

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

PARACHUTE TRAINING AT PAD5/ELLINGTON DROP ZONE FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, WASHINGTON



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
AIR MOBILITY COMMAND
FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, WASHINGTON**

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14. ABSTRACT

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

PARACHUTE TRAINING AT PAD5/ELLINGTON DROP ZONE FAIRCHILD AFB, WASHINGTON

Responsible Agency: Department of the Air Force, Air Mobility Command, Fairchild Air Force Base (AFB), Washington.

Proposed Action: Conduct parachute drop exercises at a new jump site to support 336th TRG Survival School's training mission. Project is located at Fairchild AFB, Spokane County, Washington.

Contact Information: Comments and inquiries regarding this document should be directed to: Public Affairs, 1 East Bong St., Fairchild AFB, WA 99011. Phone: (509) 247-5704.

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Abstract: 336th TRG – Survival School has demonstrated a need for a new area to conduct parachute exercises and has proposed the new jump site to be located south of their compound facilities on Fairchild AFB. 336th TRG has used a site owned by Washington Department of Natural Resources (WADNR), Hayford Rd. NE, for the last 15+ years. WADNR's long term management goal for the area is contrary to supporting the 336th TRG's parachute activities. The area is converting from meadow to forest and WADNR has expressed a desire to sell the property. Both of these goals are contrary to meeting 336th TRG's needs of having a jump site free of obstacles and a jump site that can be maintained for years to support their mission. The Preferred Alternative is to dedicate a drop zone on Fairchild AFB. The location is as shown on the map in Figure 1. With this alternative, potential effects to natural resources have been mitigated by establishing an adaptive management program of monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment if necessary to avoid impact to several protected plant species and their habitat. Inclusion of this protection area within the Drop Zone is necessary to allow for adequate area to operate exercises safely. The targeted area for routine landings is well away from this designated protection area and it has been determined that use outside of the routine landing area would be only in the case of emergency. Several other alternatives were explored, Alternative 2 adjusts the Drop Zone boundary to exclude the plant protection area and Alternative 3, is the No Action Alternative, and Alternative 4 purchases WADNR land. Alternative 2 is not preferred as boundary adjustment includes a higher incidence of hard obstacles such as structures, power poles and fences which present a safety hazard to the parachutists. With the No Action Alternative, 336th Training faces the risk of not achieving their training mission by either sale of the WADNR property or when the property becomes in-filled with trees and the hazard to parachutists is too great. Alternative 4 is not preferred as there is a moratorium on land

acquisition of this size and purchase requires a source of funding currently not available to 336th Training. Resources considered in the impact analysis are: air quality, water resources, geologic resources, biological resources, cultural resources, infrastructure and utilities, land use, wastes and hazardous materials, safety and occupational health, and environmental management. This assessment finds that no significant impacts will result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

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Chapter 1: Purpose and Need for Action

1.1 Introduction

This Environmental Assessment is being prepared to evaluate any potential environmental impacts, either direct or indirect or cumulative, that may result from conducting parachute exercises in the unimproved area south of 336th TRG administrative facilities on Fairchild Air Force Base (AFB).

Fairchild AFB is an Air Mobility Command (AMC) Base located in eastern Washington approximately 12 miles west of the city of Spokane. Communities located near the base include Airway Heights and Medical Lake. 336th TRG is a tenant at Fairchild AFB currently administered under the Survival School Campus Master Plan and Tenant Agreement.

1.2 Need for the Action

336th TRG has been using land owned by Washington Department of Natural Resources (WADNR) for the last 15+ years for their parachute demonstration and proficiency training. This training is a requirement for Survival School's training program. The management goals for WADNR lands currently used are contrary to long term use by 336th TRG. WADNR is managing the area as a conservation reserve and the area is converting from meadow to forest. Additionally, WADNR has expressed interest in selling the property. Both of these reasons, present 336th TRG with the need to find a new jump site area. Relocating the jump site to Fairchild AFB adjacent to their administrative facilities is convenient, expedient, and utilizes area already dedicated to a military mission.

336th TRG has proposed relocation of their jump site to Fairchild AFB, south of their compound installation. The area proposed would be dedicated to this use and would remain in the Land Use categories, Unimproved and Semi-Improved Open Space as long as the area was needed for training purposes.

1.3 Location of the Proposed Action

A proposed Drop Zone boundary has been delineated generally bounded by the fence boundary of Fairchild AFB on the west, Montana Avenue and Patrol Road on the north, the Resistance Training facilities/fence on the east, and includes an unimproved area designated for protection of Threatened and Endangered Species to the south. For a detailed map, see Figure 1.

1.4 Scope of the Environmental Assessment

This Environmental Assessment (EA) will evaluate, to the fullest extent possible, the environmental consequences of the proposed action and alternatives on the affected environment, as well as possible cumulative impacts from other reasonably foreseeable actions. This EA is being completed in accordance with the requirements of the National

Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. Resources to be considered include: air quality, noise, water resources, geologic resources, biological resources, cultural resources, infrastructure and utilities, land use, wastes and hazardous materials, safety and occupational health, and environmental management. The rationale for not evaluating the Socioeconomic Resources, and the Environmental Justice is provided below.

Socioeconomic Resources. There would be no change in the number of personnel present at FAFB as a result of the proposed action. Thus, no long term changes would be anticipated to area population, housing requirements, school enrollment, or economic factors. It is not anticipated that construction workers would relocate to the area as a result of the proposed activities. Thus, there would be no short term changes to area population, housing requirements, school enrollment, or economic factors. Therefore, there would be no anticipated long term or short term socioeconomic impacts resulting from the proposed project.

Environmental Justice. *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations* directs Federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse environmental and human health effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income communities. Based on analysis conducted in the EA, it is determined that activities associated with the proposed project would not impose adverse environmental effects on adjacent populations. Therefore, no disproportionately high and adverse effects would affect minority or low-income populations.

