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Environmental Assessment

Henry Y.H. Kim Airbase Expansion

Prescott National Forest
Yavapai County, Arizona



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SUMMARY

The Prescott National Forest proposes to expand and make improvements to its Prescott Fire Center airbase, the Henry Y.H. Kim Aviation Facility, located at the Prescott Regional Airport. Original construction of the airbase facility began in 1988 and it was officially dedicated in 1992. The original blueprints for the facility included four airtanker loading pads and two areas for light, fixed-wing parking. However, just two loading pads and one light, fixed-wing parking area were constructed. Now it has become evident that additional space is needed, especially during periods of high fire activity. Additionally, after twenty years of use, improving and updating the existing amenities is critical for the continued safe, effective, and efficient functioning of the facility.

The proposed action is not expected to have any notable impacts to the environment. The site has already been leveled and there are no archaeological, cultural, or historic sites or artifacts at the location. There are no threatened, endangered, or Regional Forester's sensitive species in the project area. There are no wetlands, parks, or farmlands. The land is not National Forest System land and therefore contains no special designations or inventoried roadless areas. Construction and airbase operations will follow Best Management Practices and other policy requirements to avoid impacts to water quality, reduce the risk of fuel spills, and protect worker and public safety.

Based upon a review of the purpose and need and the evaluation of environmental effects as disclosed in this analysis, the Responsible Official will decide whether to expand and update the facility as proposed or to keep the existing facility as is. The Responsible Official will also determine whether there would be any significant environmental impacts that an Environmental Impact Statement would be needed.

INTRODUCTION

Document Structure

The Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action. The document is organized into three parts:

- *Introduction:* The section includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose of and need for the project, and the agency's proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- *Proposed Action and Environmental Effects* This section provides a more detailed description of the agency's proposed action and the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action.
- *Agencies and Persons Consulted:* This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Prescott National Forest Supervisor's Office, 344 S. Cortez St., Prescott, Arizona.

Background and Purpose and Need for Action

The Henry H. Y. Kim airbase facility is a vital resource for the forests and communities in northern and central Arizona, as well as to the Forest Service's Southwestern Region (Arizona and New Mexico) and surrounding regions. The facility is home to the Prescott Fire Cache, the Prescott Airtanker Base, the Prescott Hotshot Crew, the Prescott Helitack Crew, the Prescott Dispatch Center, as well as fire and fuels managers and support services. It also serves as a training facility and hosts numerous meetings.

After 20 years of service, there is a need for additional capacity and to update and improve the existing facilities. Safety features need to be upgraded and modernized while landing and loading areas need to be expanded and resurfaced. These improvements will make the airbase more serviceable, safe, and effective for the continued support for fire fighting and other agency needs and responsibilities.

Decision Framework

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official reviews the proposed action and the environmental consequences to decide whether to implement the proposal as described or whether changes need to be made. The deciding official also will determine whether the environmental effects would require additional analysis in an EIS.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning July 15, 2011. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment with a scoping letter mailed on July 18, and a public notice was published in the newspaper of record, the Daily Courier, on July 20, 2011.

Comments received during scoping can help identify issues that might be resolved through the development of alternative methods for achieving the project's purpose. No issues were identified during scoping, nor through internal discussions with resource specialists, that would lead to the development of an alternative. Therefore only the proposed action and no action alternatives were analyzed.

