



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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



Columbus Air Force Base T-7A Recapitalization Draft Environmental Impact Statement Virtual Public Hearing October 30, 2023

Dial-In: 1-408-418-9388 Meeting number: 2485 513 9142

Meeting Password: ColumbusT-7A

Web Link: <https://bit.ly/ColumbusAFBT-7A>

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Introduction



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Columbus Air Force Base T-7A Recapitalization Draft Environmental Impact Statement In-Person Public Hearing October 25, 2023



Introduction



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Virtual Public Hearing

**Draft Environmental Impact Statement
for the T-7A Recapitalization at
Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi**

October 30, 2023

Welcome



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In-Person Public Hearing

Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the T-7A Recapitalization at Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi

October 25, 2023

Welcome



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Tech Talk and Troubleshooting



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Chinling Chen, Air Force Civil Engineer Center (AFCEC), NEPA Division

AETC T-7A Program Office

Columbus Air Force Base (AFB)

HDR and HMMH, Contractor Team



NEPA Team Members



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Air Force Presentation

- Proposed Action and alternatives
- Overview of the NEPA process
- Summary of the potential environmental consequences of the proposal
- Discussion of the Department of the Air Force (DAF)'s plans and actions to mitigate and manage any adverse impacts

Formal Draft EIS Verbal Comment Opportunity

- Statements on the record
- Transcribed by Court Reporter

Public Hearing Agenda



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- **During this Virtual Public Hearing:** Follow the teleconference prompts to register to provide a comment.
- **Mail:** 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
- **Email:** chinling.chen@us.af.mil
- **Online on the Project Website:** <https://columbus.t-7anepadocuments.com>
- **Comment Form:** Available for download on project website.



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To ensure timely consideration of your comments in the Final EIS, please submit comments by November 20, 2023.

Providing Comments



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- **During this Public Hearing:** Verbal and written comments accepted.
- **Mail:** 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
- **Email:** chinling.chen@us.af.mil
- **Online on the Project Website:** <https://columbus.t-7anepadocuments.com>
- **Comment Form:** Available at the table in the rear of the room and for download on project website.



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Columbus AFB is home to the 14th Flying Training Wing (FTW) of the U.S. Air Force Air Education and Training Command (AETC).

- **14 FTW Mission:** Train World Class Pilots
- **14 FTW Pilot Training:** Undergraduate pilot training: T-38C Talon

The T-38C aircraft are approaching the end of their useful life, and student pilots need a more technologically advanced aircraft with which to train.





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DAF plans to recapitalize the T-38C fleet with T-7A aircraft to provide a training environment suitable for modern aircraft.

Procure approximately 350 T-7A aircraft and deliver these aircraft to the five T-38C pilot training installations using a geographically phased replacement.

- Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA)-Randolph
- Columbus AFB
- Laughlin AFB
- Vance AFB
- Sheppard AFB
- T-7A aircraft will meet fifth-generation fighter training requirements.
- T-7A end state requires approximately the same number of personnel authorizations as currently programmed.

T-7A Strategic Basing Initiative





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- The Acting Secretary of the Air Force selected Columbus AFB to be the second installation to undergo T-7A recapitalization.
- Recapitalizing Columbus AFB second would:
 - ❖ Result in the least impact on continued pilot production during the transition of aircraft types.
 - ❖ Provide the most efficient cost and student production and management plan.
 - ❖ Align with AETC's student pipeline flow for the Undergraduate Pilot Training and Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals curricula.
- JBSA-Randolph is the first installation, and Laughlin, Vance, and Sheppard AFBs would follow as the third, fourth, and fifth installations.

Why Columbus AFB Second?



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To continue the T-7A recapitalization program by recapitalizing Columbus AFB to prepare pilots to operate modern fourth and fifth generation aircraft.

Purpose





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Current training practices with the older T-38C aircraft fail to prepare pilots for the technological advancements of fourth and fifth generation aircraft. Training systems provided with the newer T-7A aircraft allow for enhanced and improved flight and simulator training.

The T-7A recapitalization program will allow DAF to provide more efficient and effective instructor and pilot training for operating fourth and fifth generation aircraft.