1.5 Decision Needed

This document is intended to evaluate whether the proposed action (PA) will result in environmental impact significant enough to warrant preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), or whether the action will qualify for a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

1.6 Applicable Regulatory Requirements

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended

NEPA requires all Federal agencies to use a systematic, interdisciplinary approach in decision making which may have an impact on man's environment. Therefore, NEPA directs agencies to assess expected environmental impacts of all government actions and proposals. In turn, this data must be considered in the decision making process. Compliance with NEPA is accomplished through the guidance outlined in 32 CFR 989, Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP).

Clean Air Act, as amended (Public Law 91-204)

The Clean Air Act provides the basis for regulating air pollution to the atmosphere. The CAA requires that all Federal agencies comply with Federal, State and local requirements with respect to the control and abatement of air quality.

Clean Water Act

The objective of the Clean Water Act (CWA) is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the Nation's waters. This act has many far-reaching, water quality related requirements that must be complied with, particularly relating to the discharge of pollutants to public waters. Additionally, the CWA requires the protection of wetlands and floodplains as well as the minimization of loss and destruction.

Endangered Species Act of 1973

The purpose of the Endangered Species Act is to conserve threatened and endangered species as well as the ecosystems these species rely on. The ESA requires the Air Force to protect federally listed species identified on Air Force lands.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act

The purpose of the ARPA is to protect archaeological resources and sites on public lands for the present and future benefit of the American people. The ARPA stipulates specific procedures that must be followed if an archaeological resource is encountered during excavations on public lands.

Pollution Prevention Act of 1990; Executive Order 12856; Executive Order 12902

Regulatory mandates for pollution prevention are outlined in the Pollution Prevention Act of 1990. Right-to-Know laws and pollution prevention requirements are outlined in E.O. 12856. E.O. 12902 outlines the requirements for energy efficiency and waste conservation at federal facilities.

Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA)

CERCLA addresses past, present, or threatened releases of hazardous materials that may endanger public health or the environment. CERCLA requires specific procedures be followed if a hazardous substance spill occurs or if contamination is discovered during excavation.

Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, as amended (40 CFR parts 260-270)

The storage, handling, recycling, and disposal of hazardous wastes are subject to regulations under the RCRA act of 1976 and its 1988 amendments.

Chapter 2: Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Alternatives Considered

2.1.1 Alternative 1 – Preferred

This alternative fully implements 336th TRG's proposal to relocate their jump site to the area delineated on the map in Figure 1. This alternative does not require a change in land use designation. This alternative does require mitigation to protect federally listed plants and their habitat.

2.1.3 Alternative 2

This alternative partially implements 336th TRG's proposal by readjusting the jump site boundary to exclude an area set aside to protect federally listed plant species under Endangered Species Act. This alternative includes more area with hardened surfaces such as power poles, fences, and structures.

2.1.4 Alternative 3 – No Action

This alternative continues the current use of WADNR lands until lands become inaccessible basically deferring the decision to relocate.

2.1.5 Alternative 4

Under this alternative, purchase of WADNR land currently being used by 336th TRG is pursued.

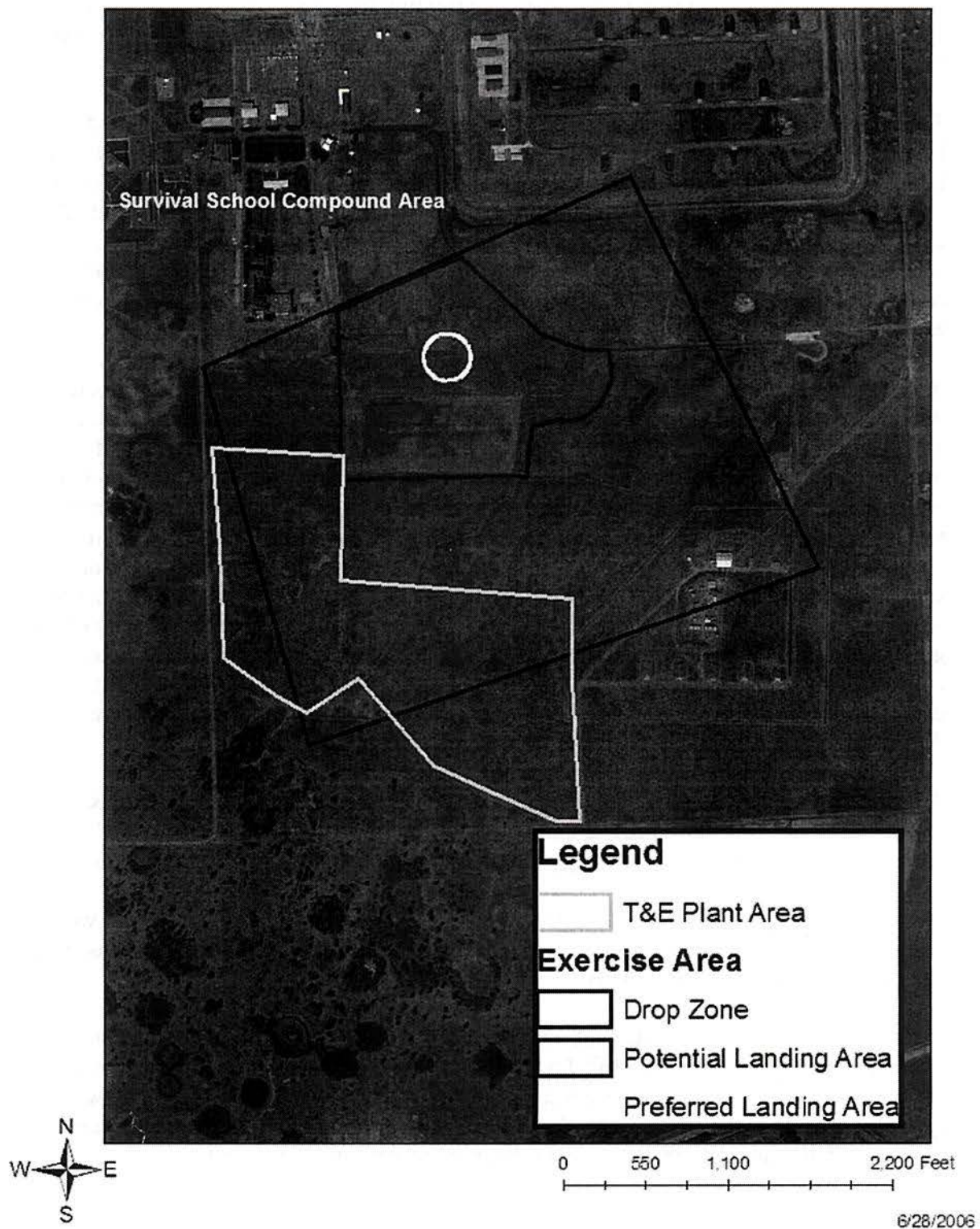
2.2 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

The alternatives listed in Section 2.1 represent an appropriate range of alternatives to consider. No other alternatives were analyzed.

