

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

March, 2005



Environmental Assessment

Lincoln Airport Special Use Permit

Lincoln Ranger District, Helena National Forest
Lewis & Clark County, Montana

Northeast ¼, Section 19, Township 14N, Range 8W



Aerial View of Lincoln Airport

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SUMMARY

The Montana Department of Transportation is proposing that the U.S. Forest Service, Helena National Forest, issues a Special Use Permit to the Montana Department of Transportation for the continued authorized use of National Forest lands for the operation of the Lincoln Airport. The new Special Use Permit would be established for a period of thirty (30) years, expiring in the year 2035. The permit would provide the Montana Department of Transportation the authorized use of land required for construction of improvements at Lincoln Airport needed to bring the facility into compliance with current FAA standards and allow for the continued operation of the airport facility at the existing location. The May 2004 Lincoln Airport Master Plan and the July 2004 Environmental Assessment for the Lincoln Airport Improvements project are hereby referenced as part of this EA for information on the proposed improvements at Lincoln Airport. The authorized use of the required land is needed to allow the Sponsor to bring the existing facility into compliance with current FAA standards for airport design, remove objects affecting navigable airspace, and upgrade facilities to safely accommodate small aircraft. The project area is located at the Lincoln Airport in the Northeast 1/4 of Section 19, Township 14 North, Range 8 West and is within National Forest lands administered by the Lincoln Ranger District, Helena National Forest, Montana.

In addition to the proposed action, this environmental analysis also evaluated the “No Action” alternative. The “No Action” alternative will not authorize the Montana Department of Transportation the land needed for development of the proposed improvements and continued operation of the airport. The airport would be able to continue operations through December 31, 2014, the expiration date of the existing Special Use Permit. Realistically, the airport would need to be closed prior to that date. Existing pavements have been rapidly deteriorating and have already exceeded their useful life. Because of the severe frost-thaw cycles in the Lincoln area, some amount of pavement failure would be expected within the next five years. Without significant repairs, the airport would become unsafe for aviation activity. The MDT Aeronautics Division does not have the financial resources necessary to maintain these pavements without Federally-funded FAA assistance. However, the FAA requires that airports obtain the necessary land interests that meet FAA requirements for a minimum of twenty years. Without the necessary land requirements throughout the twenty year period, the FAA will not support any financial assistance to the airport. Under the No Action alternative, at some point up to December 31, 2014, the Lincoln Airport would need to be permanently closed.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide whether the proposed action will result in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or require further analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) due to potential significant impacts.

INTRODUCTION

Document Structure

The special use applicant, Montana Department of Transportation, through a third party contractor has prepared this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into four parts:

- *Introduction:* The section includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose of and need for the project, and the agency's proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the U.S. Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- *Comparison of Alternatives, including the Proposed Action:* This section provides a more detailed description of the agency's proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. This discussion also includes possible mitigation measures. Finally, this section provides a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with each alternative.
- *Environmental Consequences:* This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives. This analysis is organized by the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area. Within each section, the affected environment is described first, followed by the effects of the No Action Alternative that provides a baseline for evaluation and comparison of the other alternatives that follow.
- *Agencies and Persons Consulted:* This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.
- *Appendices:* The appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the environmental assessment.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Lincoln Ranger District Office, 1569 Highway 200, Lincoln, Montana.

Background

The project area is located at the Lincoln Airport in the Northeast 1/4 of Section 19, Township 14 North, Range 8 West and is within National Forest land administered by the Lincoln Ranger District, Helena National Forest, Montana. The airport is approximately one mile east of Lincoln. A map showing the project area is provide in **Figure 1** on the following page.

