

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION**

**PARTIAL ADOPTION OF FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RECORD OF DECISION
FOR**

**Establishment of the Meridian 2 Military Operations Area (MOA)
Naval Air Station Meridian, MS**

I. Introduction

This document serves as the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) adoption and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)/Record of Decision (ROD) of specific portions of the United States Navy's Fleet Forces Command "Final Environmental Assessment" dated December 2011 (hereinafter the FEA) regarding the establishment of the Meridian 2 Military Operations Area (MOA), described below. Consequently, the FAA is not adopting those portions of the FEA that address the NAS Meridian or Transit Region. The Navy prepared its FEA and FONSI in compliance with obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Navy-specific environmental regulations.

Pursuant to section 102(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR parts 1500-1508), the FAA announces its decision regarding the United States Navy's FEA.

II. Background

As the lead agency, the United States Navy (US Navy) published the FEA in accordance with NEPA. Additionally, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the FAA and Department of Defense (DOD), "Concerning Environmental Review of Special Use Airspace (SUA) Actions," dated October 4, 2005, the FAA is a Cooperating Agency. The US Navy has proposed the establishment of a Meridian 2 MOA that will result in the transit of Training Air Wing ONE (TW-1) aircraft between NAS Meridian and the proposed MOA. The FEA also evaluated a proposed increase in sorties at NAS Meridian. The environmental analysis for the proposed action is included in the FEA. However, in this document, only the environmental analysis concerning the Meridian MOA is addressed.

During the planning process for these SUA actions, the FAA conducted an aeronautical analysis to determine any aeronautical impact that might result as a result of the publication and charting of the MOA proposal. The proposal was circularized by the Eastern Service Center as FAA Airspace Case Number: 2008-ASO-015-NR Study, and was completed on March 6, 2009, with the comment period expiring on April 27, 2009. No environmental comments were received during this process. The proposed lowering of the floor of the MOAs was determined to have minimal aeronautical impact and was recommended for approval as requested.

III. Proposed Federal Action

The proposed action consists of the establishment of a new MOA, Meridian 2, near NAS Meridian, the transit of TW-1 aircraft between NAS Meridian and the proposed MOA, and a proposed increase in sorties at NAS Meridian. The Meridian 2 MOA will have an altitude between 8,000 feet above mean sea level (MSL) and 17,999 feet MSL and will be divided into two sections; a northeastern block, referred to as Meridian 2 East; and a southwestern block, referred to as Meridian 2 West. The northeastern corner will be approximately 22 nautical miles (nm) southwest of NAS Meridian. Within the MOA, the airspace between 8,000 and 10,000 feet MSL will be used to transition to the airspace above 10,000 feet MSL, where training exercises will be conducted.

IV. Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to establish an additional MOA where student naval aviators can complete their required training sorties, alleviate the current MOA capacity shortfall, and ensure that mission capabilities are sustained. Adequate airspace to accommodate realistic military training is required to ensure naval aviators are mission-trained, qualified, and prepared to support real-world events. The need for the proposed action results from changes to the Navy's training syllabus and the increase in the use of existing local military airspace by other military units. The number of sorties flown by TW-1 will increase by 5,000 from 32,000 to 37,000 annually. The current MOAs do not have the capacity to support this increase. The proposed action will alleviate the MOA capacity shortfall currently projected for TW-1.

Alternatives

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, the Meridian 2 MOA would not be established and the additional sorties would not be flown at NAS Meridian. TW-1 would continue to fly in congested MOAs which could result in an extended pilot training period, prolonging the time needed to achieve qualifications for deployment. Additionally, the purpose of and need for the proposed action would not be met.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis – The development of alternative training scenarios was based on the purpose and need to establish a military training environment that will meet and sustain the mission requirements of TW-1. This process involved analysis of operational needs and requirements for training activities. The MOAs surrounding NAS Meridian (i.e., Meridian 1, Pine Hill, Camden Ridge, Birmingham Columbus 1, Columbus 2, Columbus 3, De Soto 1, De Soto 2, Pensacola North, Pensacola South, Eglin A, Eglin B, Eglin E, and Eglin F) were considered potential alternatives to meet the training requirements. However, these potential alternatives did not meet the screening criteria, including having a distance of less than 50 nm from the closest refueling point (i.e., Key Field Airport) to the center of the primary training area of the MOA, and were eliminated from further detailed analysis in the EA.

V. Environmental Impacts

In accordance with FAA Order 1050.1E, paragraphs 402, 404d and 410, the FAA has conducted an independent evaluation of the FEA. Adoption of the US Navy's FEA by the FAA requires that each impact category detailed in FAA Order 1050.1E, Appendix A, is analyzed in addition to the US Navy's environmental requirements. In many cases, the categories overlap.

The following lists the results of FAA's independent evaluation regarding the potential environmental impacts associated with the establishment of the Meridian 2 MOA:

Air Quality: There will be no significant impacts on air quality. No aircraft sorties within the MOA will occur below the mixing height of 3,000 feet above ground level; therefore, no impacts from aircraft emissions are expected. The area has been characterized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as unclassified/attainment for all criteria pollutants.

Coastal Resources: There will be no significant impacts on coastal resources.

Compatible Land Use: There will be no significant impacts on land use. Noise from aircraft operations in the MOA would be below the maximum level considered acceptable for unrestricted residential use.

Department of Transportation Act: Sec 4(f): Designation of airspace for military flight operations is exempt from section 4(f). The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998 (Public Law 105-85) provided that "[n]o military flight operations (including a military training flight), or designation of airspace for such an operation, may be treated as a transportation program or project for purposes of section 303(c) of title 49, United States Code." Note that section 4(f) of the US Department of Transportation (DOT) Act was renumbered in 1983 as section 303(c) of Title 49.