2.3 Description of Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action

Alternative 1, the preferred alternative, consists of locating the Survival School's jump site on Fairchild AFB. The location and planned target landing areas are indicated on the map in Figure 1. The area targeted for landings is noted with a circle and is named Actual Impact Area. The area that is most desirable for landings considering safety and wind direction is indicated by an irregular shaped box on the map named Potential Impact Area. The general area designated as the Drop Zone is the largest area. It is anticipated that the area south of the Potential Impact Area will rarely or never be used for routine exercise due to the prevailing winds.

Figure 1. Pad5/Ellington Parachute Exercise Area



336th Training plans to use Pad 5/Ellington Drop Zone area on a weekly basis (on Wednesdays). Parachute drops will consist of 3 jumpers per sortie with a total of 3600 students annually conducting the exercise. Additionally, about 3 times a month (usually Thursday) currency and proficiency parachute training for SERE Specialist personnel will be conducted. During these operations an average of 10 sorties are flown with an average of 3 jumpers per sortie.

The need to relocate these exercises from their current location on WA Department of Natural Resource (WADNR) lands, NE Hayford Rd., is relatively urgent. WADNR for the last several years has indicated that they are reluctant to continue Survival's land use permit. WADNR's long term management goals are to allow trees to continue to regenerate the current meadow opening and to potentially sell the land to the highest bidder. The first goal is contradictory to Survival's need to have a safe landing area. The later goal increases the risk of losing the landing area in the immediate future with little lead time to move the exercises to a new location.

Including a portion of the T&E area in the Drop Zone presents a small degree of potential for impact. A monitoring strategy has been developed to provide assurance that landing activities are as predicted. That is, 1) landings will not occur in the T&E area as it is a less desirable area to use as a landing area because of irregular terrain and boulders, 2) landings will not occur in the T&E area because prevailing SSW to W winds will direct parachutist toward the north and north east of the T&E area, and 3) parachute landings in itself presents a low level of ground disturbance that does not present an impact to habitat. The monitoring strategy involves notifying 92CEVN if a landing should occur south of the Potential Impact Area and within a 24 hour period, the area will be assessed for ground disturbance impact. If ground disturbance is found and appears to have the potential to impact conditions that currently support proliferation of protected species, the exercise will be ceased until consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service can be conducted. The monitoring strategy is documented in the June 7, 2006 letter from 336th Training (Appendix A).

Alternative 2, presents options for realignment of the Drop Zone to exclude the T&E area. All activities and location of actual and potential impact areas remain as described in Alternative 1. No monitoring strategy would be implemented with this alternative.

Alternative 3, is the no action alternative. Under this alternative, Survival School would continue using DNR lands for their jump site and look for other jump site locations in the surrounding area of Fairchild AFB.

Alternative 4, presents the option of purchase of DNR lands currently being used for the jump site. In this alternative, 336th Training is required to seek approval for a waiver to purchase the land. Presently, there is a moratorium on large land acquisition and waivers are typically granted for larger projects than for parachute training. The approval process and seeking congressional appropriations for the purchase is anticipated to take years.

Chapter 3: Affected Environment

3.1 Introduction

Fairchild Air Force Base (AFB) is located about 12 miles west of Spokane, Washington and occupies about 4,500 acres of land. The US Air Force Survival School (336th Training Group) is the largest tenant at Fairchild AFB and occupies about 127 acres in an area to the south of the runway and directly to the south and west of the Munitions Storage Area. The Survival School is the academy for teaching aircrews and future survival instructors advanced skills for survival in any geographical location or enemy situation. They utilize over 500,000 acres of national forest, state and private land throughout the northwest in conducting their training mission.

3.2 Air Quality

The regional temperature regime and wind patterns affect ambient air quality in the vicinity of Fairchild AFB. Winds generally transport air pollutants eastward toward the Spokane Valley, which allows for increased accumulation of air pollutants. During winter months, many residents use wood burning stoves for heat, which combined with the increased carbon monoxide (CO) levels from vehicles operating under cold temperatures can significantly decrease air quality. Temperature inversions are another factor affecting air quality in the vicinity of Fairchild AFB.

The existing levels of ambient air quality and historical trends are documented by the Spokane County Air Pollution Control Authority (SCAPCA). Air quality in the Spokane area is characterized by air-monitoring stations, which measure pollutants including CO and particulate matter (PM) at various locations.

Of the six criteria pollutants identified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), two are of concern in Spokane County, specifically CO and PM. Motor vehicles are the largest contributors to CO, with the highest concentrations occurring during the winter months. PM comes from a variety of sources including dust from unpaved and paved roadways, construction activities, gas and diesel engines, and indoor/outdoor burning.

Noise. Aircraft operations are the primary sources of noise at Fairchild AFB. Additional sources of noise that occur on Fairchild AFB during periods of no flying or maintenance operations include construction activity and ground traffic movement. This noise is comparable to sounds that occur in typical communities.

3.3 Water Resources

The south portion of Fairchild AFB is nearly flat to undulating and has two surface water features; wetlands and vernal pools. There are no stream courses, although an old irrigation ditch constructed in the 1930's represents a legacy of water conveyance from Silver Lake to the Base area. This ditch lacks continuous flow but has standing water and wetland vegetation in some but not all of its length. These surface water features are intermittent

responding to shallow groundwater perched by basalt bedrock or to a lesser degree, clay lenses from glaciofluvial materials. All surface waters are isolated, lacking surface connection to the watershed.

