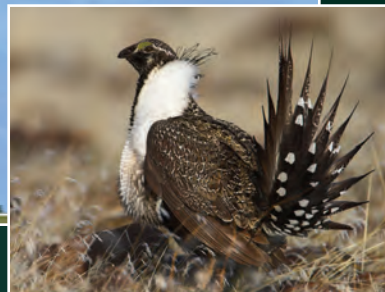
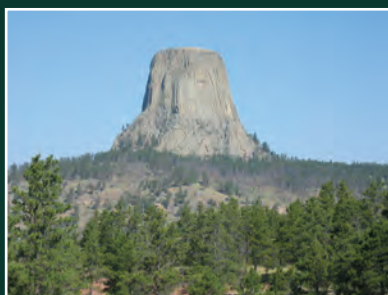


Environmental Impact Statement

OPTIMIZATION OF POWDER RIVER TRAINING COMPLEX

Ellsworth Air Force Base
South Dakota



SUMMARY
August 2026

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SUMMARY

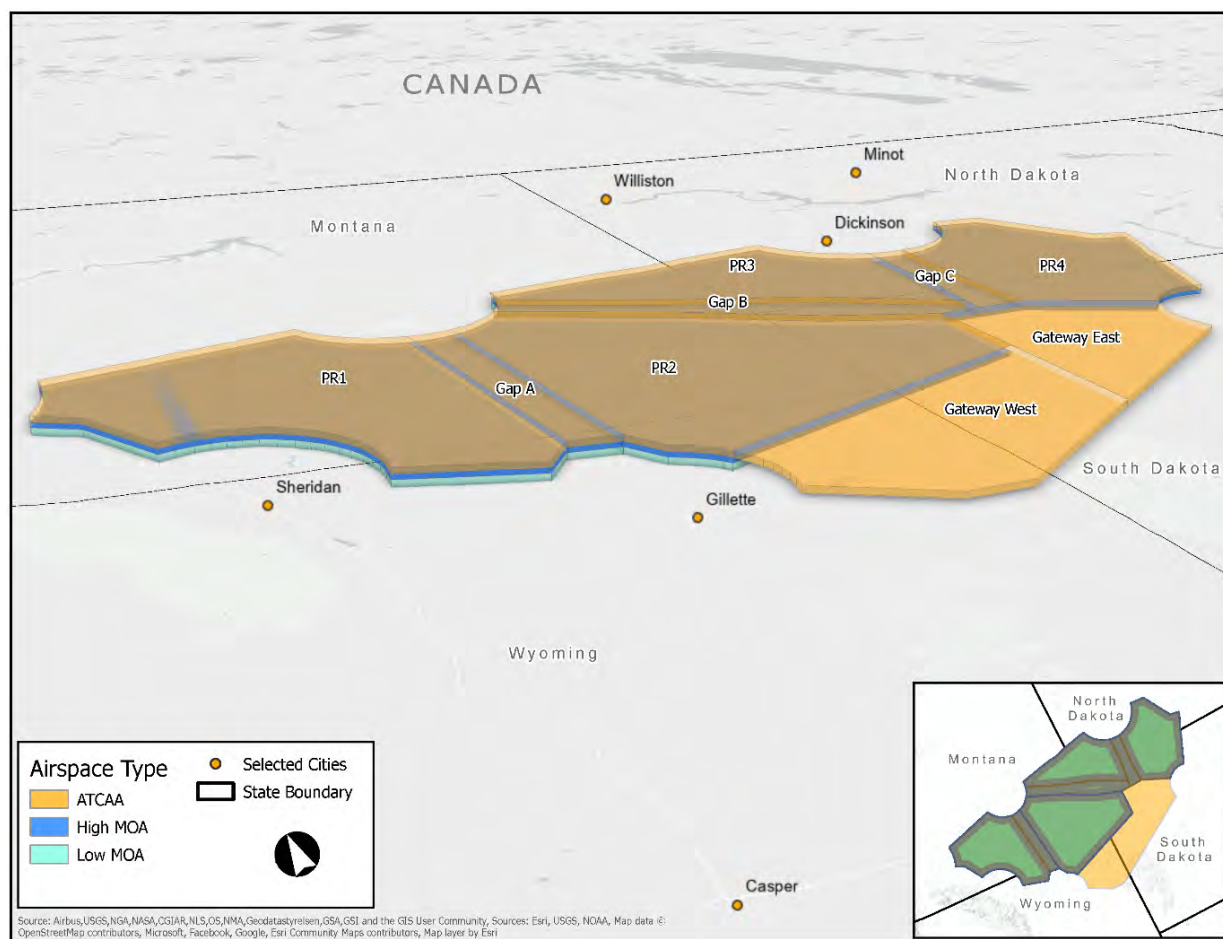
The Department of the Air Force (DAF) has prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that analyzes the potential environmental consequences resulting from the DAF proposal to address shortfalls in aircrew readiness by improving day-to-day training and increasing Large Force Exercise (LFE) capability hosted at Powder River Training Complex (PRTC) to meet emerging threats to National Security.