T-7A recapitalization at Columbus AFB would allow DAF to continue the geographically phased sequence, ensuring pilot training requirements are met.

Need

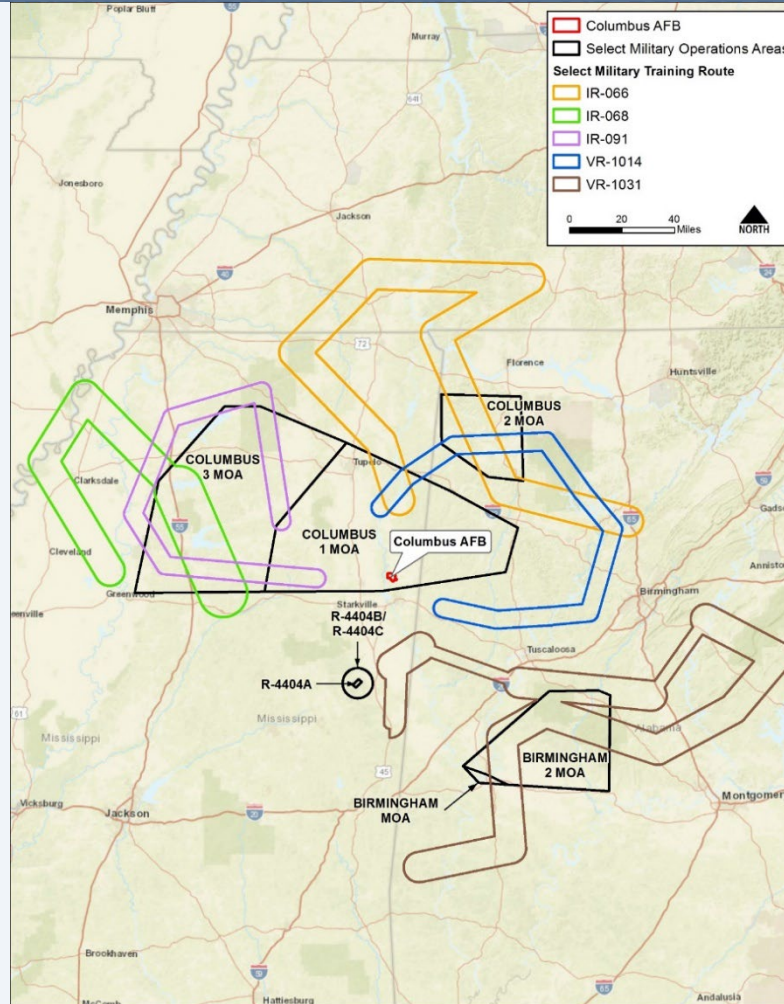




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Project Location





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The DAF would recapitalize the T-38C flight training program at Columbus AFB with T-7A aircraft. Recapitalization entails the following elements:

- Replacement of all T-38C aircraft assigned to Columbus AFB with T-7A aircraft.
- Transition of aircraft operations and associated airspace from the T-38C to T-7A.
- Introduction of nighttime (between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m.) T-7A operations.
- Changes to the number of personnel and dependents in the Columbus AFB region.
- Construction and upgrade of operations, support, and maintenance facilities through 11 projects – 5 military construction (MILCON) and 6 facilities sustainment, restoration, and modernization (FSRM) projects – to support pilot training and aircraft operations and maintenance.

Overview of the Proposed Action





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The DAF analyzed the environmental impacts of three action alternatives:

- Alternative 1
- Alternative 2
- Alternative 3

The three action alternatives consider different numbers of T-7A aircraft stationed at Columbus AFB and different numbers of operations at Columbus AFB and associated airspace training areas.

Overview of Action Alternatives





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Alternative 1 – 61 T-7A Aircraft and T-7A Operations at a Level Sustaining Pilot Training

- T-7A aircraft would be delivered to Columbus AFB beginning in 2028 and continuing through 2030.
- As T-7A aircraft are delivered and placed into service, T-38C aircraft would be withdrawn from service.
 - ❖ T-38C withdrawal would begin in 2028 and be complete by 2030.
 - ❖ T-7A operations would begin in 2028 and increase to steady state in 2030.
 - ❖ T-7A nighttime (between 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) operations would occur with up to 474 annual nighttime operations at Columbus AFB.

