

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

NOTICE (92-WFF-02)

National Environmental Policy; Finding of No Significant Impact

Agency: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

Action: Finding of No Significant Impact for Launch of Conestoga Launch Vehicle from the Goddard Space Flight Center at Wallops Island, Virginia

Summary: Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) by the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500 - 1508), and NASA's Procedures for Implementing NEPA (14 CFR Subpart 1216.3), NASA has prepared a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the planned Conestoga launches. The Conestoga expendable launch vehicle (ELV) is a commercial launch vehicle that will be assembled, integrated, and launched from Goddard Space Flight Center's (GSFC) Wallops Flight Facility (WFF), Wallops Island, Virginia. The Conestoga ELV will carry the Commercial Experiment Transporter (COMET) into orbit.

DATE: Comments must be in writing and received no later than 30 days from the date of initial notice.

ADDRESS: Address comments to Mr. Peter Martini, Goddard Space Flight Center, Wallops Flight Facility, Code 832.3, Wallops Island, Virginia, 23337.

Interested Parties may request single copies of the supporting Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Conestoga/COMET launches from the above address. Copies are also available for review at:

Goddard Space Flight Center/Wallops Flight Facility, Public Affairs Office, Wallops Island, Virginia, and the Eastern Shore Public Library, Accomac, Virginia 23337.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT: The Wallops Flight Facility Public Affairs Office at (804) 824-1579.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NASA has reviewed the EA prepared by EER Systems Corporation and has determined that it adequately and accurately describes the environmental impacts from the proposed Conestoga ELV launches. The EA, which includes input from Federal and Commonwealth of Virginia regulatory agencies, is incorporated by reference in this FONSI.

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The purpose of the proposed project is to implement a commercial ELV program at GSFC/WFF using operational facilities at Wallops Island, Virginia. The Conestoga ELV, a product of EER Systems Corporation, was selected by the Office of Commercial Programs to support the Commercial Experiment Transporter (COMET) program.

The vehicle will carry a payload of integrated experiments weighing up to 1,800 pounds (818 kilograms) into a low earth orbit of 300 nautical miles (nm) (± 50 nm). Beginning in 1993, approximately three launches per year are proposed. The launch azimuth will be directed over the Atlantic Ocean and away from inhabited areas.

The Conestoga ELVs will use solid rocket motors (SRMs) whose performance characteristics and exhaust products are well documented. The Conestoga/COMET program will continue to be coordinated with GSFC/WFF operations, range safety, and environmental staff. The launch vehicle and experimental payloads will be processed at Wallops Island in conformance with NASA safety requirements.

NASA's Center for Commercial Development of Space (CCDS) and its industrial partners sponsored, designed, and developed the COMET payloads. The CCDS and partners are an industry, university, and government nonprofit consortium that conducts space-based high technology research and development in specific areas ranging from materials processing to remote sensing. The proposed COMET payloads, which will fulfill a variety of objectives, do not involve exotic species, infectious agents, nor radiological materials.

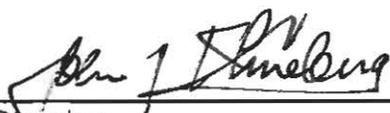
EER Systems Corporation prepared an EA to evaluate the environmental impacts of the proposed launches. Alternatives considered included the no action alternative (no Conestoga/COMET launch) and alternative locations for launching the Conestoga ELV. Of existing launch facilities, GSFC/WFF was determined to be the recommended site due to its launch schedule flexibility and absence of Department of Defense launches which could take priority over commercial launches. Furthermore, a Conestoga launch from GSFC/WFF demands less energy to launch a given payload size to the required orbit than launches from other facilities. Because of the high costs associated with construction of a completely new launch facility and the greater likelihood of substantial environmental impacts from the new site alternative, only existing launch facilities were considered for the Conestoga launches. Implementation of the Conestoga/COMET program is consistent with Public Law 98-575, the "Commercial Space Launch Act", which determined that development of a commercial launch vehicle program in the United States is in the national public interest.

Impacts to the human environment associated with this mission arise almost entirely during the launch of the Conestoga ELV. The following summarizes the specific impacts associated with a launch of a Conestoga ELV:

1. Although the Conestoga/COMET program will produce air emissions during launch, these emissions will not exceed National Ambient Air Quality Standards nor short-term exposure guidelines. Negligible adverse impacts to populated areas, areas of recreational use, and wildlife refuges are anticipated.

2. Launch noise levels as a result of the Conestoga ELV will exceed noise levels from past launch missions at GSFC/WFF. However, off-site areas are not expected to be subject to noise levels which could cause structural damage or lead to hearing impairment. Noise level analyses indicate that noise levels approximately 2.1 miles (3.3 km) from the launch pad will be less than 120 decibels and be of extremely short duration. Additionally, the infrequent number of launches combined with the short duration of exposure to elevated noise levels will mitigate noise-related impacts to populated areas, recreational areas, and wildlife refuges;
3. Adverse impacts to water quality, plant and animal communities, and nearby wetlands are not expected. No filling of wetlands will occur as a result of implementing this project;
4. No adverse impacts to threatened and endangered species are expected. The proposed project has been coordinated with the Federal and State resource agencies who concur with a determination of no effect for species under their purview;
5. The vehicle and payload processing at GSFC/WFF will comply with all applicable health and safety regulations. Due to the small size of each experiment and minimal processing necessary for each experiment at Wallops Island, substantial volumes of toxic substances and hazardous wastes will not be a factor;
6. The State Historic Preservation Office has concurred that no adverse impacts to resources under their review authority are anticipated;
7. The proposed Conestoga/COMET program is consistent with local land use for Wallops Island and will result in positive economic impacts to the local and regional economies.

No other issues of environmental concern have come to NASA's attention. On the basis of the Conestoga/COMET EA, NASA has determined that the environmental impacts associated with the mission will not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. NASA will take no final action concerning the proposed activity prior to the expiration of the 30-day comment period.



 Director
 Goddard Space Flight Center



 Date