

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE  
SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
MID-BAY BRIDGE CONNECTOR, EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE**

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The US Air Force determined through an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact/Finding of No Practicable Alternative (FONSI/FONPA), December 5, 2008 (original EA), that a Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) is needed when changes to the Proposed Action involve changes in environmental impacts, or when there are new circumstances or information relating to environmental impacts. Therefore, pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508) and US Air Force Environmental Impact Analysis Process as regulated by 32 CFR Part 989, the Mid-Bay Bridge Authority (MBBA), with support from the Air Force, conducted an SEA to identify and assess probable environmental consequences resulting from the changes to the Proposed Action that have occurred outside of the original 400-foot-wide study corridor during the design of Phases 2 and 3. The Mid-Bay Bridge Connector is an approximately 11-mile-long, four-lane divided limited access toll facility that would be constructed and operated primarily through Eglin Air Force Base (AFB). This project will occur in three phases over an approximately 10-15 year period. Construction of Phase 1 began on April 20, 2009. Per 40 CFR 1502.21, the SEA is incorporated by reference into this FONSI/FONPA.

**Purpose and Need for the Changes to the Proposed Action** (SEA Section 1.3, page 1-6):

The purpose of the changes to the Proposed Action for the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector are to refine and improve the alignment to produce a more efficient, productive, and safe transportation system that further minimizes impacts to environmental resources while adequately addressing the Purpose and Need defined in the original 2008 EA. During continued design of the roadway, several factors were considered in order to accurately determine the placement of the roadway within the approved 400-foot-wide study corridor. Such factors include, but are not limited to, horizontal/right-of-way (ROW) limitations with respect to natural, cultural, social, biological, and physical resources, vertical changes (topography), design speed, earthwork balancing, and drainage requirements such as stormwater management pond sizing and locations, ditches, and outfalls. Now that these parameters have been further defined and analyzed, a more accurate representation of impacts can be established.

**Changes to the Proposed Action** (SEA Sections 2.1 - 2.7, pages 2-1 through 2-20):

For this SEA, the following seven changes to the Proposed Action have occurred as a result of the design of Phases 2 and 3 of the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector. The changes to the Proposed Action are as follows:

- Stormwater Pond Siting
- Western Alignment Shift across Rocky Creek
- Toll Plaza Location
- Location of the Northeast Niceville Median Opening
- Forest Drive Extension
- SR 285 Interchange
- SR 85 Interchange

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Because the Toll Plaza and the Northeast Niceville Median Opening changes are located within the original 400-foot-wide study corridor, they were analyzed in the original EA and were eliminated from detailed evaluation. Because portions of the following five changes occur outside of the original 400-foot-wide study corridor, their potential effects to cultural resources, surface waters, listed species, wetlands and floodplains, land use, utilities, and health and safety will be carried forward for further analysis.

#### Stormwater Pond Siting

In compliance with the FDEP stormwater management system regulations at 62-346 of the F.A.C., the stormwater management ponds have been located along the corridor. Because portions of these ponds occur outside of the original 400-foot-wide study corridor, their potential effects to cultural resources, surface waters, listed species, wetlands and floodplains, land use, utilities, and health and safety will be carried forward for further analysis. As a result of the stormwater pond sitings south of Rocky Creek, the reconfiguration of two sections of an existing dirt road (see SEA, Figure 10; page 4-7) will be required to provide continued access to a designated public recreational area consisting of a campground and boat launching area located on Rocky Creek. Because portions of this realignment are outside the original 400-foot-wide study corridor, Eglin determined that its potential effects to cultural resources (Section 4.1.1) and wetlands (Section 4.4.1) will be carried forward for further analysis.

#### Western Alignment Shift across Rocky Creek

In compliance with the terms and conditions of the BO (Appendix B of the original 2008 EA) and to further prevent direct impacts to the Okaloosa darter, a western shift was needed to avoid constructing bridge piles directly in the Rocky Creek stream channel and further avoid and minimize potential impacts to cultural resources. Because this shift diverges slightly outside of the original 400-foot-wide study corridor, its potential effects to cultural resources, surface waters, listed species, wetlands and floodplains, land use, utilities, and health and safety will be carried forward for further analysis.