The area proposed as the potential impact area for parachute landing has standing water on the surface some years from March through late May. Several wetlands delineated in 1991 using the 1987 Corps of Engineers jurisdictional delineation method are within the Drop Zone area. Two wetlands comprising about 10 acres are within the potential impact area. Both of these wetlands are highly disturbed with reed canarygrass and do not sustain ponded water except intermittently and not in all seasons.

There are vernal pools within the proposed Drop Zone area but not within the Potential Impact Area. These areas have very shallow soils over basalt bedrock and support ponded water from March through April or early May in most years.

3.4 Geologic Resources

Soils mapping has been recently updated and indicates the dominant soils are Cheney and Uhlig series in the Potential Impact Area and Rockly and Deno series in the mound/intermound topography in the southern portion of the Drop Zone (T&E area). Cheney and Uhlig soils are both well drained soils and have slow surface runoff. They have a high hazard to wind erosion when vegetation is removed. Rockly and Deno soils are well drained; shallow to moderately deep and are associated with vernal pools and mound/intermound topography. These soils also have a high hazard to wind erosion when vegetation is removed. Caldwell soils occur as inclusions in the potential impact area and are associated with wetlands and wet meadows.

Topography generally ranges from 0 to 5 percent or nearly flat and undulating. More complex topography exists in the southern half of the Drop Zone locally called mound/intermound. These mound/intermound areas form a pattern across the landscape where mounds with deeper soil are about 20 feet across usually shaped in the direction of wind direction intermittent with shallow soil, rocky areas. Elevation relief between these two features is approximately 2-5 feet.

The area is a part of the Columbia River Plateau and represents the northern most extent of Miocene period basalt flows that have shaped much of the Plateau. The landscape has been further shaped by catastrophic glacial floods originating from a series of ice dam breaks in western Montana. Flood waters scoured and redeposited materials through the Spokane Valley and West Plains area virtually affecting much of what is now Eastern Washington. This landscape is named Channeled Scablands which fittingly describes the intermittent bedrock outcroppings and deep glaciofluvial deposits in close proximity to each other. This diverse landscape creates sharp contrasts in hydrologic capacity and retention both laterally and vertically. Volcanic eruptions in the last 6000 years have blanketed the surface with volcanic ash. Winds have redistributed this material and other loess materials creating the fine sandy loam/silt loam surface layers of many of the soils in the area.

3.5 Biological Resources

The southern portion of Fairchild AFB has less development and provides the majority of natural or semi-natural habitat. The Base is fenced which reduces interaction between ground based species and has created an isolated herd of mule and white tailed deer. Small mammals, numerous migratory (including neotropical) birds, raptors, and resident bird species typical of the region utilize the open meadows, native prairie, wetlands, and occasional stands of Ponderosa pine. This area typical of the West Plains has a high density of invasive plant species as well as aggressive noxious weeds which has affected biological diversity in much of the area.

From several wildlife and plant surveys we are aware of several species at risk or concern that are known to use habitat in the area. The federal-listed threatened plant species, Spalding's catchfly and *Howellia* exist in the designated T&E area. Four other plant species listed by the state of Washington as sensitive or threatened occur in the vernal pool areas. The habitats for these plants are within the proposed Drop Zone and plants have been observed in the area. Several bird species, that have been sighted on base or are known to have nested on base, are designated as Federal species of concern, state candidate species, state monitor species, or state sensitive species. Most of these species are migratory in nature. These species include: golden eagle, burrowing owl, grasshopper sparrow, western bluebird, red-necked grebe, great blue heron, turkey vulture, Caspian tern, black tern, and osprey. The white-tailed jackrabbit, a state candidate species, is known to occur on FAFB. Columbian ground squirrel and American badger, both being carefully monitored by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, have been documented as occurring on base.

3.6 Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include prehistoric and historical archaeological sites, buildings, structures, districts, artifacts, objects, or any other physical evidence of human activity considered important to a culture, subculture, or community for scientific, traditional, or religious purposes. The irrigation ditch from the 1930's meets lesser historical significance. There is also a old well site from an original homestead that is considered significant. The well site is south and well removed from the Drop Zone area. The ditch runs through a portion of the Drop Zone. No other cultural resources of significance have been identified within the assessment area.

3.7 Infrastructure and Utilities

Roads, a fence, and a power line all exist within the proposed Drop Zone. The road is Artillery Road and is asphalt surface and several unnamed native surfaced roads. The far southeast corner of the Drop Zone includes the power lines that service the Resistance Training area and a portion of the compound fence surrounding the Resistance Training area.

3.8 Land Use

Fairchild AFB is surrounded primarily by agricultural uses, with increasing rural-residential development. The nearest town, Airway Heights, is approximately three miles to the east. The assessment area is characterized as unimproved and semi-improved land management in the Base General Plan and is designated in either the Survival School or Open Space Land Use Category.

3.9 Wastes and Hazardous Materials

The Environmental Restoration Program has identified the area around the Steam plant (IRP Site PS-7) as having contaminated soils from a leaking underground storage tank. In 1992 over 535 tons of petroleum-contaminated soil was removed however 20 cubic yards remain immediately adjacent to and beneath Building 1350 (ICF Technology Inc. 1995). The remaining contaminated soil will be removed along with the demolition of Building 1350 (see Survival School Master Plan 2002). This contaminated soil area is north and adjacent to the assessment area. It is within 1000 feet of the north boundary of the Potential Impact Area for parachute landings. Monitoring in the general area indicates that groundwater and soils within the assessment area are not contaminated and there is a low likelihood of migration from this identified source of contamination (Bennett 2006).

3.10 Safety and Occupational Health

Fairchild AFB takes safety and occupational health issues seriously. All applicable standards, such as those required by the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) are strictly followed. All requirements to assure flight and parachutist safety is assured through coordination with Air Force safety organizations and the Federal Flight Administration. The proposed Drop Zone (DZ) has over 80 percent of the area that lack hardened obstacles that would present a safety hazard.