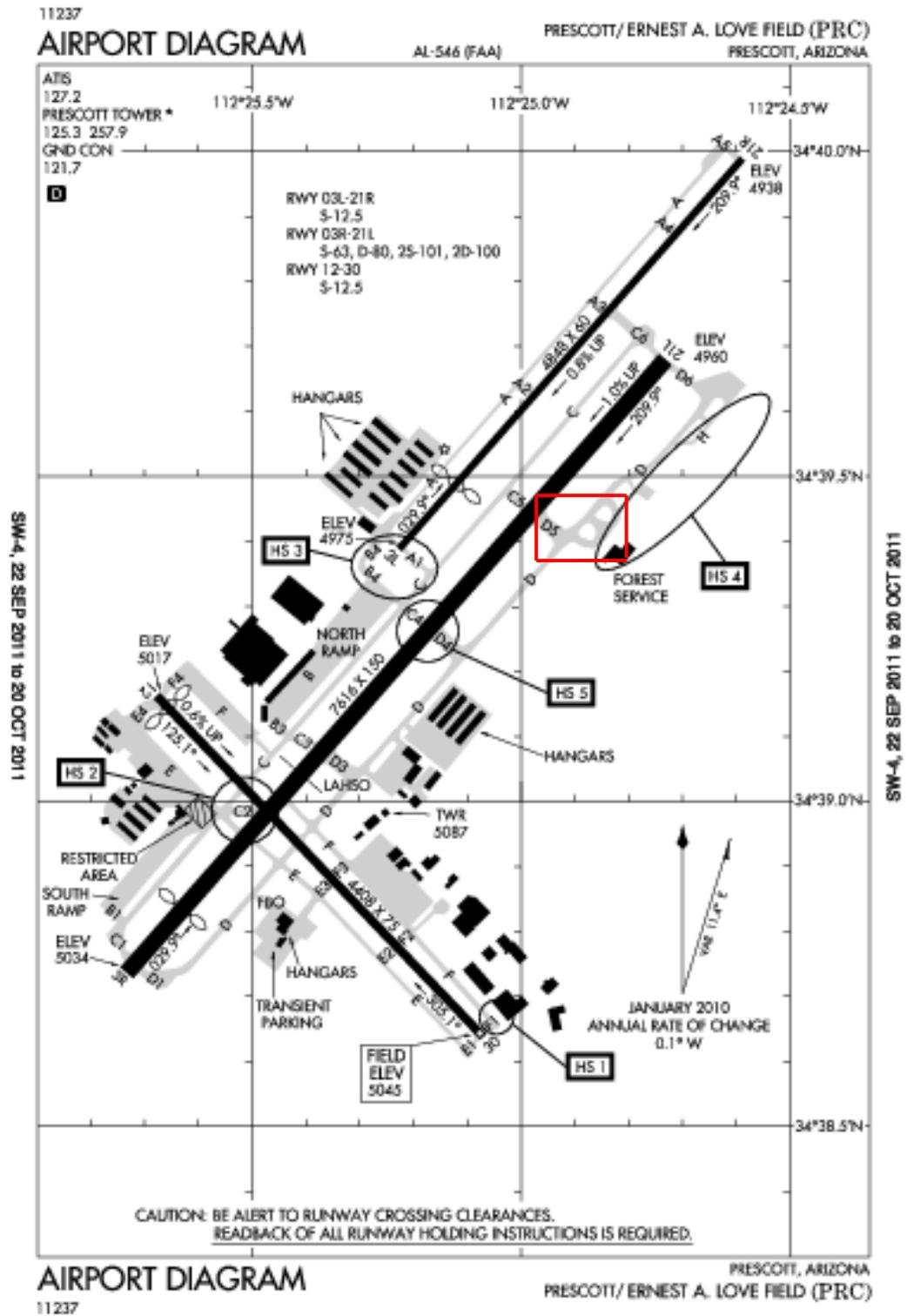
A letter regarding the availability and location for the preliminary EA was mailed to 26 parties, and a legal notice of opportunity to comment was published in the *Prescott Daily Courier* on January 9, 2012. Three comments were received on the proposed action and analysis, two of which were in support of the proposal and one which requested some additional information. That information was provided, and the commenter then was also in support of the project.

THE PROPOSED ACTION

This section describes activities associated with the Henry Y.H. Kim Airbase Expansion project. It includes a description of various elements of the project and the timing of these actions as well as what effects there might be from those activities. It also describes mitigations or restrictions on the activities.

The proposed improvements are to 1) construct an additional loading pad and enlarge the existing light, fixed-wing parking area; 2) reconstruct the existing asphalt in the ramp and parking areas; 3) make security enhancements to be in compliance with the USDA Integrated Physical Security Standards; 4) improve helicopter landing and support facilities; and 5) improve and update amenities of the facility. These improvements would increase capacity for airtankers and parking, boost the capabilities of the base, and increase safety at the facility. The expanded paved areas would cover approximately two acres of additional asphalt.

Plans and blueprints for the improvements were originally expected to be completed by March, 2012, allowing for a construction start of August 2012. The facility would be completed and back in service by March, 2013. However, due to a lack of funding, the proposed construction will be delayed until a subsequent fiscal year.



Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

This section summarizes environment of the project area and the potential impacts due to implementation of the project.

Affected Environment

The Henry Y. H. Kim airbase is located adjacent to the Prescott Regional Airport, north of the airport terminal and main buildings and southeast of the runways. The airport area is located between the Bradshaw and Black Hills mountain ranges on mostly flat ground surrounded by rolling hills. The project site is at an elevation of approximately 4980 feet. Most of the area is developed, either residential or commercial, and the native vegetation is primarily open grasslands with some chaparral and a few trees.