#### Forest Drive Extension

As a result of the design, it was determined a new access road was needed to provide the public with an option for ingress/egress to the Connector. Therefore, an intersection was designed as an extension of Forest Drive. Because this new connection occurs outside of the original 400-foot-wide study corridor, its potential effects to cultural resources, surface waters, listed species, wetlands and floodplains, land use, utilities, and health and safety will be carried forward for further analysis.

#### SR 285 Interchange

As a result of the design, the SR 285 interchange location, layout, and ROW limits have been determined. Because portions of this interchange occur outside of the original 400-foot-wide study corridor, its potential effects to cultural resources, surface waters, listed species, wetlands and floodplains, land use, utilities, and health and safety will be carried forward for further analysis.

## SR 85 Interchange

During design of the SR 85 interchange, it was determined that a "trumpet" type interchange would better serve the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector Purpose and Need. Because this interchange occurs outside of the original 400-foot-wide study corridor, its effects to cultural resources, surface waters, listed species, wetlands and floodplains, land use, utilities, and health and safety will be carried forward for further analysis.

### **Summary of Environmental Consequences**

Because the area(s) of potential effects (APE) regarding air quality, geological resources, groundwater, noise, socioeconomics, environmental justice, aesthetics, and transportation were previously analyzed in the original 2008 EA, implementation of the changes to the Proposed Action would have no additional effects to these environmental resource categories. Thus, no further analyses of these resources are presented in this SEA. As a result of the changes to the Proposed Action during design of the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector, relevant environmental issues that are addressed in this document include potential effects in the areas of cultural resources, surface waters, listed species, wetlands and floodplains, land use, utilities, and health and safety.

The potential impacts of the changes to the Proposed Action are summarized below.

**Cultural Resources** (SEA Section 4.1, pages 4-1 through 4-2 and Appendix B): In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Eglin's Cultural Resource section has conducted State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and Tribal Consultation regarding the resource concerns in Phases 2 & 3 of the project consistent with the construction phase timeline. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in compliance with 36 CFR 800.5 & 800.6, has been developed and signed by Eglin, MBBA, SHPO, and sent to the Native American Tribes for concurrence. Please refer to Appendix B of the SEA for the specific consultation documents that were required to complete the Section 106 process.

**Surface Waters** (SEA Section 4.2, page 4-3): The MBBA is required to construct stormwater management ponds pursuant to FDEP regulations 62-346, FAC. These ponds have been designed to collect and attenuate the runoff necessary to ensure no adverse impacts will occur to surface waters or their water quality. Stormwater permit applications are under FDEP jurisdiction and permits will be received prior to construction.

**Federal and State Listed Species** (SEA Section 4.3, page 4-4 and Appendices F and G): The BO, signed by the USFWS on September 16, 2008, analyzed impacts 1,000 feet on either side of the corridor (See Figure 2 of the BO, Appendix B of the original 2008 EA), these changes remain within the APE and are consistent with the approved BO. In addition, in accordance with the FWC rules that went into effect in April 2009, the MBBA has conducted the required gopher tortoise surveys including state listed wildlife surveys. A WHR was submitted to FWC on November 23, 2009, to ensure compliance with state regulations and maintain compliance with commitments made during FWC coordination meetings (MBBA, 2009). Concurrence from FWC was received January 7, 2010 and is contained in Appendix F. Furthermore, an Incidental Take of Listed Species permit from FWC, specific to the Okaloosa darter, is provided in Appendix G.

**Wetlands and Floodplains** (SEA Section 4.4, pages 4-5 through 4-7): The changes to the Proposed Action will not significantly impact wetlands or floodplains. Overall wetland and floodplain impact acreages have decreased from the estimated amount in the original EA of

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42.77 acres of wetlands and 39.84 acres of floodplains to approximately 26 acres and 23 acres, respectively. A Nationwide Permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE NW 14/33 -Section 404) was received from the USACE. In addition, a mitigation plan involving the restoration of Tom's Creek has been approved and permitted by the USACE and FDEP and construction has been completed (SEA Section 5.4). A Wetland Resource Permit from FDEP will be obtained prior to construction activities in wetlands and/or floodplains.

**Land Use** (SEA Section 4.5, page 4-8): Eglin determined through early planning and coordination that the changes to the Proposed Action will not significantly impact the land uses necessary to support the primary mission of Eglin AFB. The MBBA will pay fair market value (FMV) to lease the property using the US Air Force value-based transaction (VBT) outgrant process for a transportation corridor, including the stormwater management facilities.