The PRTC is a group of Military Operations Areas (MOAs) and Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspaces (ATCAAs), which overlie parts of South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana. Currently it is the day-to-day (primarily Monday through Friday) training complex for aircrews operating B-1 aircraft from the 28th Bomb Wing (28 BW) at Ellsworth Air Force Base (AFB) and aircrews operating B-52 aircraft from the 5th Bomb Wing (5 BW) at Minot AFB. In addition to day-to-day training operations, the PRTC hosts LFEs for joint forces to participate in realistic combat training scenarios.

MOAs are a type of Special Use Airspace established for the purpose of separating certain military training activities from other air traffic. MOAs are used for non-hazardous activities such as air combat tactics, aerobatics, formation training, and low-altitude tactics. MOAs are established in lower altitudes, below 18,000 feet.

ATCAAs are a type of Special Activity Airspace of defined vertical and lateral limits, assigned by air traffic control, for the purpose of providing air traffic segregation between the specified activities being conducted, within the assigned airspace and other traffic. ATCAAs are typically established in higher altitudes, above 18,000 feet.

The primary MOAs utilized for day-to-day training include Powder River (PR) 1, 2, 3, and 4 along with their associated ATCAAs that exist above the MOAs (**Figure S-1**). The PR 1, 2, and 3 MOAs are vertically segmented into a low and high MOA. The PR 4 MOA does not have a low MOA. The low and high MOAs with an ATCAA above provides training space from 500 feet up to 26,000 feet, while the PR4 MOA/ATCAA provides space from 12,000 feet up to 26,000 feet. The Gateway West ATCAA is also used day-to-day and provides training space from 18,000 feet up to 26,000 feet. The Gap A, B, and C MOAs/ATCAAs and the Gateway East ATCAA are only available during LFEs.



Legend: ATCAA = Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace; MOA = Military Operations Area; PR = Powder River; PRTC = Powder River Training Complex

Figure S-1 Existing PRTC Airspace Structure

The 28 BW and the 5 BW units are expected to deploy and execute air operations anywhere in the world with short notice. To successfully accomplish their missions, these units must have access to training airspace that allows units to fly their aircraft's tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) at altitudes and in the same manner as they would in combat. Training in airspace that lacks requisite volume, altitude, and attributes introduces artificial constraints and limits training effectiveness. Counterproductive training experience threatens aircrew survivability and mission readiness. To accomplish TTPs, aircrews need to train in higher altitude, up to 60,000 feet, and the PRTC currently only provides airspace up to 26,000 feet.

The PRTC hosts LFEs, which are military training exercises that involve a significant number of participants and assets and are designed to prepare servicemen and women for real-world scenarios. The importance and complexity of LFEs has evolved with advanced aircraft capabilities and combat strategies. LFEs have grown into large combat integration exercises with participation by more types of aircraft, specifically 5th generation fighter aircraft F-22 and F-35. The integration of multiple aircraft types has become a critical training tool for many units. LFEs are moving away from 2- or 3-day long exercises to 5-day up to 2-week events. Longer duration exercises enable units to achieve complex realistic training. Currently, the duration of LFE events at PRTC is limited to up to 3 days quarterly (no more than 10 days annually). This limits

the complexity of the LFE scenarios. The longer durations would also provide non-local participants with the most training for their invested time, effort, and money for a single event.