Because the facility is not on the Prescott National Forest, it is not covered by the forest's vegetation maps nor included in any management area. The project is not subject to those policies that are specific to actions or activities that occur on National Forest System lands.

Environmental Consequences

Effects on the following elements were evaluated:

1. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** Construction and operation of the facility would include all design criteria needed to ensure worker and public safety. The project will be subject to applicable FAA requirements and standards to include but not limited to the required completion and submittal of a Construction Safety Plan in accordance with FAA Advisory Circular 150/5370-2 current edition, Operational Safety On Airports During Construction. Additionally, this project will require compliance with 14 CFR Part 77 and the subsequent submittal of FAA form 7460-1 as appropriate.

Safety assurance requires that the Forest Service actively monitors systems and processes to consistently identify new hazards, measure the effectiveness of aircraft operations and maintenance, and monitor risk controls that have been implemented in order to ensure compliance with internal and external requirements. The annual revision of the Prescott Airtanker Base Operations and Safety Plan will reflect the safety, security, and environmental compliance controls to be implemented as a result of this construction project.

The purpose of the Prescott Airtanker Base Operations and Safety Plan is to identify the policies and procedures specific to the Prescott Airtanker Base to ensure that safe and efficient operations continue to be the standard. The expansion of the airbase would also serve to improve the Forest Service's ability to protect life and property from the threat of wildfires.

2. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** The project area contains no historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, or any other unique characteristics; nor is it in close proximity to any of these areas that they might be affected.
3. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects of proposed action are well known and there is no known controversy over the effects. There would be no discernable change to the human environment.
4. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The possible effects on the human environment are not uncertain nor do they involve unique or unknown risks. Expansion of airbase capacity and updating facilities are common occurrences.
5. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The proposed action does not set any precedent for any future actions nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
6. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The proposed action is not related to any other actions.
7. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The proposed action would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places nor would it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. There are no such features in the area to be affected by the project.
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** There are no known threatened or endangered species in the project area. Other species considered for this project include migratory birds considered under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and bald and golden eagles, considered under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The proposed action would not have any notable effect on any migratory birds or bald or golden eagles.
9. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The proposed action is consistent with relevant Federal, State, and local laws and requirements.

The Prescott Airtanker Base is administrated by the Prescott National Forest Supervisor's Office under the direction of the Prescott National Forest (PNF) Deputy Fire Staff Officer/Forest Aviation Officer. All of the runways and taxiways are owned by the City of Prescott, and managed by the Prescott Municipal Airport (Ernest A. Love Field) under

FAA regulation. The City of Prescott is responsible for all of the operations at Prescott Municipal Airport including the runways, taxiways, and ramps.

The construction project will be subject to City of Prescott requirements and standards as applicable. Close coordination with the staff of the Airport Administration will be required during all phases of this project including but not limited to design and construction. Coordination will also be made with the City of Prescott, Building Department, Fire Department, and Public Works Department.

The work will also conform to State and Federal requirements for any permits, design features, Best Management Practices, and operational requirements.

Cumulative Effects

Because there are no notable direct or indirect effects of the proposed project on the environment, there would be no effects to add to other activities in the area that would add cumulatively to impacts on the environment.

No Action

The no action alternative would have no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on the environment. The no action alternative would not address the purpose and need for the action, which is the expansion and upgrading of the Henry H. Y. Kim airbase.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS OR AGENCIES:

U.S. Congressman Paul Gosar

Carol Springer,
Yavapai County District 1 Suprvsr

Benjamin Vardiman, Manager
Ernest A. Love Field

CITY OF PRESCOTT:
Antelope Hills Golf Course
Acting City Manager
Chief Building Inspector
Fire Department Administration
Mayor
Planning Division
Public Works/Engineering
Water and Sewer Dept

OTHERS:

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical
University

Rittaire

Mile High Avionics

North-Aire, Inc.

Powell Upholstery and
Aircraft Interiors

Great Lakes Airlines

Nostalgaire

Guidance Helicopters

Sun State Lumber-Truss

Ruger Firearms

Arizona Aviation Supplies

Center for Biological Diversity

Western Watersheds

Interdisciplinary Team Members:

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Gabrielle Kenton, Writer/Editor &
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Bruce Nellans, Archaeologist

Greg Olsen, Hydrologist

Dan Salcido, Project Lead

Doug Schmidgall, Engineer