



# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

## T-7A RECAPITALIZATION AT COLUMBUS AIR FORCE BASE, MISSISSIPPI



### PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR T-7A RECAPITALIZATION AT COLUMBUS AIR FORCE BASE, MS

#### Introduction

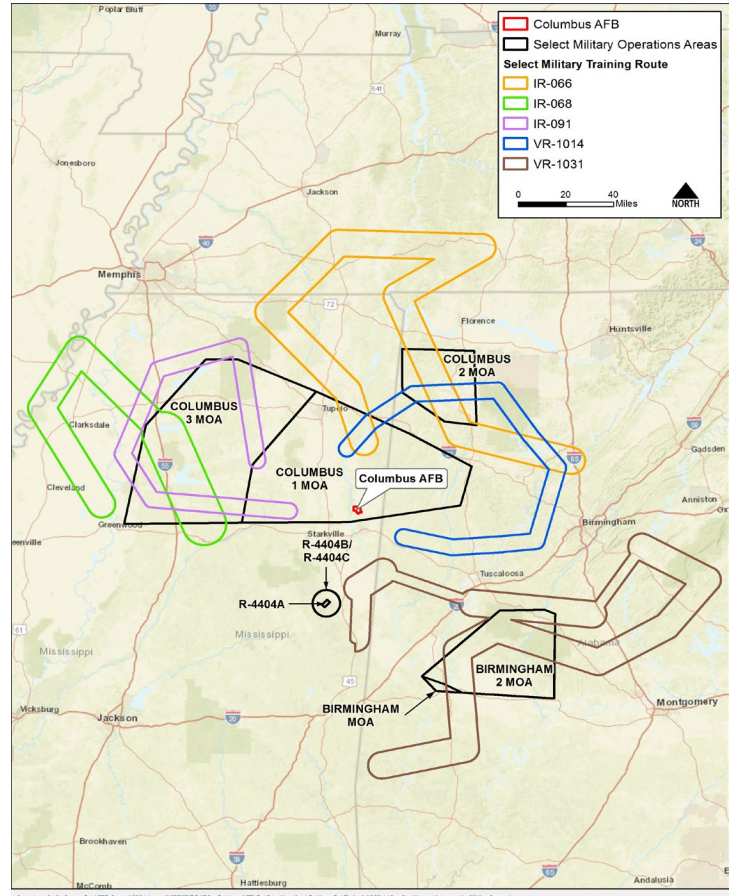
The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was enacted to address concerns about federal actions and their effects on the environment. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is the most detailed analysis prescribed by regulations implementing NEPA. The U.S. Department of the Air Force (DAF) has published a Notice of Availability, pursuant to NEPA, for the Draft EIS for the proposed T-7A recapitalization at Columbus Air Force Base (AFB). Recapitalization entails introduction of T-7A Red Hawk aircraft and flight operations at Columbus AFB and associated airspace to replace all T-38C Talon aircraft assigned to the installation; introduction of nighttime (between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m.) T-7A flight operations; changes to the number of personnel and dependents in the Columbus AFB region; and construction and upgrade of operations, support, and maintenance facilities. The number of T-7A aircraft, aircraft operations, and nighttime operations is evaluated as part of the three action alternatives to the Proposed Action.

#### Background

DAF proposes to recapitalize the flight training program at Columbus AFB with T-7A aircraft because the T-38C is expected to reach the end of its service life within the next decade. Training with the T-38C fails to prepare pilots for the technological advancements of modern fourth and fifth generation aircraft including nighttime flight training. The Secretary of the Air Force has made strategic basing decisions to recapitalize existing T-38C pilot training installations, and Columbus AFB would be the second of five T-38C installations to be environmentally analyzed for possible recapitalization.



Photo Credit: Boeing T-7A Red Hawk Website, September 2021, <https://www.boeing.com/defense/t-7a/gallery>



Columbus AFB and Affected Military Training Airspace

#### What is the Public Involvement Process?

An EIS is a public document, and public involvement is a vital component of the NEPA process. The public involvement process helps inform interested stakeholders, elicit valuable community input, develop trust and credibility, and avoid misunderstandings through a mutual exchange of information. The Draft EIS public comment period is an open process for identifying issues that should be addressed in the Final EIS, for notifying the public about the Draft EIS, and for soliciting written and verbal comments from the public on these topics.

#### Reviewing the Draft EIS

The Draft EIS is available for download on the project website at <https://columbus.t-7anepadocuments.com> and can also be reviewed at the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library at 314 7th Street North in Columbus, Mississippi. Hardcopies also may be requested using the contact information on the back of this brochure. Please consider the environment before requesting printed material.