The Proposed Action is to address shortfalls in aircrew readiness by improving day-to-day training and increasing the capability of LFEs hosted at PRTC. Specifically, the Proposed Action includes:

- Actions to improve day-to-day operations:
 - Raise the ceiling of the most used ATCAAs
 - Change times of use for PRTC
- Actions to improve training capability of LFEs:
 - Raise the ceiling of all of PRTC
 - Increase the total days allowed annually
 - Increase duration allowed for individual LFEs

There are no proposed changes to the altitude or horizontal dimensions of any of the MOAs (which provide low-level training airspace). All of the proposed changes address shortfalls in higher altitudes (above 26,000 feet).

S.1 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to facilitate training that ensures combat effectiveness and aircrew survivability. The Proposed Action is needed because the current PRTC does not allow aircrews to complete required high altitude day-to-day and LFE training, and because current limitations on LFEs prevent realistic training that ensures mission readiness and aircrew survivability.

S.2 Alternatives Considered

The DAF has determined that reasonable Alternatives must meet the following objectives:

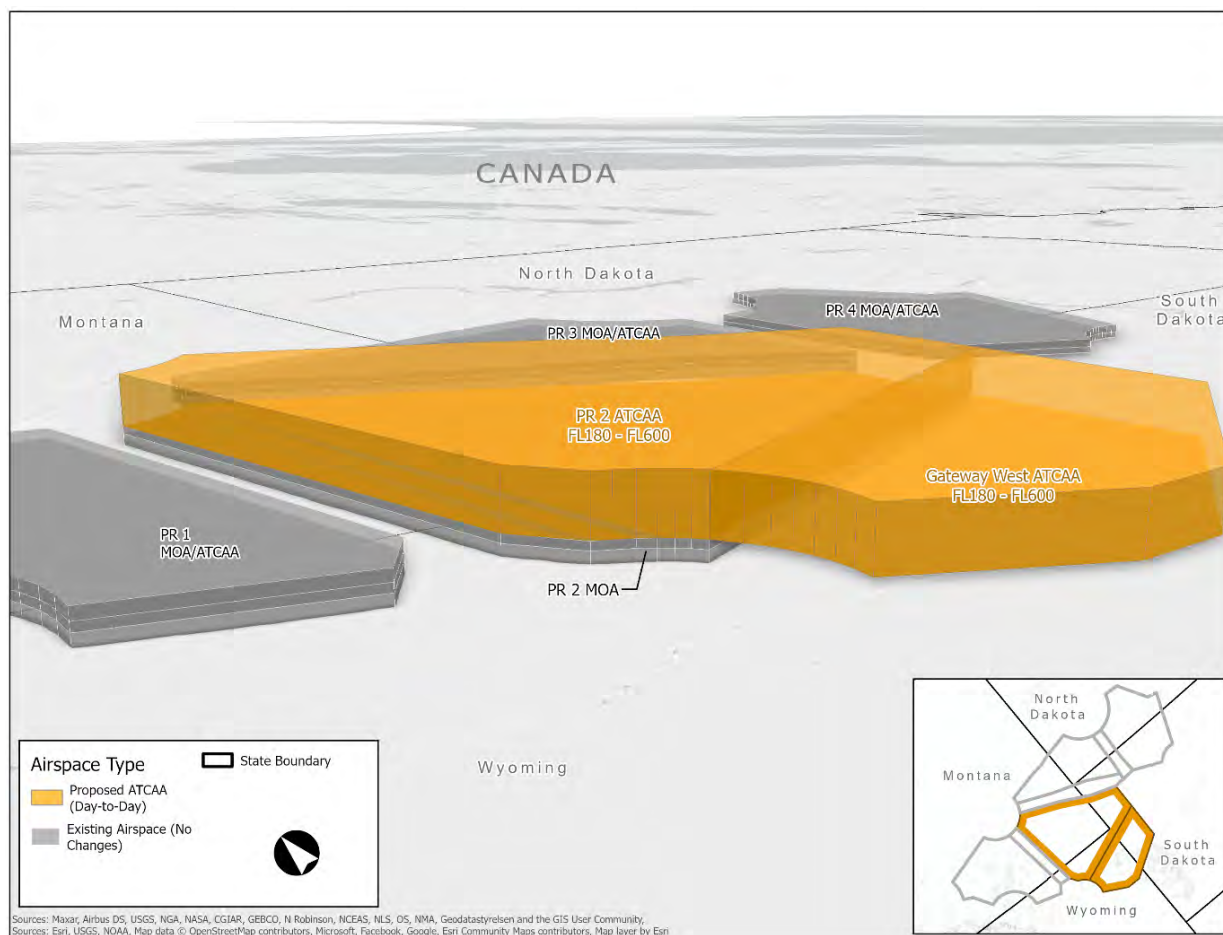
- Provide sufficient volume of training space at PRTC required to effectively accomplish TTPs.
- Accommodate more effective LFEs at PRTC by increasing the duration of individual events.
- Integrate 5th generation aircraft in bomber training at PRTC.
- Provide training environment that aligns as closely as possible to real-world scenarios.
- Utilize existing ground assets at PRTC.

