

NASA

Scientific Balloon Program

Supplemental Programmatic

Environmental Assessment

FACT SHEET

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Balloon Program Office (BPO)

NASA BPO has prepared a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) to evaluate the effects of continuing its existing launch program; adding and utilizing a launch site in Burns, Oregon and tracking station at Idaho Falls, Idaho; and managing infrastructure through construction, renovation, and demolition projects at the existing Palestine, Texas and Fort Sumner, New Mexico and proposed Burns launch sites.



Why did BPO Need to Prepare an EA?

For over 35 years, the NASA BPO has administered, launched, and monitored the flights of scientific balloons from two launch sites in the U.S.: in Palestine, Texas and at the Fort Sumner Municipal Airport in New Mexico. Scientific balloons are used to collect scientific data and conduct research in the fields of geoscience, heliophysics, and astrophysics while operating in a near-space environment. Significant finds, such as the discovery of the ozone hole above the Antarctic in the mid-1980s, have been made by instruments tested or operated on balloon missions launched from these sites. Currently, there are a maximum of 31 BPO flights annually: 25 originate from Fort Sumner and 6 from Palestine. The NASA BPO anticipates that will continue over the next ten years. To provide more opportunities to launch heavy payloads, NASA BPO proposes to add ten annual launches from a new launch site in Burns, Oregon and establish a new tracking station in Idaho Falls, Idaho to monitor these flights. The PEA assesses launch, flight, and recovery operations as well as facility improvements.

What is the Proposed Action?

The EA evaluated the potential environmental effects of:

- Continuing launch, flight, and recovery operations for balloons launched from Texas and New Mexico at current levels, 31 annual launches
- Establishing a new balloon launch site at Burns, Oregon
- Establishing a new tracking station at Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Launching, flying, and recovering up to 10 balloons annually from the Burns launch site
- Improving facilities including construction and demolition at the proposed and existing launch sites

Balloon flight paths are wind-driven, and balloons can land in adjacent states. Past flights launched from Fort Sumner and Palestine are primarily recovered from Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, with a few landing in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Colorado. Future flights from Burns are expected to be recovered from Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative, required by the National Environmental Policy Act, analyses, and serves as a baseline for comparing impacts of the Proposed Action. The No Action Alternative for this EA means that NASA would not add the Burns launch site, Idaho Falls tracking site, increase the number of balloon flights or make the proposed facilities improvements.



Environmental Effects

The NASA BPO Supplemental PEA analyzed the potential effects of the proposed action on:

- Airspace
- Safety
- Air Quality
- Socioeconomics
- Land Use
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources, and
- Hazardous Materials and Systems

In preparing the Draft Supplemental PEA, NASA requested input from over 425 potentially interested parties, including those in federal, state, and tribal governments. During this process, several commenters offered support of the proposal; most did not comment. Therefore, NASA has assessed the potential effects of the proposal and the No Action Alternative on physical, biological, and economic resources and has tentatively concluded those impacts are not significant.

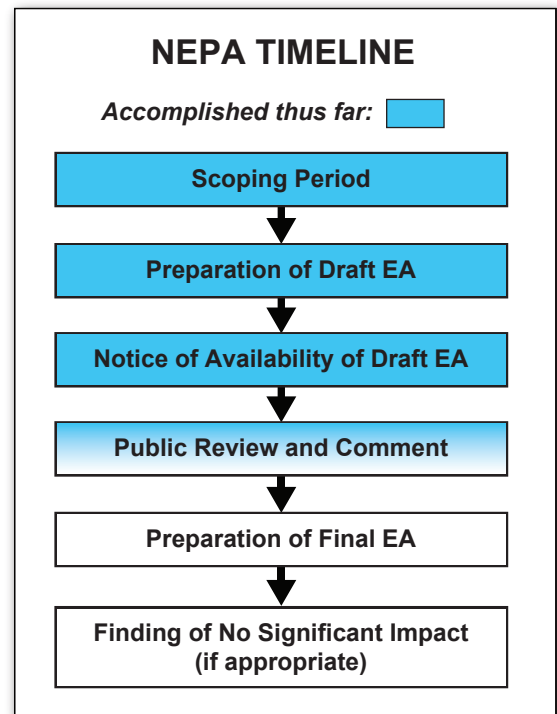


The National Environment Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) establishes a framework for considering the scope of environmental issues and concerns early in the federal decision making process. Public involvement is an essential part of the process. Through involving the public and completing detailed environmental analysis, the NEPA process helps the decision-maker arrive at the best possible informed decision.

NASA sought input and suggestions from the public on proposed activities addressed in the EA during the scoping period. Following data collection and research, the potential effects of the proposed action on the resources listed above, were analyzed and the type and extent of impacts were identified.

The Draft NASA BPO Supplemental PEA is available for public review. NASA is seeking public comments on the analyses and findings presented in the Draft EA during the 30-day public comment period. Comments will be accepted throughout the public comment period. Responses to relevant comments on the Draft PEA will be included in the preparation of the Final PEA



How Can You Be Involved?

Your involvement in the decision-making process is important to NASA. Interested parties are invited to submit comments on environmental issues and concerns. Comments may be submitted by e-mail or mail to:

Center NEPA Manager
Mail Stop 250
NASA Goddard Space Flight Center
Wallops Flight Facility
34200 Fulton Street
Wallops Island, VA 23337
gsfc-dl-nepa@nasa.gov

To ensure consideration in the Final PEA, please provide comments no later than June 16, 2025.