Alternative 1





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Alternative 2 – 61 T-7A Aircraft and T-7A Operations at 25 Percent Greater than Alternative 1

- Intended to cover a scenario where DAF requires a surge or increase in pilot training operations above the current plan.
- Like Alternative 1, 61 T-7A aircraft would be delivered and placed into service beginning in 2028, T-38C withdrawal would be complete by 2030, T-7A operations would increase to steady state by 2030, and T-38C operations would conclude by the end of 2029.
- T-7A aircraft would perform annual operations at Columbus AFB and associated airspace training areas at an intensity that is approximately 25% greater than Alternative 1.
 - ❖ At steady state, T-7A nighttime operations would occur with up to 595 annual nighttime operations at Columbus AFB.

Alternative 2





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Alternative 3 – 77 T-7A Aircraft and T-7A Operations at 25 Percent Greater than Alternative 1

- Intended to provide operational flexibility so that 16 additional T-7A aircraft can be assigned to Columbus AFB, if needed.
- An additional 16 T-7A aircraft would be delivered to Columbus AFB in 2028 resulting in a total of 77 T-7A aircraft by 2030.
- Like Alternative 1, T-38C withdrawal would be complete by 2030, T-7A operations would increase to steady state by 2030, and T-38C operations would conclude by the end of 2029.
- T-7A operations, to include nighttime operations, at Columbus AFB and associated airspace training areas would be identical to those described for Alternative 2.

Alternative 3





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- A “No Action Alternative” is considered in the Draft EIS.
- Provides a baseline to evaluate the impacts of the Proposed Action.
- The No Action Alternatives analysis presents the environmental impacts of not implementing the Proposed Action.
- The T-7A program will be implemented regardless of whether the No Action Alternative is selected.
- If the No Action Alternative is selected, DAF would re-evaluate their T-7A strategic basing decisions and implement all or a portion of the basing requirements proposed for Columbus AFB at an undetermined location.
- DAF would not implement T-7A recapitalization at Columbus AFB.

No Action Alternative





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- The Draft EIS has been prepared in accordance with NEPA regulations.
- Federal agencies must analyze potential impacts of proposed actions, reasonable alternatives, and a no action alternative, before action is taken.
- The goal is to support sound decisions through the assessment of impacts and involve the public in the EIS process.
- The results of this analysis and other relevant factors will be considered before the DAF makes a decision on this proposal.

Your input during the public scoping period earlier in the NEPA process and this public comment period help the DAF decision-maker make the most informed decision possible on this proposal.





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We are currently at the Draft EIS review stage

- *Federal Register* publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft EIS occurred on October 6, 2023.
- Draft EIS made available on project website and at Columbus-Lowndes Public Library.
- Notification letters mailed to federal, state, and local representatives and elected officials, Native American tribes, and individuals who requested copies during the EIS scoping period.
- The review period required by NEPA is 45 days. Our date for completion of the public review period is November 20, 2023.

The EIS Timeline





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- After the public review period closes, DAF will:
 - ❖ Review all comments received tonight, through the mail, or electronically via email or on the project website, and consider them in preparing the Final EIS.
 - ❖ Respond to substantive comments in the Final EIS.

(Substantive comments offer information regarding the alternatives or are relative to the assessment of impacts or NEPA process.)

- Final EIS is scheduled to be released in early 2024.
- After the Final EIS NOA is published in the *Federal Register*, a waiting period of at least 30 days is observed before DAF signs the Record of Decision to document actions selected to implement.

The EIS Timeline (continued)





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Resource areas analyzed in detail for potential environmental impacts are:

- Air Quality and Climate Change
- Noise
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Land Use
- Hazardous Materials and Waste
- Infrastructure and Transportation
- Safety
- Water Resources
- Environmental Justice

Resources determined to have negligible effects and not analyzed in detail within the Draft EIS are:

- Airspace
- Geological Resources
- Socioeconomics

Draft EIS Resource Areas





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- The proposed construction or renovation of facilities at Columbus AFB is not anticipated to have significant impacts on any of the resources.
- Noise associated with T-7A flight operations under Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would increase areas of incompatible land use on and adjacent to Columbus AFB.
 - ❖ DAF is committed to working with Lowndes, Monroe, and Clay counties and others to analyze compatible uses surrounding Columbus AFB and would continue to partner with local governments.
- Aircraft operations for the T-7A under Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would result in a disproportionate adverse impact on environmental justice and sensitive receptor populations when compared to baseline conditions.





