

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**  
**U.S. AIR FORCE QUICK REACTION LAUNCH VEHICLE (QRLV) PROGRAM**

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508), Department of Defense (DoD) Directive 5000.2-R and U.S. Air Force Instruction (AFI) 32-7061 (promulgated by 32 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 989), which implements these regulations through the Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP), the U.S. Air Force (USAF) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the potential environmental consequences of the USAF QRLV Program (QRLV EA). The No Action Alternative also was considered. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) summarizes the results of the evaluation.

**Proposed Action and Alternatives:** The attached EA is for the USAF QRLV Program, which consists of eight sub-orbital missile launches from the Kodiak Launch Complex (KLC) on Kodiak Island, Alaska. The USAF has a requirement for a QRLV Program to validate its ability to launch suborbital rockets within a relatively short preparation time (typically within 12 months of when the need is identified). Based on the DoD requirement for launching suborbital vehicles to support DoD Missions in the Alaskan Theatre, the QRLV launches will occur from KLC.

The proposed action is the USAF QRLV Program, which will consist of launching of up to eight suborbital vehicles from KLC. The project would launch one QRLV per year, beginning in 2001 and ending in 2008. The launches will be scheduled to occur between February 1 and April 30 of each year. The initial launch is proposed for March 2001.

The launches also will be used for various experiments, ranging from measuring atmospheric attributes to demonstrating new technologies. Depending on the specific mission, the QRLV suborbital launch vehicle would consist of either a single-stage vehicle or a two-stage vehicle. The single-stage vehicle would be either a Minutemen I M-56 motor

or a Minuteman II/III SR-19 motor. The two-stage vehicle would be either a Minuteman II/III SR-19/Minuteman I/II M-57 or a Delta II Castor IVB Minuteman I/II M-57.

In addition to the proposed action, the USAF considered whether other alternative sites could meet the QRLV mission requirement to support DoD activities in the Alaskan Theatre. No alternative sites are available that would meet the mission requirements of the QRLV Program.

Under the No Action Alternative, the USAF QRLV Program would not be conducted. Impacts associated with the processing and launch of up to eight suborbital rockets would not occur. If the proposed action is not conducted, demonstration of the USAF QRLV will not occur.

**Anticipated Environmental Effects:** The EA evaluated potential environmental effects of the USAF QRLV Program, whereby eight USAF QRLV suborbital vehicles would be launched from KLC. The construction and operation of KLC was evaluated in an EA prepared by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which analyzed construction of the facility, plus at least 20 years of subsequent operations, involving up to nine orbital launches per year. The FAA EA was completed in June 1996, and a FONSI was signed by the FAA in October 1996. The FAA EA demonstrated that construction and operation of KLC would not result in significant impacts to geology and soils, water, land use, socioeconomics, environmental justice, recreation, visual and cultural resources of Kodiak Island and the KLC site.

Potential impacts specific to the processing and launch of two sub-orbital USAF *atmospheric intercept technology (ait)* test vehicles from KLC were the subject of an EA prepared by USAF in 1997 (*ait* EA). A FONSI for the *ait* EA was signed by USAF in November 1997. The *ait* EA adopted the conclusions of the previous FAA EA in regard to Geology and Soils, Water, Land Use, Socioeconomics, Environmental Justice, Recreation, Visual and Cultural Resources. The *ait* EA further demonstrated that the USAF *ait* Program would not result in significant impacts to air quality, biological

resources, noise, health and safety, or hazardous materials and waste. The USAF adopts the analysis and conclusions of the *ait* EA as they relate to the proposed QRLV Program.

In addition, the USAF conducted noise monitoring of the two *ait* launches in compliance with monitoring requirements of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The monitoring was conducted to assess the effects of the launches on the endangered Steller sea lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*), which utilizes Ugak Island as a haulout, approximately 3 miles southeast of KLC.

Also, the University of Alaska, Anchorage, Environment and Natural Resources Institute (ENRI) conducted environmental monitoring studies of the two *ait* launches in compliance with the KLC Environmental Monitoring Plan (EMP). The ENRI monitoring was conducted to detect disturbance to Steller's eiders, Steller sea lions on Ugak Island, and impacts from rocket exhaust products on surface water and soils quality. Based on the results of the USAF and ENRI studies, the two *ait* launches did not result in significant impacts to biological or other environmental resources. The USAF incorporated the results of these studies in its assessment of potential impacts from the proposed USAF QRLV Program.

