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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
[Docket No. 28611]

Proposed Finding of No Significant Impact

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), DOT.

ACTION: Proposed Finding of No Significant Impact; Notice.

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SUMMARY: An Environmental Assessment (EA), which addresses the Alaska Aerospace Development Corporation's (AADC) proposal to construct and operate a launch site at Narrow Cape on Kodiak Island, Alaska, has been prepared. After reviewing and analyzing currently available data and information on existing conditions, project impacts, and measures to mitigate those impacts, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Office of the Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation (AST) proposes to determine that licensing the operation of the proposed launch site, is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. Therefore the preparation of an environmental impact statement would not be required and AST is proposing to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

FOR A COPY OF THE KODIAK LAUNCH COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTAL  
ASSESSMENT

For further information contact: Mr. Nikos Himaras, Office of the Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation, Licensing and Safety Division, Suite 5402A, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, D.C. 20590; phone (202) 366-2455; or refer to the following Internet address:

<http://www.dot.gov/dotinfo/faa/cst/cst.html>.

DATES: There will be a thirty (30) day comment period before the FAA makes its final determination on the proposed FONSI. Interested individuals, Government agencies, and private organizations are invited to send comments on the proposed FONSI to the address set forth below by July 25, 1996.

ADDRESS: Written comments should be sent to, Docket Clerk, Docket No. [28611], Federal Aviation Administration, 800 Independence Avenue SW., Room 915, Washington, D.C. 20591.

PROPOSED ACTION: Operation of a non-Federal launch site in the United States, such as AADC's proposed construction and operation of Kodiak Launch Complex (KLC), a commercial space launch site, on Kodiak Island, Alaska, must be licensed by the FAA pursuant to 49 U.S.C. Secs. 70101-70119, formerly the Commercial Space Launch Act. Licensing the operation of a launch site is a Federal action requiring environmental analysis by the FAA in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 4321 et seq. Upon receipt of a complete application the Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation must determine whether to issue a license to AADC to operate KLC. Environmental findings are required for a license evaluation.

The launch site would be located on a 3,100-acre tract of state-owned land on a peninsula known as Narrow Cape. Construction for the project would involve (1) upgrading about 3 km of gravel access road; (2) creating two laydown areas for construction equipment; (3) building a launch control center, a payload processing facility, the launch area, and a water pumphouse; and (4) expanding an existing borrow pit to obtain fill material. Construction would disturb approximately 43 acres, including about 1.5 acres of wetlands, most of which is adjacent to the gravel road leading to the launch complex.

To launch launch vehicles from KLC, fee-paying customers would (1) transport launch vehicle components, payloads, associated parts, and staff to the site; (2) assemble components and prepare for launches; and (3) launch and track payloads into orbit. Operations would begin in 1997, and about 3 launch vehicles per year would be launched during the first four years. Anticipated frequency of use would increase to a maximum of 9 launches per year over the 22 years of operation. Materials would be transported to Kodiak Island by boat (container ship or ocean barge) or airplane and transported to the KLC by truck. Initially, approximately 100 people would be onsite for 6 weeks before a launch. Operations could eventually involve up to 14,000 person-days per year onsite. The KLC would provide the site for launches of small solid rocket motor launch vehicles, such as Lockheed Martin Launch Vehicles 1 and 2, Minuteman II (modified for commercial use), Taurus, and Conestoga.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:

Ecological resources. Construction would disturb vegetation on 43 acres of the site. With the exception of wetlands the disturbed areas are not considered high-quality habitat. The 1.5 acres of wetlands that would be disturbed constitute 0.2% of the 790 acres of wetlands on the 3100-acre site. No practicable alternatives to disturbing wetlands are available and, based on the small areas involved, the wetland and vegetation losses are judged to be not significant.

Noise from construction activity would temporarily disturb areas immediately adjacent to roads and proposed new facilities, but the valuable wildlife habitats, mostly along the shoreline and offshore, would not be significantly affected. Construction activities could expose ducks and seabirds resting and feeding in the waters off Narrow Cape to peak noise levels of approximately 72 dBA, below the 80-90 dBA known to disturb water fowl and wildlife. The closest site believed to have a bald eagle nest is located at least 3000 feet from construction activities, substantially greater than the 660-ft buffer zone recommended by the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior (DOI) to protect nesting eagles. Launch vehicle launches would cause occasional noise levels sufficient to cause startle responses in birds and marine mammals. However, these brief disturbances, three to nine times per year, are not anticipated to have lasting or significant adverse impacts on wildlife, including endangered or sensitive species. Emissions from launch vehicle propulsion would be occasional and widely and rapidly dispersed, and no significant ecological effects would be expected. AADC and AST have informally discussed wildlife impacts with the Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), DOI, and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) United States Department of Commerce (DOC). The only species now listed under the Endangered Species Act in the vicinity of the proposed site is the Stellar Sea Lion, a threatened species. This species falls under the purview of the NMFS, and based on discussions to date, AST expects that the NMFS would find that there would be no significant impacts on endangered or threatened species and that no further analysis would be necessary.