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- Temporary (2024 to 2028) air emissions produced from the use of heavy equipment for construction.
- Operational air emissions would begin in 2028.
- Annual net change of criteria pollutant emissions for all 3 action alternatives would not exceed insignificance indicators for all criteria pollutants.
- GHG emissions would not contribute meaningfully to the potential effects of global climate change and would not considerably increase the total GHG emissions produced in the state.
- Climate priorities would be considered during the design phase for new buildings.
- No future climate scenario or potential climate stressor would have significant effects on any element of the Proposed Action.

Air Quality and Climate Change





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- All construction would be within the Columbus AFB boundary, be collocated with other existing noise-compatible activities, and would not result in significant impacts on any noise-sensitive site.
- Noise from aircraft operations would increase areas of incompatible land use on and adjacent to Columbus AFB and two training ranges. The acreage and population within the 65 dB contour would increase incrementally from current conditions for Alternatives 1, 2, and 3.
- The changes in acreage and population for each alternative are provided in EIS and summarized on the next slide. The modeled footprints for each alternative at Columbus AFB are shown on the following two slides.
- No change in noise levels under training airspace other than Birmingham and Sea Ray Range.





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	Existing	Alternative 1	Alternatives 2 and 3
Columbus AFB			
Aircraft Noise Footprint (within 65+ DNL)	7,253 acres	11,219 acres	12,369 acres
Population (within 65+ DNL)	308	902	1,241
Birmingham Range			
Aircraft Noise Footprint (Within 65+ DNL)	3,349 acres	15,132 acres	17,601 acres
Population (within 65+ DNL)	19	145	177
Sea Ray Range			
Aircraft Noise Footprint (Within 65+ DNL)	5,023 acres	14,563 acres	16,342 acres
Population (within 65+ DNL)	59	210	235

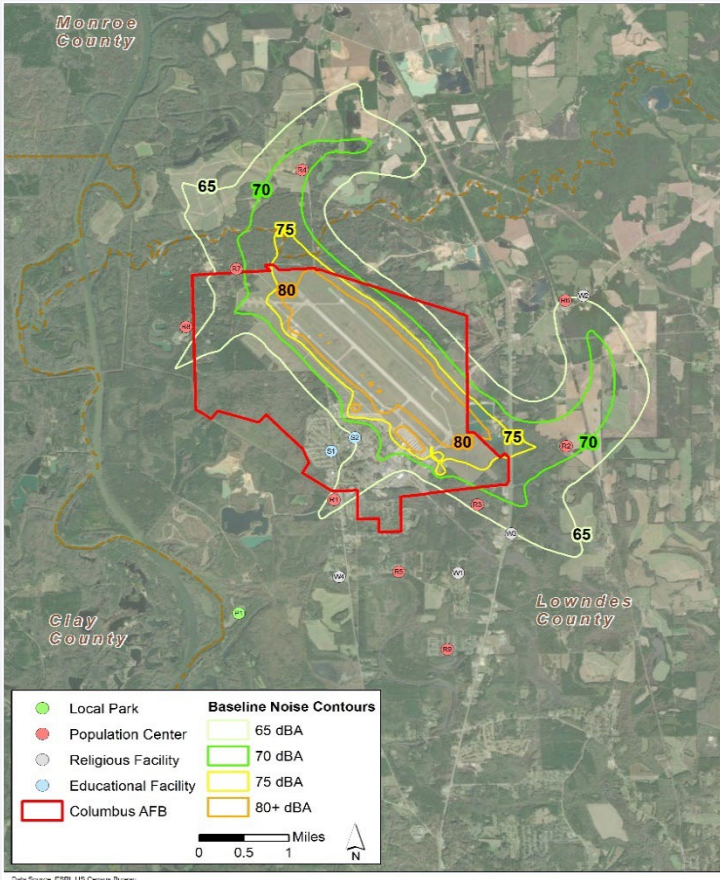
Noise (continued)





