLUSION: Based on analysis of the proposed construction and operation of a diverse communications system for MDA at Vandenberg AFB, this SEA identified no significant impact affecting the quality of the human environment. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

POINT OF CONTACT: To request a copy of the Diverse Communications Project at Vandenberg Air Force Base SEA please call the MDA points of contact listed below. The SEA and draft Finding of No Significant are also available on the internet at: <http://www.mda.mil/mdalink/html/enviro.html>.

Missile Defense Agency
Mr. Whitt Walker, DFW (256) 313-9796, or
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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for
DIVERSE COMMUNICATIONS PROJECT AT VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE
SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AGENCY: United States Air Force (USAF)

CONCUR:

[REDACTED]

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19 Sep 08
DATE

APPROVED:

[REDACTED]

CHRIS PUCKETT
SES, DAF
Director of Installations and Logistics

30 Oct 2008
Date

AGENCY: Missile Defense Agency (MDA)

APPROVED:

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ALBERT D. HEMPHILL II
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7 Nov 08
Date