## Personnel and Construction

Columbus AFB and the surrounding region would experience an increase of approximately 43 personnel and 82 dependents during the aircraft transition period of 2028 and 2029 and a decrease of 31 personnel and 59 dependents (relative to current personnel levels) after 2029. Five military construction and six facility sustainment, restoration, and modernization projects would be undertaken. These projects include construction of a new Ground Based Training System Facility, Unit Maintenance Trainer Facility, hush house, standalone facility adjacent to the Egress Shop (Hangar 3), and either 46 or 58 T-7A shelters.

## Proposed Action Alternatives

DAF is considering three alternative ways to implement the Proposed Action (i.e., Alternatives 1, 2, and 3) and the No Action Alternative. These alternatives are described as follows:

### Alternative 1: 61 T-7A Aircraft and Operations at a Level Sustaining Pilot Training while Simultaneously Phasing Out the T-38C and Phasing In the T-7A

Columbus AFB would receive 61 T-7A aircraft between 2028 and 2030. Pilot training operations would gradually transition from the T-38C to the T-7A during 2028, 2029, and 2030, and pilot training operations would be performed at a level to meet DAF's anticipated training needs. Operations are takeoffs, landings, the approach phase of a "touch-and-go", and the takeoff phase of a "touch-and-go". Up to 474 annual nighttime T-7A operations would occur. Existing military training airspace would be used, and no changes to airspace configurations would be required. All T-7A operations would be sub-sonic.

### Alternative 2: 61 T-7A Aircraft and Operations 25 Percent Greater than Alternative 1

Alternative 2 would be identical to Alternative 1 except T-7A operations would be 25 percent greater than Alternative 1. Up to 595 annual nighttime T-7A operations would occur. Alternative 2 covers a scenario in which DAF requires a potential surge in requirements.

### Alternative 3: 77 T-7A Aircraft and Operations 25 Percent Greater than Alternative 1

Alternative 3 would be similar to Alternatives 1 and 2 except 16 additional T-7A aircraft would be delivered in 2028 and 12 additional T-7A shelters would be constructed. T-7A operations would be identical to Alternative 2. Alternative 3 is intended to provide DAF with operational flexibility so that 16 additional T-7A aircraft can be assigned to Columbus AFB, if needed.

### No Action Alternative: Does Not Implement T-7A Recapitalization at Columbus AFB

The No Action Alternative assesses the environmental consequences from taking no action and serves as a baseline to compare the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action. For the No Action Alternative, DAF would not implement T-7A recapitalization at Columbus AFB. The existing fleet of T-38C aircraft would continue to be used in their current capacity even though they will reach the end of their service lives within the next decade and maintenance requirements would continue to increase. No changes to current flight operations would occur. No changes to the number of personnel and dependents would occur, and no construction would be undertaken.

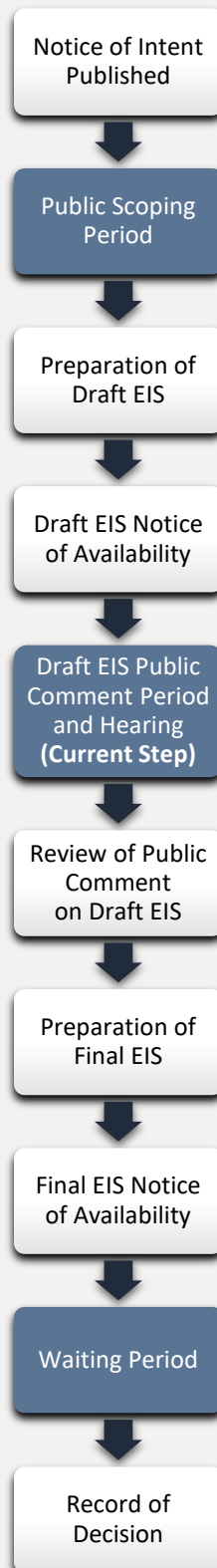
## Environmental Impact Analysis Process

DAF has found the following notable environmental impacts from the Proposed Action:

1. Increases in criteria pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions would occur, but these emissions would not exceed the *de minimis* level threshold or insignificance indicators.
2. Noise from aircraft operations would increase areas of incompatible land use on and adjacent to the installation, the Birmingham Range, and the Sea Ray Range.
3. Increased potential for bird/wildlife aircraft strike hazards.
4. Aircraft operations would result in disproportionate adverse impacts on environmental justice and sensitive receptor populations when compared to baseline conditions.

The Draft EIS contains a detailed description of all environmental impacts that would result.

## EIS Timeline



Please provide comments on the Draft EIS in English on the project website, by email at [chinling.chen@us.af.mil](mailto:chinling.chen@us.af.mil), or via postal mail to Ms. Chinling Chen, AFCEC/CZN; Attn: Columbus AFB T-7A Recapitalization EIS; Headquarters Air Education and Training Command Public Affairs; 100 H. East Street, Suite 4; Randolph AFB, TX 78150. If you have questions, please call (210) 395-0979.

<https://columbus.t-7anepadocuments.com/>

To ensure DAF has sufficient time to consider public input, please submit all comments by November 20, 2023.