The DAF is considering two action alternatives and the No Action Alternative:

Alternative 1. Under Alternative 1, the ceiling of the two primary airspace segments used for day-to-day training (PR 2 and Gateway West ATCAAs) would be raised to Flight Level (FL)¹ 600 (approximately 60,000 feet) to improve high-altitude training capability (**Figure S-2**). This alternative also includes changing the published times of use to align with how the complex is currently used for day-to-day training: 7:00 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. Monday to Thursday, 7:00 a.m. to

¹ Flight Level (FL) is used to describe the cruising altitudes for aircraft traveling long distances above 18,000 feet. Flight Levels are given in hundreds of feet, e.g. FL300 is 30,000 feet.

6:00 p.m. Friday, and other times by Notice to Airmen (NOTAM)². These airspace modifications would not change the total day-to-day annual operations within PRTC but would allow operations to occur at higher altitudes. Approximately 90 percent of day-to-day training time would be above 18,000 feet (as is the current situation).



Legend: ATCAA = Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace; FL = Flight Level; MOA = Military Operations Area; PR = Powder River; PRTC = Powder River Training Complex

Figure S-2 Alternative 1 Proposed Changes for Day-to-Day Training

Lastly, under this alternative the ceiling of all the PRTC airspace would be raised to FL600 (approximately 60,000 feet) during LFEs (**Figure S-3**) and the total LFE days would be increased to 30 days annually without a quarterly restriction. This would allow for a more complex individual LFE lasting up to 2 weeks (5 fly days, no weekend flying, followed by 5 fly days). The increased LFE days would increase annual operations from approximately 3,234 sorties up to 4,974 sorties. Approximately 90 percent of training time would continue to be at a higher altitude (above 18,000 feet).

² The current time of use is by NOTAM 2 hours in advance: Monday through Thursday from 07:30–12:00 and 18:00–23:30; Friday from 07:30–12:00; and other times by NOTAM 4 hours in advance.

