

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

NOTICE 94-LaRC-PLUM TREE ISLAND MODEL DROP SITE

National Environmental Policy Act; Finding of No Significant Impact; Closure of Plum Tree Island Model Drop Site, Langley Research Center

AGENCY: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500 - 1508), and NASA's Procedures for Implementing NEPA (14 CFR Subpart 1216.3), NASA has made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with respect to the closure of NASA LaRC Plum Tree Island model drop site in the City of Poquoson, Virginia. NASA's lease for the site will expire on September 30, 1994 and the lease will not be renewed. NASA has identified the need for powered model for testing of future aircraft designs. Because the existing site is close to populated areas for powered model testing, NASA will relocate the operations to its facility in Wallops Island, Va.

DATE: Comments in response to this notice must be received in writing within 30 days of (first date of publication in local newspaper).

ADDRESS: Comments should be addressed to Tricia Romanowski, Environmental Engineer, Office of Environmental Engineering, OSEMA, M/S 429, 5 Hunsaker Loop, NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia 23681-0001.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the closure of the Plum Tree Island model drop site of NASA LaRC which supports this FONSI may be reviewed at:

Hampton Public Library, Main Branch, Reference Department, 4207 Victoria Boulevard, Hampton, Virginia

NASA Headquarters Information Center, Room 1H23, 300 E. Street S.W., Washington, DC

A limited number of copies of the EA are available by contacting Tricia Romanowski, Environmental Engineer, in writing at the address indicated.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Tricia Romanowski, Environmental Engineer, Office of Environmental Engineering, OSEMA, M/S 429, 5 Hunsaker Loop, NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, Virginia 23681-0001; Telephone (804) 864-7020.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NASA has reviewed the EA prepared for the closure of the Plum Tree Island model drop site operated by NASA LaRC, and has determined that it represents an accurate and adequate analysis of the scope and level of associated environmental impacts. The EA is incorporated by reference in this FONSI.

As part of NASA's aerospace technology research, LaRC has conducted un-powered aircraft model flight testing at the Plum Tree Island model drop site since the early 1960s. NASA holds an operating lease of the 105 hectare (260 acre) site, located in the City of Poquoson, Virginia, and approximately ten kilometers (six miles) to the north east of LaRC in Hampton, Virginia. NASA's lease on the property expires on September 30, 1994, and NASA does not propose to renew the lease. NASA has identified the need for powered (self-propelled) models for testing sophisticated designs of future aircraft. Because the existing facility is too close to populated areas for powered model testing, NASA plans to relocate the operations to its facility in Wallops Island, Virginia. All testing operations at the Plum Tree Island site were terminated on July 30, 1994.

At its peak operation, the facility employed approximately 10 personnel. With the operations terminated, all movable property such as trailers, instruments, and furniture has been removed from the site. The only remaining structures include the main building, the water supply and waste water systems, the helipad and the runway strips. Electrical service, which belongs to Virginia Power, will also be left in place. The existing steel frame structure with approximately 110 square meters (1,000 square feet) usable floor area was constructed in 1974. The structure has fiber-glass insulation in the walls and roof. In 1990, a 90 square meter (800 square feet) extension to the building was added. The restroom trailer and the self-contained waste water holding tank system are located outside the building. The asphalt helipad constructed around 1970 measures approximately 2200 square meters (20,000 square feet) and the two asphalt runway strips constructed in 1975 each measure approximately 16 m (50 feet) wide and 60 m (200 feet) long. All the structures have been maintained in a good condition.

NASA proposes to leave the site with the existing structures and services for possible public use by future lessees/owners such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS) or an appropriate public entity. USF&WS which manages the adjacent Wildlife Refuge has expressed an interest in the use of the site and the existing NASA LaRC structures as a visitor center. NASA LaRC is working with the USF&WS in this regard. As part of the proposed action to close the site, NASA LaRC would carry out all remedial measures necessary for a safe and healthy environment for future use of the site structures.

Two alternatives to the proposed action were considered: the No-Action Alternative, and the alternative to remove all NASA LaRC structures and services from the site and regrade the site. The No-Action Alternative which constitutes continuing operations at the site, is not feasible because NASA's lease for the property will not be renewed. The alternative of removing all NASA LaRC structures and regrading the site will require demolition and removal of existing structures, the runway strips, and the helipad and eliminate a valuable opportunity for a likely, adaptive, inexpensive public use of the site.

NASA LaRC operations at the Plum Tree Island site have not had any significant adverse impact on the area water, air, land, biological, or coastal resources. Damage to small areas of tidal wetlands resulting from the operation of an all-terrain, model recovery vehicle (marsh buggy) have been identified. NASA LaRC has developed and discussed a remediation plan consisting of replanting damaged areas with the City of Poquoson which has jurisdiction over the site. It is likely that the damaged area may revegetate naturally. The City of Poquoson is expected to make a determination of final remediation action by the end of September 1994.

The operations have not resulted in significant release of any contaminants to the atmosphere, land or water resources. A small gravel patch, approximately two square feet in area, appears to be contaminated with hydraulic fluid from a hoist used in the operations. NASA LaRC will excavate this area and dispose of the contaminated soil in accordance with applicable State and Federal regulations within a reasonable period after the expiration of lease. The operations have not affected any listed or proposed endangered or threatened species, or their critical habitat.

Existing structures do not contain friable asbestos or asbestos containing materials. The fiber glass insulation of the metal frame structure is not considered toxic or hazardous. Lead based paints have been used in the building walls and doors. Testing of paint samples taken from the walls and door paints indicated levels of lead less than OSHA and EPA permitted limits. Construction and operation of the facility did not involve generation or use of radioactive materials or non-ionizing radiation. Therefore, no remedial action is anticipated.

Existing structures at the Plum Tree Island facility are relatively new and do not have any significant archeological or architectural features. Therefore, the structures are not considered to be historically significant.

There has been no significant impact to area noise levels, traffic or transportation, or local economy from past operations at the site. There will be no significant impact on these resources from the closure of the Plum Tree Island model drop site.

The likely future public use of existing structures by future lessees/owners such as the USF&WS or other appropriate public entities is not anticipated to cause any significant impact to area natural resources and the human environment since no significant construction or developmental activities are likely. No significant increase in the site usage is anticipated from visiting public.

Future adaptive reuse of the existing structures is not anticipated to entail the use of hazardous materials or generation of hazardous wastes.

No other issues of environmental concerns were identified.

On the basis of the EA for the closure of the Plum Tree Island facility of LaRC, and the underlying reference documents, NASA has determined that the environmental impacts associated with this action will not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the environment. The action is consistent with the requirements of the Executive Order 12898 since there will be no disproportionately high or adverse human health effects or environmental effects on minority or low-income population. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Paul F. Holloway
Director
NASA Langley Research Center

Date

Concurrence:

R. E. Hammond
Director, Environmental Management Division
NASA Headquarters

Date