

Draft Finding of No Significant Impact for Modification and Addition of Airspace at the Alpena Special Use Airspace Complex

The National Guard Bureau (NGB) and the Michigan Air National Guard (MIANG) have prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to consider the potential consequences to the human and natural environment associated with modification, expansion, and utilization of the Alpena Special Use Airspace (SUA) Complex. The NGB is the proponent of this proposal and lead agency. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is a cooperating agency.

The NGB has prepared this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500–1508, revised 2020 and 2022), the Department of the Air Force’s Environmental Impact Analysis Process, and FAA’s NEPA-implementing and airspace regulations. The decision in this FONSI is based on the information in the EA, which is herewith incorporated by reference.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to modify and establish Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center’s (CRTC) SUA supporting military readiness requirements that would contribute to the overall provision of an integrated, year-round, realistic training environment. The proposed modifications and additions to the Alpena Complex are designed to meet current and emerging training requirements and contribute to the most efficient use of the airspace structure.

Description of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

The NGB proposes to modify and expand the existing Alpena SUA Complex. The Proposed Action, which is Alternative A, would include the following:

- establish five new Military Operations Areas (MOAs; Grayling East, Grayling West, Steelhead Low North, Steelhead Low South, and Steelhead Low East)
- discontinue annual request for the Grayling Temporary MOA
- modify the internal lateral boundaries of Pike East, Pike West, and Steelhead MOAs
- return Hersey MOA to the National Airspace System
- raise the vertical ceiling of the existing R-4102B from 9,000 feet above mean sea level (MSL) to 23,000 feet MSL to match the existing height of R-4201A
- establish two new Visual Flight Rules Military Training Routes between Alpena CRTC and Grayling Air Gunnery Range (VR-1601 and VR-1602)

The Proposed Action would result in increases in aircraft sorties, though no near-term changes to the existing fleet mix of aircraft or scheduling of Alpena CRTC are proposed. No construction or ground-disturbing activities are proposed as part of this action.

The following measures would be incorporated into the Proposed Action upon implementation. These measures were developed through previous environmental scoping and review efforts to reduce potential impacts:

- In the Steelhead Low MOAs, participating aircraft would fly no lower than 1,500 feet above ground level within one nautical mile of the Lake Huron shoreline from May 15 through September 15.
- No F-35 aircraft would be allowed in the Steelhead Low North, South, and East MOAs. This measure was added in response to early public scoping efforts.
- The shape and altitude of the Steelhead Low South MOA were designed to enable civil flight operations around Huron County Memorial Airport without entering military airspace.
- The airspace legal description requirement would include that the airspace must be activated by Notice to Airmen at least four hours in advance.
- The Michigan ANG would enter into a Letter of Agreement with Minneapolis Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) and Cleveland ARTCC to establish procedures for real-time separation and use of the airspace to allow civilian Instrument Flight Rules aircraft access through the MOAs.

Alternatives

NGB considered three additional alternatives: Alternative B, which is the Proposed Action without the three Steelhead Low MOAs; Alternative C, which is the Proposed Action without the Grayling East and Grayling West MOAs, and also retaining Hersey MOA and continuing annual request of the Grayling Temporary MOA; and Alternative D, which is the No Action Alternative.

Summary of Environmental Consequences

Airspace Management

Under the Proposed Action, the controlling agency for all SUA in the Alpena SUA Complex, including the new proposed MOAs, would remain the Minneapolis ARTCC. The scheduling and using agency would remain the Alpena CRTC for airspace in the Alpena SUA Complex except for R-4201, where the using agency would remain Camp Grayling. Under the Proposed Action, the LOA would be updated to include the new MOAs and any necessary procedure revisions.

The total number of annual hours of use and the total size and volume within the Alpena SUA Complex would increase under the Proposed Action. The increase in flying hours is partly based on the need for the Proposed Action to have airspace that is of sufficient, contiguous size and altitude to accommodate mission requirements, and some SUA would be requested more than others. Although the comparison of flying hours and available airspace is not parallel, given the amount of airspace available and the need for the Proposed Action, the proposed airspace could accommodate the estimated aircraft capacity.

To alleviate potential adverse impacts on air traffic at Huron County Memorial Airport, a seven nautical mile arc was incorporated into the proposed MOA design around the airport so that the floor of the MOA would be 4,000 feet MSL in this region. This enables aircraft to arrive and depart using their current published instrument approach procedures. Impacts on airspace management would not be significant.

Safety

Pilots would continue to conduct preflight planning, participate in low-altitude awareness training, and use in-flight warning systems to ensure low-altitude training is conducted safely. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not introduce aircraft safety risks or increase the potential for aircraft mishaps beyond the existing conditions. If necessary due to seasonal fire conditions, the altitude at which flares are deployed would be raised to 2,000 feet within R-4201 to decrease fire risk. Impacts on safety would not be significant.