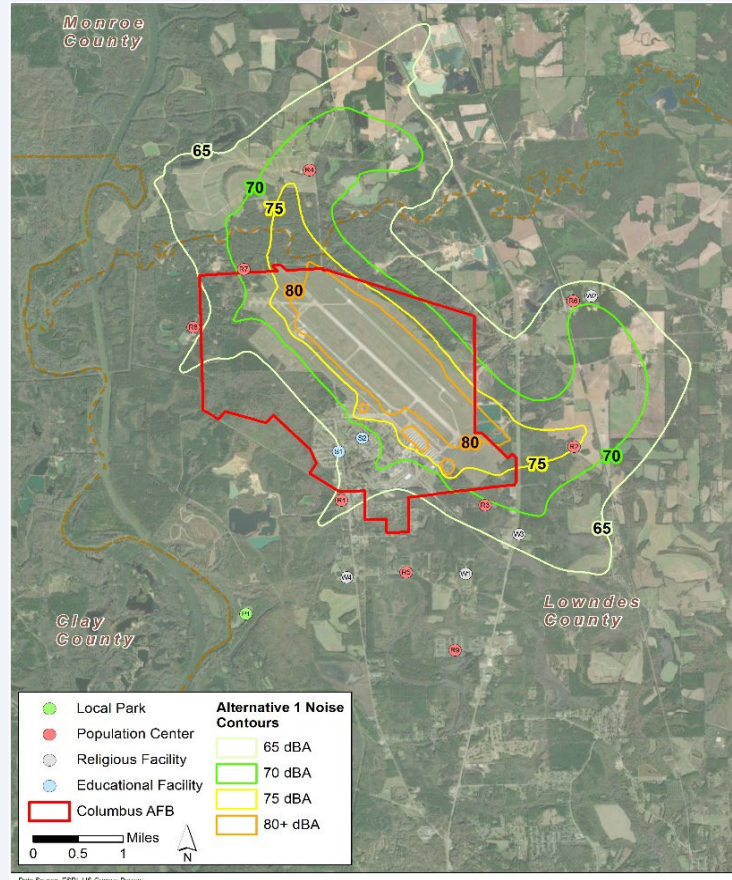
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Existing Noise Footprint

Alternative 1



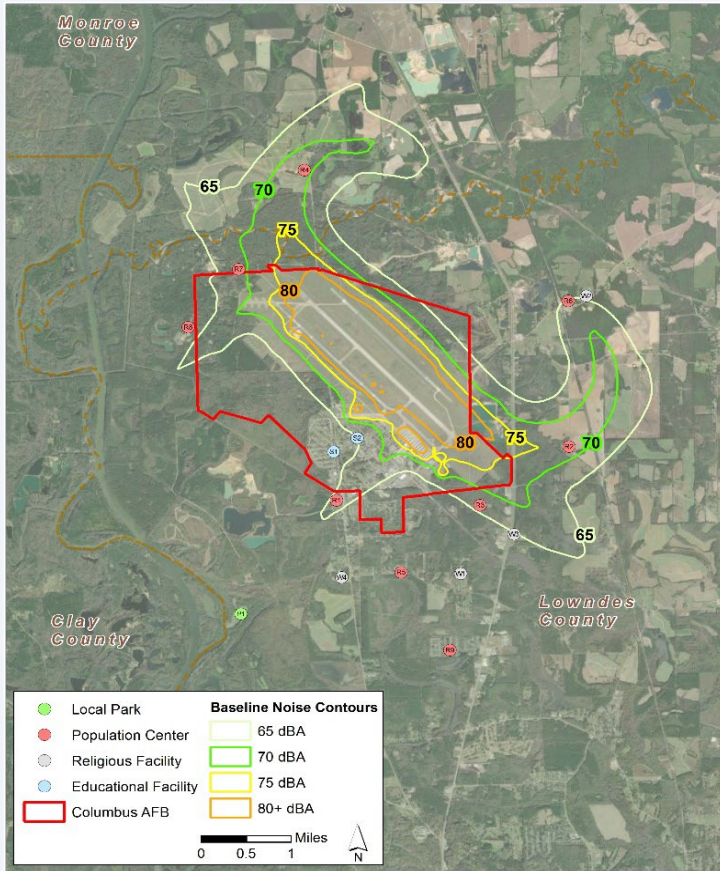
Noise – Existing Conditions vs Alternative 1