**Utilities** (SEA Section 4.6, page 4-9): Short-term interruptions of utility service will likely occur during construction. Impacts to the NVOC wastewater spray-fields located just east of SR 285 and north of College Boulevard will be mitigated under a MOA prior to or concurrently with roadway construction.

**Health and Safety** (SEA Section 4.7, page 4-10 and Appendix E): It was determined by the Eglin AFB safety office that in order to ensure the safety, health, and welfare of the public, an Explosive Safety Submission (ESS) would be required in accordance with all applicable Department of Defense and Department of the Air Force Safety Standards. As a result of this determination and in compliance with the commitments of the original EA, an ESS "Finding of No Further Action" was conducted. A summary of the ESS process is included in Appendix E. In addition, it was determined through coordination with NWF State College representatives that because of the Proposed Action's proximity to the Public Safety/Criminal Justice Training Center firing range located on the campus, the MBBA would continue to coordinate the roadway design with the college and prepare an MOA to ensure safety requirements are met prior to or concurrently with roadway construction.

**Cumulative Impacts** (SEA Sections 4.9 through 4.10, pages 4-11 through 4-13): No significant cumulative impacts are projected to occur based on the changes to the Proposed Action and consideration of past, present, or other reasonably foreseeable projects in the project area. The changes to the Proposed Action would further improve the transportation efficiency and capacity in the area, and benefit the transportation network of other local projects. In addition, the western alignment shift across Rocky Creek avoided potential impacts to the Okaloosa darter and its habitat and reduced potential cultural resource impacts and proved to be a beneficial change.

**Status of Plans, Permits/Approvals, Management Actions, and Mitigation Projects** (SEA Section 5.0, pages 5-1 through 5-4): The MBBA has committed to obtaining and complying with the plan, permits/approvals, management actions, and mitigation projects associated with the Proposed Action. In addition, the MBBA has initiated several mitigation projects in compliance with the BO.

**Public Notice and Agency Coordination** (SEA Section 6.0, pages 6-1 through 6-3 and Appendices A, C, and D, pages A-1 through A-16, page C-1, and pages D-1 through D-28): A public notice of availability of the Draft SEA and original EA - FONSI/FONPA was published in the *Northwest Florida Daily News* on 22 March 2010, beginning the 45-day comment period. Concurrently, the Draft SEA was submitted to the FDEP, Florida State Clearinghouse for agency review. The public comment period closed on May 5, 2010. No comments were received from the public. Agency comments were received on May 7, 2010 and incorporated into the Final

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SEA. In addition, agency coordination meetings regarding this project were held on April 2 and December 3, 2009 and consisted of representatives from Eglin AFB, MBBA, USFWS, USACE, NFWFMD, FDOT, FDEP, FWC and HDR Engineering, Inc. In addition, pre-application meetings with FDEP, USACE, USFWS, and FWC were held on July 8 and 9, September 9, and December 3, 2009; informal coordination occurred with USFWS and FWC on May 19, 2009 and USFWS on Feb 9, 2010; and on-site field meetings were held June 30, July 23, and August 5, 2009, and January 26, 2010 with USFWS, FWC, Eglin Natural Resources, FDEP, and USACE.

#### **Finding of No Practicable Alternative**

Taking the above information into consideration, pursuant to Executive Order 11988, *Floodplain Management*, Executive Order 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*, and the authority delegated by the Secretary of the Air Force Order 791.1, I find there is no practicable alternative to conducting the Proposed Action within the floodplains and wetlands. The Air Force further finds all practicable measures have been taken to minimize harm to floodplains and wetlands, and proposed measures to minimize impacts are documented in the SEA. Because there is no practicable alternative to impacting wetlands, federal regulations require compensatory mitigation. Mitigation for wetland losses are proposed to occur at a suitable location off of Eglin AFB property. This finding fulfills both the requirements of the referenced Executive Orders and 32 CFR Part 989.14 requirements for a Finding of No Practicable Alternative.

#### **Finding of No Significant Impact**

Based upon my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached SEA and as summarized above, I find the proposed action to construct the Phases 2 and 3 Mid Bay Bridge Connector will not have a significant impact on the natural or human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This analysis fulfills the requirements of NEPA, the President's Council on Environmental Quality, and 32 CFR Part 989.



DAVID W. FUNK, Colonel, USAF  
Command Civil Engineer  
Installations and Mission Support  
(HQ AFMC/A7P)



Date