Air Quality

Long-term, minor air emissions would result from aircraft operations. Huron County in the study area is an orphan maintenance area for the 1997 ozone NAAQS, meaning that total direct and indirect ozone emissions must be compared to the ozone maintenance thresholds specified in 40 CFR 93.153(b) to determine if the Proposed Action would be *de minimis*, or if a full Conformity Determination is required. All other criteria pollutants are in full attainment. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not exceed *de minimis* thresholds and, therefore, impacts on air quality would not be significant. A Record of Non-Applicability has been prepared and is included in Appendix I of the EA.

Noise

Aircraft sorties would produce increased noise levels, but, in most areas across the SUA, the Onset-Adjusted Monthly Day-Night Average Sound Level (Ldnmr) and Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) would be equal to or less than 45 A-weighted decibels (dBA). However, within R-4201A, the ambient noise level would increase from 62 dBA to 63 dBA Ldnmr (and remain at 61 dBA DNL); within R-4201B, the ambient noise level would increase from 45 dBA to 57 dBA Ldnmr and 44 dBA to 56 dBA DNL. Points of interest across the SUA were also modeled; increases in noise would not be significant. Noise impacts would not be significant.

Land Use

The Proposed Action would be consistent with existing, adjacent, and future land uses under the proposed airspace. Impacts on land use would not be significant.

Water Resources

Aircraft operations, including increases in chaff and flare, would not have adverse effects on water resources. The Proposed Action would comply to the maximum extent practicable with Michigan's coastal zone policies and would not adversely affect sensitive coastal land uses. No construction or ground disturbance would occur, so there would be no effects on wetland, floodplains, or wild and scenic rivers. Impacts on water resources would not be significant.

Biological Resources

Flight operations would be in accordance with the existing Bird-/Wildlife-Aircraft Strike Hazard Plan and Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan, which both specify guidelines that minimize the potential for bird-aircraft strike and, specifically, adverse effects on bald eagles. The following guidelines would be implemented to minimize potential effects on bald eagles:

- Avoid operating aircraft within 1,000 feet of bald eagle nests during the breeding season (December through August), except where eagles have demonstrated tolerance for such activity.
- Avoid use of the secondary crossing runway at Alpena County Regional Airport, especially during the breeding season from December through August.
- Maintain 1,000 feet of vertical and horizontal distance from known foraging areas and communal roost sites.
- Follow the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines for activities other than aircraft operations around eagle nests.

Airspace changes would not be expected to affect terrestrial species (refer to Section 4.7 of the EA). Studies suggest that species do not exhibit statistically significant differences in behaviors and activity levels between preflight and postflight aircraft overflight occurrences. Based on continued reproductive success within the airspace, newborn individuals would be expected to acclimate to aircraft activity with no long-term effects.

Seventeen federally listed threatened, endangered, or candidate species or critical habitat were identified as potentially present using the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's online Information for Planning and Consultation tool. Using the online Michigan Determination Key, an initial determination of "may affect" for the northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) was generated due to the presence of a hibernacula beneath the Pike West MOA. However, only lateral changes at the southern border are proposed. The floor of Pike West MOA would remain at 6,000 feet MSL, which is well above the altitude at which the northern long-eared bat would be found based on habitat preferences and foraging habits. The Proposed Action may affect but is not anticipated to cause prohibited take and is therefore not likely to adversely affect the northern long-eared bat. The Michigan Determination Key concluded that the Proposed Action would have no effect or be not likely to adversely affect the remaining species and critical habitat potentially present under the Alpena SUA airspace. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the determination that the Proposed Action is not likely to adversely affect the northern long-eared bat. See Appendix D of the EA.

Impacts on biological resources would not be significant.

Cultural Resources

Proposed airspace modifications and changes in aircraft operations would increase operational noise and could alter the feel of cultural resources that are present, but these would be less than significant. Maximum sound levels from single-events would not cause vibration-related structural damage. Impacts on cultural resources would not be significant. Correspondence with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office and federally recognized tribes is ongoing. See Appendix E of the EA.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Negligible-to-minor impacts on the socioeconomics of the region are anticipated, with no disproportionate impacts on minority or low-income populations or children. Impacts on the socioeconomic environment and environmental justice would not be significant.

Cumulative Effects

Other reasonably foreseeable actions were considered in the EA. Effects would not be significant.

Finding

Based on the analysis presented in the EA, NGB finds that implementation of the Proposed Action would have no significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. Accordingly, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required to implement this action. This decision is made after consideration of agency and public comments received during Interagency and Intergovernmental Coordination for Environmental Planning and a 30-day comment period of the Draft EA.

Name

Date

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