

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/
FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE**

**13th Street Bridge Replacement at the Santa Ynez River Crossing
Vandenberg Air Force Base, California**

This Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) / Finding of No Practicable Alternative (FONPA) hereby incorporates by reference and attaches hereto the Final Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), 13th Street Bridge Replacement at the Santa Ynez River Crossing, Vandenberg Air Force Base (VAFB), California. This EA considered all potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action and the No-Action Alternative, in addition to cumulative impacts, and identified measures to avoid and/or minimize environmental impacts.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action (Alternative A) is a Federal project on VAFB (Federal land), that was developed based on the purpose, need, and selection criteria discussed in Chapter 1 and 2 of the attached EA. After evaluating seven potential alignments and three structural design types for the replacement bridge and five potential sites for wetland mitigation actions, no other feasible action alternatives were identified that would meet the Proposed Action's purpose and need.

The Proposed Action has the following main components: construction of a new bridge on 13th Street over the Santa Ynez River and corresponding approach roads; demolition and removal of the existing 13th Street Bridge and existing approach roads; installation of a fiber optic communication cable under the Santa Ynez River, approximately 1,100 feet (ft) west of the existing bridge; restoration of areas temporarily disturbed by construction and demolition activities; and establishment of a Wetland Mitigation Area at the Santa Ynez River Estuary to offset any potential project related impacts to wetlands that cannot be restored within the main project area. The Proposed Action would occur in two project areas within the lower Santa Ynez River area, referred to as the Wetland Mitigation Area and the 13th Street Bridge Project Area. The 13th Street Bridge Project Area includes the site of the new bridge construction, the demolition of the existing bridge, the installation of the fiber optic cable under the Santa Ynez River, and the restoration of temporary impacts from construction and demolition. Construction of the new bridge and demolition of the existing bridge is anticipated to begin in late spring or early summer 2015 and last approximately twelve to twenty months. Demolition and removal of the existing approach roads are estimated to begin in April 2016 and last between five and six months. The installation of the fiber optic cable under the Santa Ynez River is estimated to begin in April 2015 and last approximately four months. Wetland restoration at the Wetland Mitigation Area in the Santa Ynez River Estuary would begin after construction and demolition activities for the bridge and fiber optic cable had been completed and final project impacts assessed.

NO ACTION

Under the No-Action Alternative (Alternative B), a new bridge would not be constructed and the existing bridge and roadway would remain in place. The overhead fiber optic cable downstream of the bridge would not be replaced and the Wetland Mitigation Area at the estuary would not be used. VAFB would continue maintenance and emergency repairs to the

structure, as necessary. As in the past, future emergency repairs to the bridge may require reinforcing the existing piers and abutments with additional rip rap; however, eventual collapse of the bridge has been determined to be unavoidable. In addition, the existing overhead fiber optic cable downstream of the bridge is vulnerable. Maintenance to the line would continue; however mission critical communications would continue to be at risk.

The No-Action Alternative would not meet the Proposed Action's purpose and need; however, it was analyzed in the EA as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The attached EA analyzed the potential environmental consequences of activities associated with the Proposed Action and the No-Action Alternative. Based on the analysis, neither the Proposed Action nor the No-Action Alternative would result in individual or cumulatively significant impacts to any resources. However, potential adverse impacts were noted for the Proposed Action to the following resources: air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, earth resources, hazardous materials and waste management, human health and safety (noise), land use and aesthetics, solid waste management, transportation, and water resources. Some aspects of the Proposed Action were noted as potentially beneficial to biological resources and water resources. If the existing bridge experiences a catastrophic failure, adverse impacts from the No-Action Alternative could be greater than the Proposed Action. Otherwise, the No-Action Alternative would result in impacts less than the Proposed Action. Environmental protection measures that are incorporated into the Proposed Action (identified as required in the EA) would be implemented to avoid and/or minimize the potential adverse impacts. Discretionary environmental protection measures may further reduce potential impacts of the Proposed Action.

NOTICE OF WETLAND INVOLVEMENT

Pursuant to Executive Order (EO) 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*, EO 11988, *Floodplain Management*, and Air Force Instruction (AFI) 32-7064, *Integrated Natural Resources Management*, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) hereby provides notice of the potential impacts to wetland or floodplain as a result of the Proposed Action. Jurisdictional wetlands were found in the 13th Street Bridge Project Area (within the riparian corridor of the Santa Ynez River) and the Wetland Mitigation Area. Potential impacts to these wetlands may occur as a result of construction and demolition activities.

Other alternatives were reviewed during the EA development process under the requirements of NEPA, but were eliminated from further detailed analysis in the EA because they did not meet the stated purpose and need for the action, were not practicable, or would have led to greater overall environmental impact. The only practicable alternative is the Proposed Action. For the reasons stated in the EA, the dismissed alternatives are not practicable alternatives to avoiding the potential wetland impacts.

Similarly, there is no practicable alternative to implementing the Proposed Action outside of the Santa Ynez River floodplain since 13th Street and the associated infrastructure and utilities must cross over the river and the floodplain to maintain efficient and secure transportation between North and South Vandenberg Air Force Base. Although work within the floodplain is unavoidable, the Proposed Action is anticipated to result in overall beneficial impacts to the watershed compared to existing conditions. By fixing an otherwise meandering channel between narrow abutments and narrow bays, the existing bridge has concentrated flows into

fixed paths and intensified scour downstream. The new bridge will span 650 ft of channel, compared to 500 ft spanned by the existing bridge, and replace the existing eight narrowly spaced pier walls with two widely spaced hexagonal piers. As a result, the river flow will be allowed to meander through a broader, less constricted channel and the new bridge is expected to decrease downstream scour and sedimentation.

In addition, the USAF has a no net loss policy on wetlands and impacts to wetland acreage will comply with the terms of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404(b) permit. The USAF is committed to mitigating the loss of the wetland area through restoration, enhancement and creation of wetlands at the site of the bridge replacement and within the designated Wetland Mitigation Area adjacent to the Santa Ynez River estuary.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

The Final Draft EA and Draft FONSI/FONPA were made available for public review and comment for 30 days following the publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) in the following newspapers: Lompoc Record and Santa Maria Times. The Final Draft EA and Draft FONSI/FONPA were also distributed per the current VAFB NEPA Distribution List, including the State Clearinghouse. Public comments received will be considered in the final preparation of the EA.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT / FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE

Based on my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached EA conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S. Code 4321 et seq., implementing Council on Environmental Quality Regulations, 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508, and 32 CFR Part 989, *Environmental Impact Analysis Process*, I conclude that implementing the Proposed Action (chosen alternative), with incorporation of required environmental protection measures, will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Pursuant to EO 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*, EO 11988, *Floodplain Management*, AFI 32-7064, *Integrated Natural Resources Management*, and the authority delegated by Secretary of the Air Force Order 791.1, and taking the above information into account, I find that there is no practicable alternative to this action and that the Proposed Action includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to the wetland and floodplain environments. Therefore, further analysis in the form of an environmental impact statement is not required and a FONSI/FONPA is appropriate.

KEITH W. BALTS, Colonel, USAF
Commander, 30th Space Wing

Date

Attachment: FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (2015)
13TH STREET BRIDGE REPLACEMENT AT THE SANTA YNEZ RIVER CROSSING
VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE, CALIFORNIA