Noise. Launch noise would be audible on Kodiak Island for a distance of approximately 12 miles for approximately 1 minute. Sonic booms would be heard only on the open ocean. Given the infrequency and short duration of launches, no significant adverse impacts to the public would be expected.

Safety. The proposed KLC facilities would be located so that launch vehicles would fly primarily over open water. A flight and operational safety program would be implemented to manage risks to workers and the public. Total public casualty risk, for all mission activities, is

estimated to be less than 1 in 1,000,000. All safety concerns will be addressed as part of AST's licensing process.

Visual and Cultural Resources. Construction and operation of the proposed KLC would affect the visual resources of Narrow Cape by placing five new man-made structures into a relatively isolated area. The largest of these, the launch service structure would be 170 feet high, 40 feet wide and 70 feet long, and because of the relatively flat terrain, would be visible over most of Narrow Cape and from offshore. Because the site is isolated and has few viewers, the visual impacts are considered non-significant. Impacts to subsistence harvesting and archaeological or historic sites would be minor.

Air and Water. Impacts of construction to both air and water would be short-term and minor. Launch vehicle launch emissions of hydrogen chloride and aluminum oxide would slightly degrade local air quality, and the hydrochloric acid (HCl) formed could be deposited in nearby surface waters. Maximum concentrations of HCl and particulates resulting from launches would not exceed the Air Force guideline of 10 parts per million of HCl (averaged over a 30-minute period) or the National Ambient Air Quality Standard of a 24-hour average of 150 micrograms per cubic meter for PM-10, particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter. Acid deposition impacts would be minor because of the high capacity of local streams and lakes for buffering acid inputs. Because launch vehicle launch impacts to air and water would be relatively minor, occasional, and short-term, no significant impacts would be expected to occur.

Geology and Soil Resources. Soil erosion control practices, implemented under the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan, would keep impacts to soils minor. Changes in soil pH resulting from acid deposition from launch combustion products would be non-significant, as KLC soils have a high cation exchange capacity.

Socioeconomics. Construction of the proposed KLC would result in expenditures of \$18-24 million on goods and services, which would have positive effects on the local and regional economies. Community resources and infrastructure are adequate to support the construction and operational workforces.

Section 4(f). Impacts to recreational resources would be small. The site would be closed immediately before and during launch activities, but would remain open for recreational activities at all other times. No significant impacts to the Pasagshak State Recreation Area or the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, located about 4 miles and 40 miles respectively from the KLC site, would be expected because of the distances and the limited extent of construction and operational activities.

Land Use. The proposed action underwent a review for consistency with standards established under the Alaska Coastal Management Program (Alaska Administrative Code, Title Six, Chapter 80) and was issued a final consistency determination. In addition, the Kodiak Island Borough Planning and Zoning Commission has reviewed and tentatively approved an AADC permit application for construction in a conservation district, contingent upon approval of the project by the applicable Federal and state permitting agencies.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED: Alternatives analyzed in the EA included (1) the proposed action, licensing the operation of a launch site at KLC, and (2) the no action alternative. AADC has conducted a state-wide siting survey that evaluated 27 alternative locations for a space launch facility. AST has given substantial weight to the preferences of AADC in selecting the proposed site because AST's review indicates that no substantially superior alternative site from an environmental stand

In designing the KLC, efforts were made to avoid wetlands when possible. The payload processing area and the access road to the launch area were re-sited to avoid wetland disturbance, and the launch control center was redesigned to minimize wetland impacts. The launch control center, however, must be located a minimum distance from the launch area and must have a direct view of the launch area. The only alternative for siting the launch control center to completely avoid wetlands would have required access road construction that would have affected more wetlands. The only alternative that would have avoided wetlands destruction in upgrading Pasagshak Point Road would have involved extensive road relocation, substantial destruction of non-wetland habitat, and prohibitive expense. Because of these factors, no practicable alternatives to wetlands destruction were available (See Section 4.5.1.1 of the EA). The Alaska District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a public notice regarding project construction and wetlands involvement on September 7, 1995, providing the public and appropriate state and Federal agencies an opportunity for early review of wetlands impacts.

MONITORING AND MITIGATION: Construction and operation of the KLC will include development of a Natural Resources Management Plan that will address monitoring and mitigation activities for special status species, as discussed in Section 5.13 of the EA. If monitoring detects adverse impacts greater than those identified in the EA, AADC would take action, if possible, to avoid or eliminate further similar impacts.

DETERMINATION: After careful and thorough consideration of the facts contained herein, the undersigned finds that the proposed Federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and

objectives as set forth in Section 101(a) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and that it will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise include any condition requiring consultation pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of NEPA. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed action would not be required.

Issued in Washington, DC, on June 18, 1996.  
Frank C. Weaver,  
Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation.  
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