

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT: Balloon Program Office Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment

AGENCY: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] 4321 et seq.), NASA has made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with respect to its proposed changes to the Balloon Program.

ADDRESS: The Final Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) that supports and serves as a basis for this FONSI may be reviewed at <https://www.nasa.gov/goddard/memd/nepa/NASA-Balloon-SPEA> and at the following locations:

- Fort Sumner Public Library, Fort Sumner, NM
- Palestine Public Library, Palestine, TX
- Harney County Library, Burns OR

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION:

NASA has prepared and issued a Final Supplemental PEA that analyzes scientific balloon launch/flight operations originating from NASA's Balloon Program Office (BPO) facilities in Fort Sumner, New Mexico; Palestine, Texas; and a proposed Burns, Oregon scientific balloon launch facility. For over 35 years, NASA has launched and monitored the flights of scientific balloons launched from existing BPO facilities. 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. Currently, NASA launches up to 31 scientific balloons each year. NASA proposes to increase the annual number of scientific balloons launched by adding a new launch site.

In accordance with NEPA, NASA prepared the Scientific Balloon Program Supplemental PEA to evaluate the potential environmental effects of adding a new scientific balloon launch site in Burns, Oregon and a new tracking station at Idaho Falls, Idaho. These sites, to the north of the existing sites, would allow for larger cargos and longer float times, which are increasingly in

demand. Up to ten scientific balloon flights per year would be launched from the proposed Burns launch site. In addition, construction, demolition, and renovation would take place at the Fort Sumner, Palestine, and proposed Burns launch sites and the Idaho Falls tracking site.

Alternatives Considered

The EA evaluates the No Action Alternative and a single action alternative: continuing ongoing scientific balloon mission activities from launch to recovery at the two existing BPO launch sites (Fort Sumner and Palestine), and establishing, launching and monitoring from a proposed new launch site at Burns, Oregon and a new monitoring site in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

Environmental Analysis

The PEA examines the potential effects of the alternatives on physical, biological, and social resources. Resources evaluated in detail include airspace; safety; air quality; socioeconomics; land use; biological resources; cultural resources; and hazardous materials. In summary, the EA concludes that potential effects to these resources are negligible to minor.

Public Involvement

NASA initiated coordination with federal, state, and local government agencies and the public in January 2025 to obtain input on the development of the EA. A 30-day scoping period ended on February 18, 2025.

NASA notified the public of the availability of the Draft EA for review and comment during a 30-day public comment period through advertisements placed in the Federal Register, as well as the Palestine Herald (Texas), the DeBaca County News (New Mexico), and the Burns Times-Herald (Oregon). The Draft EA was available on the project website, as well as at the libraries listed above. The public comment period ended on June 16, 2025. In preparing the Final EA, NASA considered all comments received on the Draft EA.

The Final EA and FONSI are available for review on the project website: <https://www.nasa.gov/goddard/memd/nepa/NASA-Balloon-SPEA>. As with the Draft EA, a Notice of Availability (NOA) was published in the Federal Register and advertisements of the Final EA and FONSI were placed in the Palestine Herald (Texas), the DeBaca County News (New Mexico), and the Burns Times-Herald (Oregon).

Related Environmental Reviews

While preparing the EA, NASA coordinated with agencies pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.) and National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). As such, NASA has met its obligations with respect to these statutes in parallel with the development of the EA.

Conclusion

Based on the Final EA, NASA has determined that the environmental impacts associated with scientific balloon launch/flight operations originating from NASA's Balloon Program Office (BPO) facilities in Fort Sumner, New Mexico, Palestine, Texas, and the proposed Burns, Oregon scientific

balloon launch facility would not individually or cumulatively have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, a new Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

David L. Pierce
Director, Wallops Flight Facility

Date