3.11 Environmental Management (Pollution Prevention)

The Washington State Department of Ecology requires that users of hazardous substances and/or generators of hazardous wastes develop a Pollution Prevention Management Action Plan for their respective facilities. The FAFB Pollution Prevention plan has been developed and implemented to addresses this and other requirements.

All base operations are required to follow guidelines specified by the Department of Defense Green Procurement Program, specifically including the Affirmative Procurement Program for Recovered Materials. This program requires that certain products be composed of a specified percentage of recycled and recovered materials. The program requires proper documentation should the EPA-specified product composition be unsuitable for the particular use. Additionally, all base personnel are requested to participate in recycling programs.

3.13 Indirect and Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative environmental impacts have occurred in the area from the legacy of land and water development to support agricultural uses in the early 1900's. These activities plowed wetlands and possible drained wetlands in some areas. The greatest effect is a lesser amount of wetland diversity both, hydrologically and in vegetation species. An old railroad line, additional roads to support Fairchild AFB activities, and other infrastructure has most likely had an influence on wetland diversity and function as well.

Invasive introduced plant species are competing with native species and in some areas the area is mostly occupied by non-native plant species. The Potential Impact Area and Actual Impact Area are both occupied by Canada thistle, a noxious weed that has thwarted past control efforts. This plant species is currently accelerating its density through the assessment area as well as the entire south end of the Base.

Air space for military training is a finite resource and must be coordinated with commercial flights using the general air space to connect with Spokane International Airport. Flights to Spokane International Airport are on the increase with population growth demands but training flights from Fairchild Air Force Base have decreased in the last several years.

Chapter 4: Environmental Consequences

4.1 Introduction

This section describes anticipated environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives.

4.2 Air Quality

4.2.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

The only potential air quality impacts resulting from the proposed project would be related to air pollution resulting from airplane fuel combustion and exhaust. This pollution is a no net increase over the existing and is just relocated in the air space over Fairchild AFB. The current location for exercises is approximately 10 air miles from the proposed location. The difference in source location is thought to be miniscule considering regional wind currents..

4.2.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of Drop Zone (DZ) to avoid T&E area

This action would be similar to Alternative 1.

4.2.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

No change would occur from existing situation.

4.2.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This action would be similar to Alternative 3.

4.3 Water Resources

4.3.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

Parachute landings occur in all seasons and thus, will encounter times of the year when the Preferred and Potential Impact Areas may have ponded water or saturated soils. The act of landing by a jumper should have little effect on water quality or quantity. Ground disturbance is anticipated to be minimal and dispersed. Some compaction may occur in small areas where repeated landings occur. The size of these areas should have little effect on peak storm runoff. No stream courses exist within the Drop Zone, thus any erosion that may occur will be dispersed and sediment will be re-deposited on site. .

4.3.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This action would be similar to Alternative 1.

4.3.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

No change would occur from existing situation.

4.3.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This action would be similar to Alternative 3.

4.4 Geologic Resources

4.4.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

Repeated landings and support activities associated with landings concentrated in the same area may cause localized soil compaction and removal of vegetation in the driest time of the year. The activity is anticipated to be somewhat dispersed and not concentrated and the areas of effect very small. No environmental effect is anticipated on other geologic resources. The area of the Drop Zone that has bedrock outcrop or mound/intermound topography presents a moderate safety hazard. Landings in these areas may have more disturbance because of uneven terrain. This hazard both to natural resources and to the jumper is expected to be mitigated by avoiding these areas.

There is none of these mound/intermound areas within the Preferred or Potential Impact Areas where the majority of the activity will take place.

4.4.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This action would remove the hazard of landing on uneven terrain in the mound/intermound area. Otherwise the effects of this alternative are similar to Alternative 1.

4.4.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

No change would occur from existing situation.

4.4.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

No change would occur from existing situation.

4.5 Biological Resources

4.5.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

From 15+ years of past experience, 99% of the time jumpers have landing in the Preferred or Potential Impact Area that have been established (see Appendix A). This experience allows us to anticipate that there is a low likelihood of landings occurring outside these areas. This is important in demonstrating that by avoidance, T&E plants and their habitat will not be affected by this activity. It has also been determined that there is more of a likelihood of jumpers landing to the north or east of the Impact Areas because of the southwesterly prevailing wind direction again, avoiding the T&E area to the south of the Impact Areas. It is also expected that little ground disturbance would occur from an occasional isolated landing in the T&E area. The effects would be similar to a deer traveling through the area or a human conducting a plant inventory. A monitoring strategy will be implemented that will provide assurance of these determinations and a method to resolve if it is found that these determinations have been found to be incorrect. Implementation of this strategy provides added guarantee that there will no adverse affect to threatened plants or their habitat.

Effects anticipated to other animal and plant resources are anticipated to be minimal and no change from effects of activities occurring currently in the area. Animals may displace temporarily during the activity. It is anticipated that there will not be any adverse effect on populations, habitat, or diversity as a result of this alternative.

4.5.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This alternative does not completely remove the potential of landings in the T&E area. In an emergency situation, jumpers may land wherever expedient. The potential effects and monitoring strategy would be similar to Alternative 1.

4.5.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

No change would occur from existing situation.

4.5.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 3. Survival School would cut regenerating forest and continue to favor a meadow environment to reduce safety hazard for jumpers.

4.6 Cultural Resources

4.6.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

The only historical resource within the Drop Zone is the irrigation ditch that was built in the 1930's to support agricultural development. The ditch is an obvious feature on the landscape and is a hazard to jumpers and will be avoided. The ditch is lined mostly with basalt rock blasted to create the ditch and would be resistant to erosion from foot travel or jumper landings.

4.6.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This alternative would have similar potential impacts as Alternative 1.

4.6.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

There are no known cultural resources at the existing site and thus this alternative has no current impact or potential effect on cultural resources.

4.6.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 3.