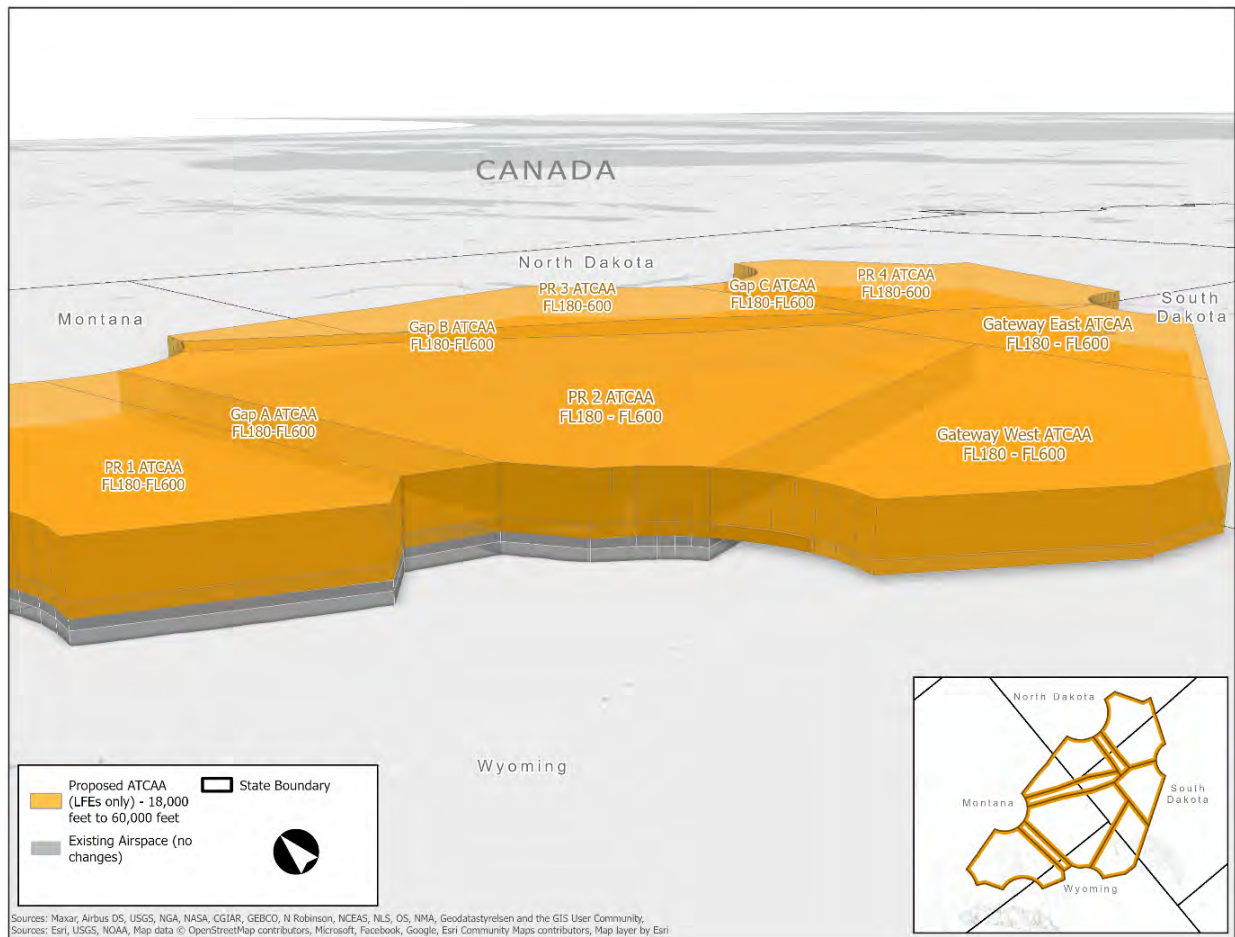
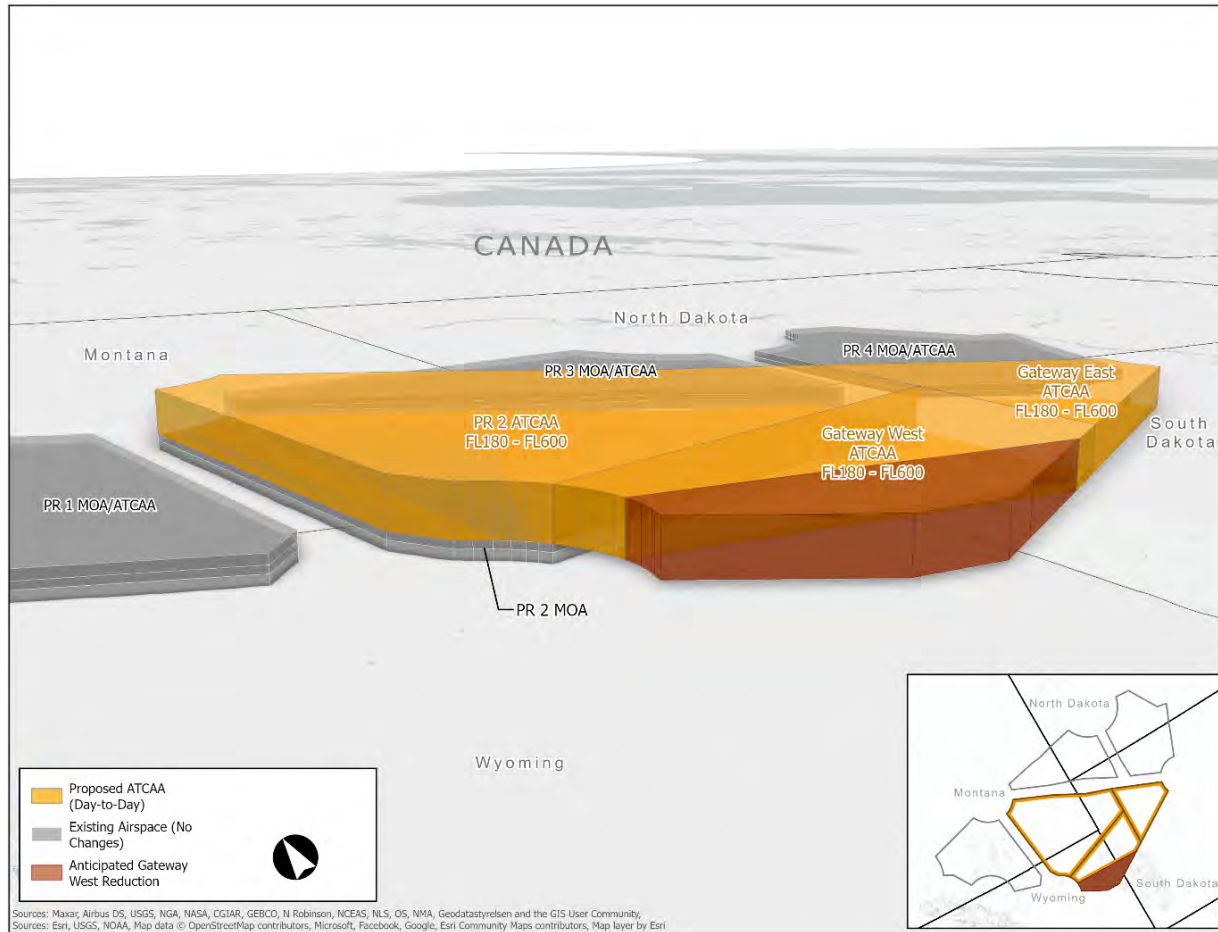


