

standard operating procedures for debris recovery, adverse biological resource and cultural resource impacts are not anticipated. The proposed ABL testing activities would require a long-term increase of approximately 750 personnel at Edwards AFB to support the ABL program and a short-term increase of up to 50 program related temporary personnel during test activities. These personnel would provide a small, positive, yet largely unnoticeable effect on population, income, and employment in the vicinity of the installations.

Environmental Effects of the No-Action Alternative. ABL test activities would continue in accordance with those actions addressed in the 1997 FEIS and associated ROD. The regional airspace restrictions at the installations would continue due to ongoing mission activities. Management of hazardous materials and waste at the installations would continue to in accordance with current practices. Current range safety measures at the installations would continue with current practices. Current range safety measures at the installations would continue to ensure public safety and the environment are protected. Based on the 1997 FEIS, no adverse air quality, noise, biological, cultural, or socioeconomic impacts are anticipated.

Preferred Alternative. The Proposed Action is the preferred alternative. This would involve conducting test activities of the ABL system at test ranges associated with Edwards AFB and Vandenberg AFB, California, and Kirtland AFB and WSMR/Holloman AFB, New Mexico. Test activities would involve testing the laser components on the ground and in flight to verify that laser components operate together safely and effectively. Edwards AFB has been selected as the Home Base and will be the primary location for ground-testing activities. White Sands Missile Range has been selected as the Diagnostic Test Range and the Western Range has been selected as the Expanded-Area Test Range.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative is the no-action alternative.

Cumulative Impacts. The SEIS found no cumulative impacts on the human environment from proposed ABL testing activities. However, due to the nature of test activities at the Western Range and WSMR, other missile test and rocket launch activities at the Western Range and WSMR, other missile test and rocket launch activities within the ranges to support other military and commercial functions would be

occurring. These missile tests and rocket launches have been addressed in Environmental Assessments (EAs) and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) that limit the number of launches and are carefully scheduled/coordinated to prevent conflicts with overlapping missions.

In the event that ground tests are conducted at Holloman AFB, potential mission conflicts could occur at Holloman AFB due to parking the ABL aircraft and associated support equipment at the western end of the base runway. This arrangement would prevent aircraft from taking-off or landing (*i.e.*, require closure of the runway). In order to avoid mission conflicts at Holloman AFB, other less frequently or unused runways, taxiways, or aircraft apron locations could be identified/dedicated to support the ABL aircraft during the short period of ground-test activities. If a suitable ground-test location that avoids Holloman AFB mission activities cannot be identified, the ABL ground-test program would be postponed until conditions at Edwards AFB or Kirtland AFB are suitable. In addition, during ABL flight-test activities, conflicts with the Holloman AFB flying mission could occur due to the ABL test activities using restricted airspace that is also used by Holloman AFB aircraft. This potential concern would be avoided through scheduling of test activities so that mission conflicts would not occur.

Measures to Minimize Impacts. All practicable means to avoid, minimize, or mitigate harm to the environment would be taken under the selected alternative. Because of the negligible impacts that ABL test activities would have on most environmental factors and measures already taken by the MDA, Air Force, and Army, no separate mitigation plan beyond adherence to applicable laws, regulations, and DOD guidelines is deemed necessary. ABL test activities would comply with applicable federal, state, DOD, Air Force, and Army regulations regarding the management of hazardous materials and hazardous waste. Evacuation plans and emergency response plans will be developed and implemented as required. Emergency planning documents will be updated and emergency response personnel trained and equipped prior to introduction of new hazardous materials.

To minimize potential laser hazards, multiple controls would be used to reduce the potential for off-range lasing and accidental lasing of unsuspecting receptors. These controls include the use of backdrops and enclosures, horizontal and vertical buffer zones,

administrative controls, and removal of mirror-like reflecting surfaces from the test area. Safety interlocks associated with the laser systems are in place to stop lasing activities in the event that the beam control steers the beam from the anticipated beam path. Evacuations, clearances, and road closures would be implemented to ensure worker and public health and safety. Any debris from target missile impact areas would be recovered in accordance with established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and regulations.

Consultation with appropriate federal and state agencies (*e.g.*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, SHPO) will be completed. Notice of launch activities will be provided to any concerned agencies, local communities, and recreational users. Efforts will be made to schedule ABL test activities to avoid impacts on other activities at the installations.

With regard to airspace, avoidance of the R-5119 Restricted Area associated with WSMR would mitigate the potential impact to the J13 and J57 high-altitude jet routes that transit through the Restricted Area. In order to avoid operational impacts at Holloman AFB, other less frequently used or unused runways, taxiways, or aircraft apron locations could be identified/dedicated to support the ABL aircraft during the short period of ground-test activities. If a suitable ground-test location that avoids Holloman AFB mission activities cannot be identified, the ABL ground-test program would be postponed until conditions at Edwards AFB or Kirtland AFB are suitable.

In the event that target debris affects White Sands pupfish habitat, specific operational steps for emergency responses would be determined on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the WSMR Missile Mishap Plan, Annex P to the Disaster Control Plan.

Conclusion

The refinements in the original testing program analyzed in the SEIS serve to increase testing efficiencies and realism, and provide further advancement of the ABL testing program.

The factors and considerations offered above justify the selection by MDA of the Proposed Action as presented in the *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Airborne Laser Program*.

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