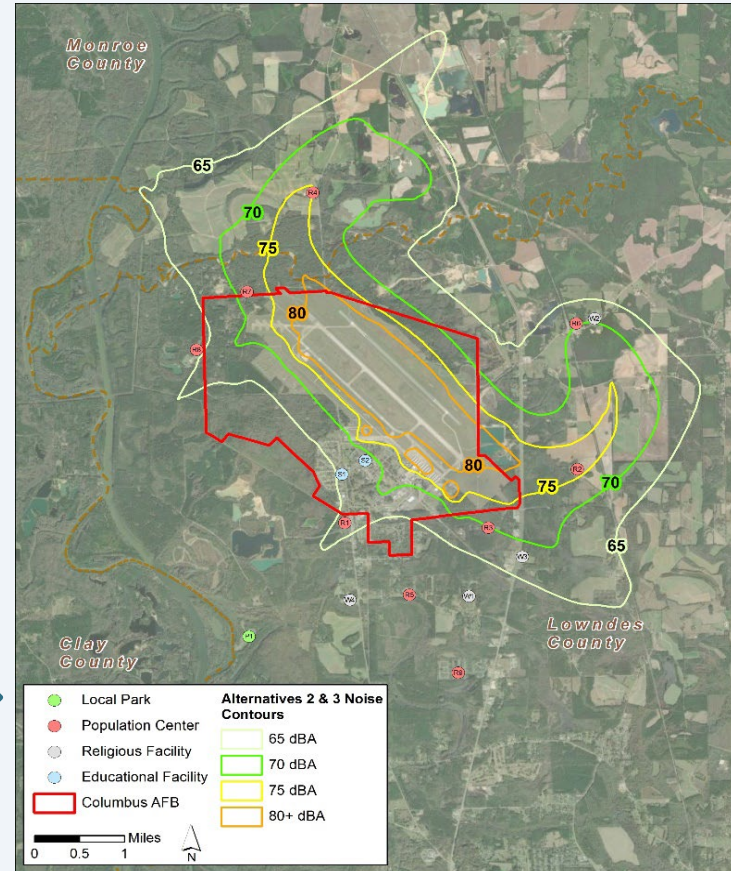
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Existing
Noise
Footprint

Alternatives
2 and 3



Noise – Existing Conditions vs Alternatives 2 & 3





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- Draft EIS contains more detailed analysis.
- Includes analysis of potential for speech interference, classroom learning interferences, sleep disturbance, potential for hearing loss, and damage to structures in nearby locations for each alternative.
- No significant impacts on the noise environment are anticipated.
 - ❖ The additional land acreage and population exposed to higher levels of noise from all three alternatives is already exposed to aircraft noise under baseline conditions.
 - ❖ The increased noise levels would not significantly adversely affect the health of residents.

Noise – Conclusions





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- Biological resource impacts are evaluated with a specific look at vegetation, wildlife, and special status species.
 - ❖ Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would have a negligible impact on vegetation from the temporary or permanent removal of vegetation for construction of new facilities.
 - ❖ Wildlife impacts from construction would be negligible.
 - ❖ Long-term impacts on wildlife from increased aircraft operations (to include the introduction of T-7A nighttime operations) would increase the risk of bird and bat strikes. The Bird/Wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) Plan would be updated and implemented to minimize potential strikes.
 - ❖ Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect, 8 federally listed or candidate species and would have no effect on the remaining 73 federally listed or candidate species with the potential to occur on Columbus AFB or within or underlying the airspace areas proposed for flight operations. No effects on state-listed and sensitive species would result.