Figure S-3 Alternative 1 Proposed Changes for LFEs

Alternative 2. Under Alternative 2, the ceiling of three airspace segments (PR 2, Gateway West, and Gateway East ATCAAs) would be raised to FL600 (approximately 60,000 feet) for day-to-day training (**Figure S-4**). Under Alternative 2, the northern border of the Gateway East ATCAA would be shifted south to align with the PR 2 ATCAA northern border, preserving the Gap B corridor. The modified Gateway East ATCAA would be available for day-to-day operations (currently use of Gateway East ATCAA is limited to LFEs only). Allowing use of the Gateway East ATCAA for day-to-day operations would require the Gateway West ATCAA to be minimized to reduce potential impacts to civilian users of the airspace. The southern corner of Gateway West ATCAA would be moved to the north. Other proposed changes would be the same as Alternative 1: adjusting the published times of use, raising the ceiling of all PRTC to FL600 for LFEs (see **Figure S-3**), increasing the LFE days to 30 annually.



Sources: Maxar, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, GEBCO, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodastystyrelsen and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA, Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors, Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Esri Community Maps contributors, Map layer by Esri

Legend: ATCAA = Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace; FL = Flight Level; MOA = Military Operations Area; PR = Powder River

Figure S-4 Alternative 2 Proposed Changes for Day-to-Day Training

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the day-to-day operations and LFEs would continue in the PRTC as they do currently. The DAF would continue to have limited training airspace vertically for the B-1 and B-52 and limit the integration opportunities with 5th generation aircraft. The altitude and duration limitations would continue to decrease the value of LFEs in PRTC for most combat aircraft and discourage them from attending an LFE. The continuation of inefficient training threatens aircrew survivability and mission readiness.