Farmlands: None of the activities associated with the Proposed Action have the potential to convert farmland to non-agricultural uses.

Fish, Wildlife, and Plants: There will be no significant impacts on fish, wildlife, or plants. There will be no ground-disturbing activities, and aircraft operations will generally occur above 7,000 MSL; therefore, no impacts on plants or habitat are expected. No effect on threatened or endangered species or critical habitat from noise or bird/wildlife strikes within the proposed action is expected and no federally designated critical habitat occurs within the proposed action. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concurred with this determination and formal consultation with the USFWS under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act will not be required.

Floodplains: All activities associated with the Proposed Action would occur within airspace and would therefore not impact any floodplains.

Hazardous Materials, Pollution Prevention, and Solid Waste: Activities associated with the Proposed Action would not utilize additional hazardous materials or generate additional hazardous waste.

Historical, Architectural, Archeological, and Cultural Resources: Activities associated with the Proposed Action would not cause ground disturbance; therefore, cultural resources would not be affected. The Mississippi State Historic Preservation Office was notified of the proposed action and the draft EA.

Light Emissions and Visual Impacts: The Proposed Action would not produce lighting that would annoy people or situations where the visual sight of aircraft would be intrusive.

Natural Resources and Energy Supply: No impact to any utilities or infrastructure (e.g., water, energy [natural gas and electricity]; wastewater treatment, solid waste management) would occur.

Noise: There will be no significant impacts on the environment from noise. Within the proposed MOA, the predicted average noise levels on the ground from aircraft will be approximately 36 to 38 dB DNL. The noise levels at NAS Meridian under the proposed action will likely increase by less than 1 dB DNL.

Secondary (Induced) Impacts: The Proposed Action would not cause shifts in patterns of population movement and growth, public service demands, and changes in business and economic activity.

Socioeconomic Impacts: There would be no change in population or purchase of additional resources associated with the Proposed Action; therefore, there would be no impact to socioeconomic resources.

Environmental Justice, Safety Risks: No additional employees will be necessary; therefore, no changes to population, demographics, or employment. Disproportionate impacts on minority, low-income, or youth populations are not expected. Therefore, there would be no impacts to Environmental Justice communities. Likewise, the Proposed Action would not cause environmental health risks and safety risks that may disproportionately affect children.

Water Quality: All activities associated with the Proposed Action would occur within airspace and would therefore not impact any water resources.

Wetlands: All activities associated with the Proposed Action would occur within airspace and would therefore not impact any wetlands.

Wild and Scenic Rivers: The Meridian 2 MOA does not overlie any river segments designated to be eligible to be included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Cumulative: Based on the FAA's independent review, the FAA concludes there are no past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions that, when combined with the establishing the Meridian MOA, would significantly affect the environmental resources in the study area.

The FAA has determined that the FEA and its supporting documentation, as incorporated, adequately assesses and discloses the environmental impacts of the proposed action for purposes of this FONSI/ROD.

VI. Incorporated by Reference

This FONSI/ROD incorporates the following information:

1. Final Environmental Assessment (FEA) Addressing the Establishment of the Meridian 2 Military Operations Area (MOA) at Naval Air Station (NAS) Meridian, Mississippi dated December 2011
2. Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Establishment of the Meridian 2 Military Operations Area (MOA) at Naval Air Station (NAS) Meridian, Mississippi dated December 2011

VII. Decisions and Order

Adoption

In accordance with FAA Order 1050.1E, paragraphs 402 and 404d, the FAA has conducted an independent evaluation of the FEA and takes full responsibility for the scope and content that addresses FAA activities. The FAA has determined that the FEA and its supporting documentation, as incorporated, adequately assesses and discloses the environmental impacts of the proposed action. Public circularization of the Special Use Airspace proposal was conducted and no comments were received concerning potential impacts on aviation.

Based on this evaluation, the FAA, as the Cooperating Agency, concludes that adoption of Meridian 2 MOA portion of the Final EA, with incorporation of its supporting documentation, is authorized in accordance with 40 CFR Part 1506.3. The FAA therefore approves and authorizes all necessary agency actions to implement the establishment of the Meridian 2 MOA portion as described in this FONSI/ROD and the FEA.

Finding

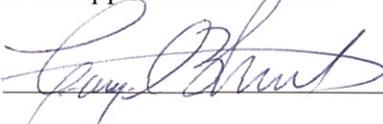
The FAA has determined that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not warranted and a Finding of No Significant Impact in accordance with 40 CFR Part 1501.4(e) is appropriate.

Statement

After careful and thorough consideration of the facts contained herein, the undersigned finds that the proposed Federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives as set forth in Section 101(a) of the NEPA, as amended, and that it will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise include any condition requiring consultation pursuant to Section 102(2) (C) of the NEPA.

Order and Right of Appeal

This decision to approve the establishment of the Meridian 2 Military Operations Area constitutes an order of the FAA Administrator pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 40103. It is subject to review by the Courts of Appeal of the United States in accordance with 49 U.S.C. § 46110. Any party seeking to stay the implementation of this decision must file an application with the FAA prior to seeking judicial relief as provided by Rule 18(a) of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure.

Approved: 

Date: 6/27/12

Gary A. Norek
Manager, Airspace, Regulations & ATC Procedures Group, AJV-11
Mission Support Service
Air Traffic Organization
Federal Aviation Administration