4.7 Infrastructure and Utilities

4.7.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

The Drop Zone includes several roads, a power line, and a fence. These all pose safety hazards with varying risks to the jumpers and will be avoided as landing sites. A safety requirement during parachute jumping is to restrict vehicular traffic during the

exercise. This will be an inconvenience to those traveling between the Resistance Training and Survival School compounds. There is an alternate route that will allow travel between these destinations during jump times. Access along the unnamed dirt roads will be restricted but again, alternative routes exist for those needing entry to the area.

There are no other infrastructures within the Drop Zone.

4.7.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This alternative includes structures and more area of powerline and roads. The relative impact to infrastructure would be similar to Alternative 1. It is possible that during exercises, there would be more inconvenience placed on users of roads as they would be restricted from travel during jump times.

4.7.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

This alternative is no change from the existing situation. Activities are currently taking place in an open field. Some dirt trails/roads exist that are traveled mostly by recreationalists and local landowners. Access is restricted during times of jumping.

4.7.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 3.

4.8 Land Use

4.8.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

The Drop Zone is within the Survival School and Open Space Land Use Categories. Both these categories are permissive of activities associated with parachute exercises. The area is currently kept in unimproved and semi-improved maintenance status. Both maintenance categories are suitable for the proposed activity.

4.8.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This alternative would have similar potential impacts as Alternative 1.

4.8.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

This alternative is no change from the existing situation. Activities are currently taking place in an open field. Some dirt trails/roads exist that are traveled mostly by recreationalists and local landowners. Access is restricted during times of jumping.

4.8.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 3.

4.9 Wastes and Hazardous Materials

4.9.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

The Drop Zone is currently kept in unimproved and semi-improved maintenance status with no known hazardous materials stored within the area. A environmental restoration site is known to exist beneath Building 1350 within the Survival School compound (IDF Technology Inc. 1995). An underground fuel tank lead was discovered in 1992 and all but 20 cubic yards of contaminated soil was removed. The remaining contaminated soils are beneath Building 1350 and will be removed along with the demolition of Building 1350 (see Survival School Master Plan 2002). This contaminated soil area is north and adjacent to the assessment area. It is within 1000 feet of the north boundary of the Potential Impact Area for parachute landings. Monitoring in the general area indicates that groundwater and soils within the assessment area are not contaminated and there is a low likelihood of migration from this identified source of contamination (Bennett 2006). Relocating The Drop Zone to this location will not produce any hazardous waste or leave behind any hazardous materials or change current amount of either.

4.9.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This alternative would have similar potential impacts as Alternative 1.

4.9.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

This alternative is no change from the existing situation. Activities are currently taking place in an open field with no known hazardous waste or materials.

4.9.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 3.

4.10 Safety and Occupational Health

4.10.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

The proposed Drop Zone has over 80 percent of the area that lack hardened obstacles that would present a safety hazard. The hardened obstacles are located within the 20 percent of The Drop Zone are located in the southeastern portion of the Drop Zone away from the Potential and Preferred Impact Areas. Prevailing wind direction will assist in avoiding these obstacles. The old irrigation ditch is an obvious feature on the landscape and is a hazard to jumpers and will be avoided. The outcroppings of basalt

rock are relatively smooth in topography and although they are to be avoided in most circumstances, they pose less of a safety hazard to parachutists due to their subdued relief.

4.10.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This alternative would have similar potential impacts as Alternative 1.

4.10.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

This alternative is no change from the existing situation. Activities are currently taking place in an open field with no known safety concerns.

4.10.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 3.

4.11 Environmental Management (Pollution Prevention)

4.11.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

Little ground disturbance is anticipated with this activity. In the worse case, some bare ground may be exposed to wind and water erosion. The topography is nearly flat and no stream courses or stormwater drains are located within the Drop Zone that could transport sediment. The land area disturbed will be dispersed and small in size and the potential for increased particulates from wind erosion would be a very low. Any increase over background measurements would be most likely immeasurable. Pollution from aircraft noise and exhaust provides no change from effects of activities occurring currently in the area. It is anticipated for the above reasons, no negative impacts relating to pollution prevention should occur.

4.11.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This alternative would have similar potential impacts as Alternative 1.

4.11.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

This alternative is no change from the existing situation. Activities are currently taking place in an open field with no known pollution concerns therefore the pollution prevention plan in which Fairchild AFB has implemented on the base is the only plan which is followed at this time.

4.11.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

This alternative would be similar to Alternative 3.

4.12 Indirect and Cumulative Impacts

The purpose of this section of the EA is to evaluate potential indirect and cumulative impacts that may occur over a broad range of time and space. For this analysis, impacts are evaluated in relation to the proposed Parachute Training at PAD5/Ellington Drop Zone in the vicinity of the Survival School facilities.

4.12.1 Alternative 1 - Preferred

The proposed activity should have no net change and no adverse cumulative effect upon existing effects from historical effects as described in Section 3.0

The Drop Zone located on Fairchild AFB poses potential for indirect effects associated with limited air space surrounding a military airfield and an adjacent public airfield. Currently, air space conflicts do not exist but as population demands grow, this may change. It is difficult to anticipate this circumstance and it is anticipated that as air space demand increases, the regulatory agency and Fairchild AFB will adjust uses to minimize conflicts.

Similarly, dedicating lands within Fairchild AFB to a use precludes other uses. Currently the land use categories in the General Plan support this activity. As the General Plan is a somewhat dynamic plan that adjusts as needs change, other uses if need be accommodated by adjusting the parachute activity or relocated the activity. The benefit of this kind of activity is that it can be relocated easily unlike dedicating lands to hard infrastructure.

Cumulative effects to the T&E area would be minimized and intended to be avoided through the monitoring program.

4.12.2 Alternative 2 – Change orientation of DZ to avoid T&E area

This alternative would have similar potential impacts as Alternative 1. Cumulative effects to the T&E area would be avoided by avoiding the area.

4.12.3 Alternative 3 – No Action

This alternative is no change from the existing situation.