S.3 Public Involvement

The DAF solicited public and agency comments during a scoping period from July 11, 2025 through September 9, 2025. Public scoping meetings were held throughout North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana as well as virtually as detailed in **Table S-1**. Comments received during the scoping period were considered in preparing the Draft EIS and helped determine the scope of the environmental issues to analyze.

Table S-1 Public Scoping Meeting Schedule

Date	Location
July 28, 2025	Hardin High School Commons Area 721 North Miles Ave Hardin, MT 59034
July 29, 2025	St. Labre Soaring Eagle Gymnasium 112 St. Labre Campus Dr Ashland, MT 59003
July 30, 2025	Fallon County Fair – Exhibit Hall 3440 Highway 7 Baker, MT 59313
July 31, 2025	Bowman County Fairgrounds – West Wing 12 Highway 12 E Bowman, ND 58623
August 1, 2025	Elgin Community Center 305 North Main St Elgin, ND 58533
August 11, 2025	Spearfish High School – CTE Center 1725 North Main St Spearfish, SD 57783
August 12, 2025	Bison School Gymnasium 200 West Carr St Bison, SD 57620
August 13, 2025	Crook County School District Gymnasium 122 State Highway 585 Sundance, WY 82729
August 14, 2025	Western Dakota Technical College Event Center 800 Mickelson Dr. Rapid City, SD 57703
August 19, 2025	Virtual Meeting #1
August 20, 2025	Virtual Meeting #2
August 21, 2025	Virtual Meeting #3

S.4 Summary of Environmental Resources Evaluated in the EIS

NEPA and DoW instructions for implementing NEPA specify that an EIS should address those resource areas potentially subject to impacts. In addition, the level of analysis should be commensurate with the anticipated level of environmental impacts. Because potential impacts would not occur under the Proposed Action, the following resources were not evaluated in detail in the EIS: visual effects, hazardous materials and wastes, farmlands, water resources, earth resources, natural resources and energy, and coastal zone.

Resources analyzed in detail in the EIS include: airspace management and use, safety, noise, air quality, natural resources, socioeconomics, cultural resources, and land use. A comparison of environmental consequences by alternative is provided in **Table S-2**.

Table S-2 Comparison of Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	No Action Alternative
Airspace Management and Use		
<i>Airport Operations</i> – VFR operations to and from airports would not be restricted, though additional radio coordination may be required when transiting active airspace. Six public airports have approaches that coincide with the PRTC airspace. Radar data indicate these airports have low frequency of use and the impact would be negligible. <i>Day-to-Day Impacts to Civil Traffic</i> – 12 high-frequency routes (those that occur more than once per week) would have minimal impacts ranging from 1 to 6 minutes of additional travel time to avoid active airspace. All other high frequency routes would experience negligible or unmeasurable changes. <i>LFE Impacts to Civil Traffic</i> – 17 high-frequency routes (those that occur more than once per week) would have minimal impacts ranging from 1 to 15 minutes of additional travel time to avoid active airspace. All other high frequency routes would experience negligible or unmeasurable changes.	<i>Airport Operations</i> – same as Alternative 1. <i>Day-to-Day Impacts to Civil Traffic</i> – 15 high-frequency routes (those that occur more than once per week) would have minimal impacts ranging from 1 to 9 minutes of additional travel time to avoid active airspace. All other high frequency routes would experience negligible or unmeasurable changes. <i>LFE Impacts to Civil Traffic</i> – same as Alternative 1.	Airspace management and use would continue as current. PRTC would continue to be used for day-to-day operations and LFEs. No change to conditions under which civil traffic operates.
Safety		
No changes to how flight emergencies are handled or communication protocols. Proposed changes would not increase potential for Bird-Aircraft strikes or aircraft mishaps.	Same as Alternative 1.	Existing flight and ground safety procedures would continue to be followed in PRTC.