To address potential impacts specific to the USAF QRLV Program, the USAF prepared an EA that addressed the processing and launch of one suborbital vehicle per year from KLC for a period of eight years. For the proposed USAF QRLV Program, the USAF may utilize up to four different suborbital launch vehicles and configurations. The largest are the Minuteman II SR-19/Minuteman II/III M57A (QRLV-3), the same as the *ait-1*, and the Delta II Castor IVB/Minuteman I/II M-57 (QRLV-4), the same as the *ait-2* suborbital launch vehicle. As a result, the findings of the *ait* EA as they relate to those aspects of the existing environment that could be affected by launch of the *ait* vehicles are relevant to the proposed action.

For the QRLV EA, the USAF analyzed operational changes, including use of a launch stool rather than the KLC launch pad and service structure for each launch, plus the

potential for four different splashdown points for the four QRLV vehicles. Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) also was addressed, as mandated by the 1996 amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) (50 CFR 600.905 et seq.). EFH is defined to include the waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding or growth to maturity. The NMFS is responsible for evaluating potential impacts and enforcing the provisions of the MSFCMA. Federal agencies that fund, permit or carry out activities that may affect EFH, including Habitat Areas of Particular Concern, are required to consult with NMFS and regional Fishery Management Councils regarding potential effects on EFH. The EA concluded that impacts of the QRLV Program are not expected to result in significant impacts to EFH. As a result, the USAF is not required to engage in formal consultation with NMFS, pursuant to MSFCMA.

No specific permits or approvals are required for the QRLV Program, as it is within the parameters evaluated in the FAA EA and *ait* EA. However, USAF has coordinated with cooperating agencies, including the FAA/Office of Commercial Space Transportation, NMFS and USFWS. Further, interagency coordination is ongoing between the USAF, NMFS, FAA and USFWS on biological resources relative to the proposed QRLV Program.

**Public Comment Period:** A period of public comment was held from November 2 through December 1, 2000. Press releases that notified the public of the release and distribution of the Draft EA were published in the Kodiak Daily Mirror on November 2 and November 8, 2000. Press releases were provided to the Anchorage Daily News and Fairbanks News-Miner on November 20, 2000. During the public comment period, the EA was available for review at the Kodiak College Library, Kodiak High School Library and Kodiak Public Library, and on the web at the Los Angeles Air Force Base web site <<http://laafb.af.mil/axf/announce.htm>>. During the public comment period, nine comment letters were received from five individuals. All comments were addressed by the USAF.

**Conclusion:** Based on the EA, which is herein incorporated by reference, it is concluded that the Proposed Action will not result in significant environmental impacts or cause significant cumulative impacts in association with other programs. An EIS is not required. This FONSI, with the supporting EA, fulfills the requirements of NEPA, CEQ regulations, and AFI 32-7061. The point of contact for this document is Thomas Huynh, QRLV Environmental Manager, telephone (310) 363-1541 or e-mail <thomas.huynh@losangeles.af.mil>. The final FONSI and its associated EA are stored in the SMC/AXF library, 2420 Vela Way, Suite 1467, Los Angeles Air Force Base, El Segundo, California 90245-4659, as well as on the SMC/AXF web site at <<http://ax.laafb.af.mil/axf/eaapgs/NEAPEA.htm>>.

**Monitoring and Mitigation:** No significant impacts are expected to result from implementation of the proposed USAF QRLV Program. As a result, no mitigation measures are identified. Interagency coordination is ongoing with FAA, NMFS and USFWS. If requirements are identified as a result of this coordination, they will be implemented in accordance with applicable regulations. Other measures described in the USAF QRLV EA include administrative or management controls and engineered systems required by USAF and/or environmental regulations. These measures are implemented through operating procedures.

Although significant impacts to species of concern in the Narrow Cape area are not anticipated, the USAF shall coordinate with the USFWS, NMFS and other agencies, as appropriate, for launch-related monitoring. Also, monitoring will be conducted by ENRI in accordance with the AADC Environmental Monitoring Plan. The following will be monitored: Steller sea lion, Steller's eider, bald eagle (during the period of nest occupancy - late April to September) and environmental quality - focusing on surface water and soils, and launch noise.

**Finding:** Following a review of the attached EA, I find that the USAF QRLV Program will not result in significant environmental impacts. Therefore, an Environmental Impact

Statement is not required for the USAF QRLV Program. This document, and the supporting EA, fulfill the requirements of NEPA, CEQ, DoD and AFI 32-7061.

**Approved:**

William M. Wilson

26 Jan 01

Date

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