4.12.4 Alternative 4 – Purchase DNR land

The area would be kept in a meadow ecological condition and reforestation would be discouraged. This would be a net benefit to some wildlife species by maintaining diversity and by maintaining the area in open space instead of residential development.

Chapter 5: List of Preparers

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Mr. Micah Shuler	92 CES/CEVN	Fairchild AFB WA
Mr. Brad Elliot	336TRG	Fairchild AFB WA
Mr. Robert Ploof	336TRG	Fairchild AFB WA
Mr. Ron Horlacher	92 CES/Planning	Fairchild AFB WA
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	92 ARW/SE	Fairchild AFB WA
	92 ARW/JA	Fairchild AFB WA

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ICF Technology, Inc. 1995. Remedial Investigation for Priority 2a Sites at Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington. USAF/AMC Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence, Brooks Air Force Base, TX USAF Contract No. F33615-90-D-4019, delivery Order No. 0005.

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APPENDIX A



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE AIR EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMAND

12 May 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR 92 CES/CEVN

FROM: 336 TRG/CD
811 Los Angeles Ave. Ste. 101
Fairchild AFB WA 99011-8648

SUBJECT: PAD 5/ELLINGTON DZ

The 336 TRG requires the use of Pad 5/Ellington DZ for demonstration and proficiency parachute jumps in support of syllabus requirements for 2 formal AETC courses (S-V80-A and S-V81-A). Demonstration and proficiency jump operations requires logistical coordination to transport SERE School students and parachutists to/from the demonstration site. The demonstration site is approximately 25 minutes from FAFB. During the winter months driving on snow covered roads is time consuming and if a mission is cancelled significant student training time can be lost. The primary 336 TRG drop zone used for demonstration jumps is quickly becoming inadequate. The DNR is in the process of selling the property that the 336 TRG is currently permitted to use to any interested buyer. Furthermore, this property is becoming overgrown with trees and vegetation resulting in potentially unsafe conditions for parachute operations. Pad 5/Ellington DZ area will eliminate logistical coordination; more effectively utilize student training time and provide for increased parachutist safety. The use of Pad 5/Ellington DZ would allow SERE School students to walk to and from the demonstration site, and the DZ area could be periodically maintained ensuring continued jumper safety.

DESCRIPTION OF AREA:

See attached maps. A drop zone (black boundary on map) is defined in parachuting, as a location where a parachutist may land. In many cases, especially with planes, the drop zone is a rectangular area, with its length in the same direction as the aircraft's movement. Air Force Instruction dictates the minimum size requirements for drop zones. The actual landing area of a surveyed DZ can be moved to a zone that contains fewer hazards or obstacles. In the case of this

DZ, the southern half of the DZ has uneven terrain with some rock on the surface and will be avoided for all landings except in unusual or emergency circumstances. The Potential Impact Area (red boundary on map) is the area expected to be the area where routine landings will occur considering wind direction and area free of obstacles. The Actual Impact Area (white circle on map) is the area designated as the target area where ideally all landings will occur.

1. FREQUENCY OF OPERATIONS AT PAD 5 DZ:

- Pad 5/Ellington DZ will be used on a weekly basis (on Wednesday) to conduct emergency bailout parachute demonstrations for approximately 3600 students annually. This figure is calculated using an average of 82 students per class. Parachute drops on this day consist of one sortie with 3 jumpers.
- Pad 5/Ellington DZ will also be used approximately 3 times per month (usually on Thursday) for training, currency and proficiency parachute operations for SERE Specialist personnel. During these operations an average of 10 sorties are flown with an average of 3 jumpers per sortie.

NOTE: All personnel parachute operations entail some form of risk. These risks are mitigated through extensive and continuous training for all 336 TRG parachutists. Some of the risks identified are explained below.

2. OFF POTENTIAL IMPACT AREA LANDING

PROBABILITY: Extremely Low (Less than 1%)

MITIGATING FACTORS: While under canopy parachutists may be exposed to changes in wind direction and thermal activity which may hamper their ability to land in the potential impact area. If a landing outside of the potential impact area is imminent, parachutists will identify a landing area free of hazards and land at that location. The prevailing winds for our area of operation are predominantly out of the west. If an environmental situation were to occur preventing a parachutist from landing in the potential impact area, they would most likely land in the proximity of the eastern section of the DZ. Consequently, an off target or a landing outside of the potential impact area would result in a parachute landing to the south (in the threatened and endangered species area) would not occur.

3. IN FLIGHT EMERGENCY REQUIRING BAILOUT

PROBABILITY: Extremely Low

MITIGATING FACTORS: All parachutists are briefed prior to each and every mission on emergency bailout procedures. In the last 15+ years, there have been zero in-flight emergencies requiring bailout by 336 TRG personnel. The type of emergency, the aircraft commander and the available altitude will all play a part in determining what emergency procedures will be

followed (i.e. stay with the aircraft and land, or bailout). In the event of a bailout, parachutists will exit and immediately deploy their parachutes to allow the aircraft clear space below them. Parachutists will evaluate the situation, group up on the low jumper and follow him to a suitable landing site which is free of hazards. Due to the flight path of the aircraft during an aircraft emergency, parachutists may not be over or close to the DZ.

4. PREMATURE PARACHUTE DEPLOYMENT

PROBABILITY: Extremely Low

MITIGATING FACTORS: All parachutists are briefed prior to each and every mission to monitor their ripcord handles at all times. While in the aircraft a parachutist will maintain one hand on top of the reserve ripcord handle to protect it preventing accidental opening of the parachute inside the aircraft. In the remote chance of a reserve parachute opening inside the aircraft with an open door, the parachutist will make every effort to contain it. If unable to contain the parachute, he will disconnect his seatbelt and exit the aircraft. If his seatbelt is already unfastened and the parachute can't be contained he will exit the aircraft. In both instances, the jumper may not be over the DZ, potential impact area, or actual impact area due to the flight path of the aircraft. Under canopy, parachutists will then evaluate potential landing sites free of hazards and land accordingly.

