

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

National Environmental Policy Act; Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign

AGENCY: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

ACTION: Finding of no significant impact.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321, *et seq.*), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and NASA policy and procedures (14 CFR Part 1216, Subpart 1216.3), NASA has made a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) with respect to the proposed Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)/Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) intends to further the science of the 1992 El Coqui study into Solar-terrestrial research by conducting another sounding rocket campaign, Coqui II from the site established for the original El Coqui campaign. Solar-terrestrial research studies the influence of changes in the Sun on: (1) the solar wind; (2) the Earth's magnetosphere, ionosphere, and atmosphere; and (3) on weather and climate. This research has long been a major element of the NASA's GSFC sounding rocket program of space science. Understanding the solar-terrestrial connection is critical to understanding both natural and human-induced changes in the Earth's atmosphere and oceans which, in turn, alter weather and climate and otherwise affect the environment in which we live. NASA's GSFC has selected the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico for continuation of this research due to its location at an ideal latitude for scientific measurements, as well as the unique opportunity to coordinate these launches with operations of the Arecibo Ionospheric Radar and Heater Facilities. The launch will be from the north coast of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico at Tortuguero Park (former Vega Baja Airdome).

DATE: Upon issuance of this FONSI, NASA will proceed immediately to implement the proposed action.

ADDRESSES: The EA for the proposed Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign may be reviewed at the following locations:

- (a) Public Affairs Office, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, VA 23337; telephone 757-824-1579.
- (b) The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board, Box 11488, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00910.
- (c) Administration of Fomento Economico, Company of Fomento Industrial, Apartado 382350, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00936-2350.
- (d) NASA Headquarters, Library, Room 1 J 20, 300 E. Street, SW, Washington D.C. 20546.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NASA has reviewed the 1991 Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the 1992 "El Coqui Sounding Rocket Campaign, The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico." In addition, NASA has reviewed the 1997 supplemental Technical Information Document prepared for the 1998 Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the 1998 EA for the Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign. Upon review of the aforementioned documents, NASA has determined these documents represent an accurate and adequate analysis of the scope and level of associated environmental impacts. NASA hereby incorporates the 1991 EA, 1998 EA, and 1997 Technical Information Document by reference in this FONSI. The 1991 EA identifies potential impacts that may occur during implementation of the proposed actions and the environmental impacts associated with both launch operations and construction of launch support facilities. The environmental concerns considered, but were not necessarily limited to: air and water quality, waste water disposal, noise, solid waste management, toxics, transportation of hazardous materials, pesticides, historical resources, radar emittance, potable water quality, health and safety, and flora and fauna. The launch site is not located in a 100 year flood plain or wetlands. In addition, the proposed Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign has been reviewed for compliance with all applicable environmental statutes and regulations. The Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign has been granted all necessary Puerto Rico environmental approvals.

The 1998 Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign is similar to the 1992 El Coqui Campaign conducted from Tortuguero Park except for the number of launches and the construction of one additional concrete foundation. All other aspects of the 1998 Coqui II Campaign will be accomplished with similar techniques and procedures as implemented in the El Coqui Project of 1992. The environmental considerations of this project are identical in nature and conduct to activities covered by the EA for the El Coqui Sounding Rocket Campaign dated 1991 (here and after the "1991 EA"). The 1991 EA addressed alternatives to the proposed action which included alternate equatorial locations and the no action alternative. In addition, the 1991 EA addressed the environmental consequences of the preferred alternative. The 1991 EA resulted in the issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) by NASA. In addition, this project is within the scope of the NASA Sounding Rocket Program, which has been conducting launches worldwide since 1959 at temporary, semi-permanent, and permanent ranges.

The 1998 Coqui II campaign involves the launch of eleven sounding rockets from the north coast of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico at Tortuguero Park (former Vega Baja Airdome). The sounding rockets for Coqui II will be solid fueled, unguided rockets that are of the type used for scientific research.

Temporary launch support facilities will be re-established at Tortuguero Park used for the 1992 El Coqui Campaign. Modifications to the existing site, include brush clearing of the previously cleared areas, construction of one concrete foundation, and installation of commercial power.

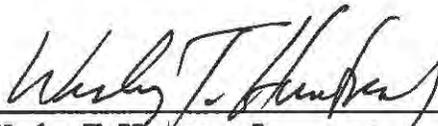
Technical campaign information is presented in the *Technical Information Document for the 1998 Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico*. Details on the specific science objectives are presented in this document. Also included in this document is a July 1997,

biological assessment that was conducted and prepared as an addendum to the *Biological Assessment of the Proposed Launch Site for El Coqui, 1991*.

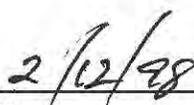
Information on the campaign was provided to the public via numerous articles published in both English and Spanish versions of the San Juan Star (newspaper). Coordination with Commonwealth and Federal agencies was conducted through the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board (EQB) and the Puerto Rico Economic Development Administration (Fomento) with whom NASA's GSFC has a formal Memo of Understanding.

The following public concerns were presented, addressed by campaign representatives, and found to be of no significant impact: (1) lead emissions from the rocket launches; (2) the use of hazardous materials in the experiments; and (3) noise generated from the rocket launches. All lead emissions are well below health based guidelines; the hazardous materials are fire hazards which are addressed by the range safety plan; and the noise generated lasts only a short period of time, attenuates rapidly, and is of a low sound frequency. The public concerns were answered through environmental community meetings held in Puerto Rico on both January 16th and February 9th 1998. These meetings were open forums to discuss environmental concerns raised by any member of the public. Each meeting was attended by approximately 50 people including concerned citizens and the media.

On the basis of the 1991 EA for the 1992 El Coqui Sounding Rocket Campaign, the 1997 Technical Information Document for the 1998 Coqui II Sounding Rocket Campaign, including the Biological Assessment of the proposed Launch Site for EL Coqui, NASA has determined that the environmental impacts associated with the proposed action will not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on human health or the quality of the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required.



Wesley T. Huntress, Jr.
Associate Administrator for
Space Science



Date