Biological Resources





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- Three MILCON and FSRM projects would entail alterations to three historic-age buildings.
 - ❖ DAF consulted with the Mississippi State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). SHPO determined that two of the three buildings are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
 - ❖ DAF continued consultation with the SHPO requesting a finding of no adverse effect for both eligible buildings.
 - ❖ Concurrence of no adverse effect was received from the Mississippi SHPO in June 2023 with two conditions for the renovation of Buildings 452 and 454:
 1. The new vertical lift doors must be installed within the existing openings.
 2. Corrugated metal panels that are similar in appearance as the existing exterior wall cladding must be used.
 - ❖ No other historic-age buildings would be impacted by the Proposed Action.

Cultural Resources





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- Five MILCON and FSRM projects would require ground disturbance.
 - ❖ Although no archaeological surveys were recommended by DAF and SHPO, one tribe noted that the area of potential effect falls within their Trail of Tears Removal Corridor and requested that a survey be performed.
 - ❖ As requested, an archaeological survey was performed and resulted in a recommendation of no effect to archaeological resources.
 - ❖ The results of that survey were approved by SHPO and the requesting tribe.
- DAF consulted with the Mississippi SHPO and Native American tribes under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.





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- Proposed MILCON and FSRM projects would be sited, designed, and constructed consistent with the Columbus AFB Installation Development Plan and would have no significant impacts on land use.
- Residential land use is considered incompatible with any aircraft noise zone above 65 DNL. However, most land uses surrounding Columbus AFB are considered Open/Recreation/Agriculture/Low-Density Residential.
 - ❖ DAF would continue to partner with local governments and update the Air Installations Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ) Plan to address any increases of land within the 65 dB or greater noise contour for Columbus AFB.
 - ❖ DAF would also continue to pursue DoD Readiness and Environmental Protection funds to further implement strategic land use acquisitions, controls, and landscape improvements associated with incompatible land use.





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- Environmental justice was assessed to determine whether the Proposed Action would result in disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental impacts on environmental justice populations (i.e., minority or low-income populations) or sensitive receptors (i.e., youth or elderly populations) within the environmental justice region of influence.
 - ❖ Three of the five Census Block Groups within the 65 dBA or greater noise contour for Alternative 1 and a small portion of an additional Census Block Group under Alternatives 2 and 3 contain environmental justice populations.
 - ❖ Therefore, Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would have a disproportionately adverse impact on environmental justice and sensitive receptors within up to four of the five Census Block Groups that coincide with the 65 dB noise contour.





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- Other resources that were analyzed in detail include Hazardous Materials and Wastes, Infrastructure and Transportation, Safety, and Water Resources.
- These resources were determined to have no significant impacts from Alternatives 1, 2, or 3.
- Further details are found in the Draft EIS.

Other Resources





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The public comment portion of the hearing will commence following this brief break.

Break



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To make a comment, you need to **virtually raise your hand**.

- **Personal computer:**

Click the **menu icon**  then click the **raise hand icon**.



- **Smartphone or tablet:**

Click the **participant icon**  then click the **raise hand icon**.



- **Landline telephone or cell phone:** Dial ***3** on your phone keypad.

When it is time to make your comment, you will a beep and you will be unmuted.

- Clearly state and spell your name and affiliation, if any.
- Comments will be limited to 3 minutes.
- You will be given a notice when you have only 30 seconds remaining.

You will be given a final notice when your time is up.

After commenting, please **virtually lower your hand** using the same procedures required to raise your hand.



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The number on your speaker card is the order we will follow.

When it is time to make your comment, please:

- Clearly state and spell your name and affiliation, if any.
- Comments will be limited to 3 minutes.
- You will be given a notice with a yellow card when you have only 30 seconds remaining.

You will be given a final notice with a red card when your time is up.

After commenting, please return to your seat.



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Mail: Ms. Chinling Chen, AFCEC/CZN
Attn: Columbus AFB T-7A Recapitalization EIS
Headquarters Air Education and Training Command Public Affairs
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Email: chinling.chen@us.af.mil

Online on the Project Website: <https://columbus.T-7anepadocuments.com>

Downloadable Comment Form: Available for download on project website



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Comment Options



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THANK YOU

for participating in this public hearing for the

Draft Environmental Impact
Statement for the Columbus AFB
T-7A Recapitalization

Thank you