5. BAD SPOTS

PROBABILITY: Extremely Low (Less than 1%)

MITIGATING FACTORS: Jumpmasters are trained at formal training schools on the basics of spotting (the exact release point relative to the target that the Jumpmaster has computed for parachutists to exit the aircraft) fixed and rotary wing aircraft for para-drop operations. Graduates of these schools are then trained and supervised by highly experienced Jumpmaster Instructors at the 336 TRG which fine-tune their skills and techniques. Jumpmasters are not permitted to deploy parachutists on their own until they have demonstrated a high level of proficiency in spotting techniques. If a Jumpmaster demonstrates the lack of ability to effectively deploy parachutists on target they will be decertified, receive additional training and must recertify prior to being authorized to deploy parachutists. Jumpmasters are instructed to never try and make a bad spot "work." Instead they will recognize a "No Drop" situation, call "No Drop" and direct the aircraft to re-establish a proper line up (route of flight) allowing for the correct spot. Wind drift indicators are used in order to calculate wind drift at altitude and make it possible for the Jumpmaster to be extremely accurate while deploying parachutists. This process ensures that Jumpmasters and parachutists are optimally deployed for landing in the intended target area. Additionally, jumpers have a steerable canopy which allows them to fly to the target area with a high degree of accuracy.

6. CONTACT PROCEDURES

If a situation occurs involving parachutists landing more than 300 feet or 100 meters south of the mapped potential impact area as documented in 336TRG GOI 60-1, the primary mission

Jumpmaster will notify the 336 TRG/PPPM. The 336 TRG/PPPM will contact the 336 TRG/XP who in-turn will notify the 92 CES/CEVN immediately

Please refer any questions or comments to 336 TRG/XP, Mr. Bob Ploof @ 247-9341 or SSgt Brad Elliott @ 247-3549

GARY A. DAIGLE, Lt Col, USAF
Deputy Commander

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)
PARACHUTE TRAINING AT PAD5/ELLINGTON DROP ZONE
FAIRCHILD AIR FORCE BASE, WASHINGTON

INTRODUCTION

336TRG has been conducting parachute demonstration and proficiency training for over 15 years in support of their mission to prepare combatants for survival in all types of mission related conditions. Landing sites for parachute training must be relatively free of hazards to the jumpers which require open terrain free of obstacles. Training is conducted throughout the year which requires a dedicated area for long term use that is accessible year round.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to designate an area on Fairchild Air Force Base that meets the need of Survival School's training mission. Survival School's current jump site is located on Washington Department of Natural Resources lands and their access to these lands is in jeopardy. An area south of their current compound area has been proposed for use as a new landing area.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action, Alternative 1. Under the Proposed Action, training would consist weekly jumps for a total of 3600 students annually landing within the newly designated area. Additionally, about 3 times a month currency and proficiency training for SERE Specialist personnel will be conducted at an average of 10 sorties per week. The area has a Preferred Impact Area and Potential Impact area, both of which are the most desirable landing areas and the predominantly used for landing. The entire area designated is called the Drop Zone. The area would be called Pad5/Ellington DZ and is shown in Figure 1 of the Environmental Assessment. A mitigation strategy has been incorporated with this alternative to minimize any potential impacts to an area south of the Impact Areas managed for threatened and endangered plant habitat.

Alternative 2. Under Alternative 2, adjusts the Drop Zone boundary to a location that does not include the Threatened and Endangered Plant Area. This boundary is less desirable as it includes buildings as well as roads and fences within the Drop Zone and the Drop Zone configuration may conflict with air space currently used by 92ARW.

Alternative 3. Under Alternative 3, no action would be taken from the current activities on Washington Department of Natural Resources (WADNR) lands. Under this alternative, Survival School would continue using WADNR lands for their jump site and research other areas to displace their activities to in the advent of WADNR discontinuing their land use permit.

Alternative 4. Under Alternative 4, 336TRG would seek purchase of WADNR lands to continue activities in their current location. A waiver from the current moratorium to purchase large blocks of land would need to be requested and funds procured to conduct the purchase.

SUMMARY OF ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROPOSED ACTION

Proposed Action. No short term or long term, direct or indirect adverse effects are expected on the human environment, natural environment or infrastructure. Parachute landing activities create little ground disturbance and the area proposed is relatively free of safety hazards to jumpers. The flight path

has been reviewed and approved; and posed no conflicts with current air traffic. The General Plan Land Use categories for the area are Survival School and Open Space; both support this kind of activity. The proposed action incorporates a monitoring strategy to assure that no adverse impacts will occur to habitat or plants that are under protection of the Endangered Species Act. The strategy involves monitoring landings and halts all activity if a landing should occur outside the planned Impact Areas until ground disturbance can be assessed.

Alternative 2. Environmental consequences under Alternative 2 would be similar to those described under the Proposed Action. Generally, effects would be considered more adverse because hazards presented to jumper safety are greater due to more buildings and more infrastructure within the Drop Zone.

Alternative 3, No Action. Environmental consequences under Alternative 3 would be no change from the current situation. This alternative is less satisfactory because it does not resolve Survival School's need to find a new jump site. There is an increasing hazard to jumper safety as the area regenerates to forest. Another location would eventually need to be found for their parachute training exercises.

Alternative 4. Under Alternative 4, environmental consequences would not change from the current situation. There is a potential that this alternative would be found unviable if a waiver to purchase WADNR lands was not obtained.

The environmental assessment has been coordinated and reviewed by department representatives from Safety, Bioenvironmental, Public Affairs, 336TRG, Environmental, and Legal. Concurrence with the findings in this EA was the result of this review.

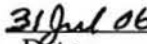
PUBLIC REVIEW AND INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

A Notice of Availability for the EA was published on June 30, 2006, in the *Fairchild Connection*, initiating a 30-day public review. The EA was made available through 92ARW/PA and 92CES/CEVN.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I conclude that the environmental effects of the proposed location of parachute training at Fairchild AFB are not significant, that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary, and that a FONSI is appropriate. The preparation of the EA is in accordance with NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality regulations, and 32 CFR Part 989, as amended.


RONALD R. DANIELS


Date

EPC Executive Secretary