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	No Action Alternative
Noise		
<i>Airfield Noise</i> – The change in day-to-day operations would not change the airfield noise environment. Additional transient fighter aircraft associated with LFEs would slightly shift the 65 DNL contour around the airfield but would not affect any noise sensitive areas. <i>Airspace Noise</i> – Changes to the noise exposure beneath PRTC would be insignificant. In most areas the exposure would be reduced from current conditions. The same areas beneath PRTC would continue to be exposed to low-level and supersonic overflights, but this would continue to be a rare occurrence. Aircraft operations would not result in noise exposure greater than 65 DNL or 62 CDNL for any airspace.	<i>Airfield Noise</i> – same as Alternative 1. <i>Airspace Noise</i> – the cumulative noise model is based on the busiest month, which is a month that includes an LFE. Thus, the predicted noise exposure is the same as Alternative 1.	The noise exposure beneath PRTC and surrounding the airfield would be unchanged. The DNL and CDNL associated with aircraft operations would not be above 65 DNL or 62 CDNL for any airspace.
Air Quality		
Additional sorties and personnel on temporary duty associated with increased LFEs would increase criteria pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions; however, emissions would not be significant or exceed General Conformity thresholds. A Record of Non-Applicability was prepared for this action.	Same as Alternative 1.	Air quality conditions within PRTC would remain unchanged. Air quality is generally in attainment throughout the four-state region.
Natural Resources (Wildlife, Vegetation, and Protected Species)		
Noise from aircraft operations would continue to be a minor disturbance to wildlife, domestic animals, and special status species. Impacts would not be considered significant. A Biological Evaluation for Endangered Species Act-listed species was provided to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and concurrence. The DAF has determined the action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect six bird, bat, and mammal species.	Same as Alternative 1.	Natural resource conditions would remain unchanged. Wildlife and domestic animals would continue to be temporarily disturbed by noise associated with aircraft operations, to include sonic booms.
Socioeconomics		
Additional temporary duty personnel associated with LFEs would have negligible increases in local spending for lodging, meals, and associated services around Ellsworth AFB. Hotels, restaurants, and other services are anticipated to have sufficient capacity to accommodate the temporary personnel during an LFE.	Same as Alternative 1.	No change to existing socioeconomic conditions. Temporary personnel traveling to Ellsworth AFB for LFEs would continue to be accommodated with local lodging, restaurants, and other related services.

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	No Action Alternative
Cultural Resources		
Cultural resources beneath PRTC would continue to be exposed to low-level overflights and sonic booms which could result in noise and visual intrusion. The locations for such activities would be the same as current conditions; however, with the increase in LFE days these locations may potentially experience these activities more frequently. The potential for an individual site to experience low-level flight or sonic booms is still rare. There would be no structural damage from aircraft operations. Existing avoidances for certain cultural resources would remain in place and Ellsworth AFB would continue to establish temporary avoidances for tribal ceremonies and events at the request of the Tribes.	Same as Alternative 1.	No change to the noise or visual character for cultural resources beneath PRTC. A number of prescribed avoidances for cultural resources are currently in place.
Land Use		
Special use areas susceptible to noise would have negligible changes. Increasing the altitude for day-to-day operations would not be a recognizable change to the experience on the ground. Increasing LFE days could be a recognizable change during those individual events; however, it would continue to be rare to experience a low-level overflight or a sonic boom given the large area of PRTC. Existing avoidances for certain special use areas would remain in place.	Same as Alternative 1.	No change to land use conditions. Special use areas beneath PRTC would continue to be intermittently exposed to low-level overflights and sonic booms. Specific avoidances for noise sensitive areas were developed during the establishment of PRTC.

Legend: AFB = Air Force Base; DNL = Day-Night Average Sound Level; CDNL = C-weighted Day-Night Average Sound Level; DAF = Department of the Air Force; DNL = Day-Night Average Sound Level; LFE = Large Force Exercise; PRTC = Powder River Training Complex; U.S. = United States; VFR = Visual Flight Rules