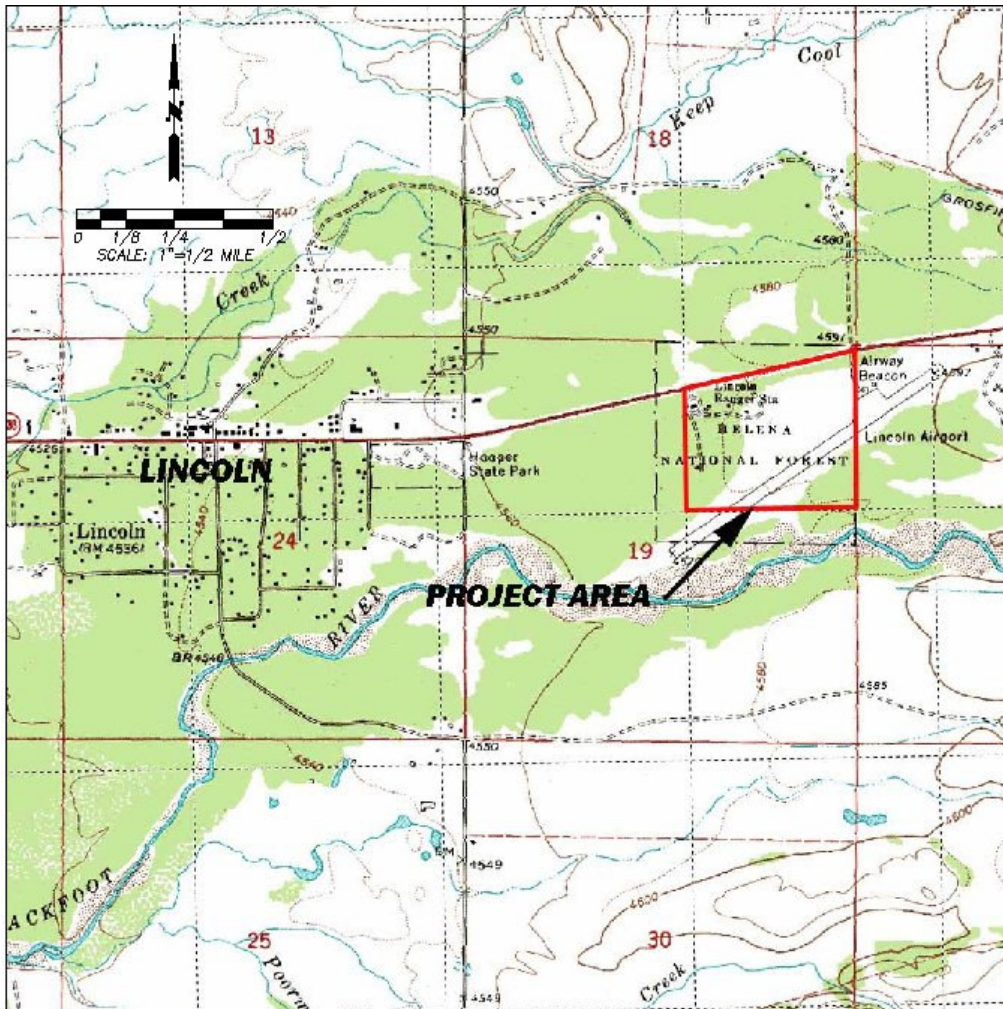


Figure 1: Map of Project Area

In April 1964, the State of Montana, Montana Aeronautics Commission entered into a Grant Agreement for Federal Aid Airport Project No. 9-24-069-C404 to construct a new airport in Lincoln, Montana. The Grant was issued by the Federal Aviation Agency under the “Federal Aid for Development of Public Airports” program. The grant included funding for the acquisition of land for visual airport development and clear zones; site preparation; construction of a 4,000-foot by 75-foot runway; 150-foot x 200-foot apron; 103-foot by 30-foot connecting taxiway; 600-foot by 20-foot entrance road; an access road; and fence.

The original project included authorized use of National Forest land needed for construction of the improvements, and future operation of the airport. Land interests acquired under the original project are summarized in **Table 1** on the following page:

Table 1
Summary of Airport Property Interests

<u>Tract</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Interest</u>
1	18.0	Grosfield	Fee Simple Title, Free and Clear
2	5.17	Anaconda Co.	Fee Simple Title, Free and Clear
3	7.35	Anaconda Co.	Fee Simple Title, Free and Clear
4	0.52	Anaconda Co.	Fee Simple Title, Free and Clear
5	2.20	Grosfield & Cook	Avigation Easement
6	19.23	U.S. Forest Service	Special Use Permit
7	3.36	U.S. Forest Service	Special Use Permit
8	2.59	U.S. Forest Service	Special Use Permit
9	0.52	Grosfield	Clearing Easement
10	2.01	Grosfield	Clearing Easement
11	2.17	Grosfield	Fee Simple Title, Free and Clear
12	1.35	MT. Highway Department	Avigation Easement
13	0.39	U.S. Forest Service	Special Use Permit

The original project included 25.57 acres of National Forest land under authorized use through a Term Special Use Permit for a period of twenty years. The Special Use Permit has been repeatedly amended and is currently scheduled to expire on December 31, 2014. Attachment 1 – Summary of Property Interests from the 1984 FAA Grant Application indicates that Amendment #5 extends the expiration date of the Special Use Permit to December 31, 2014.

Since construction of the original facilities, FAA design standards and criteria have changed. The current facility no longer meets minimum FAA standards and has an insufficient runway length to safely and efficiently accommodate operations throughout the year by the most demanding aircraft within the “small” aircraft fleet that use the airport. “Small” aircraft means those aircraft with gross weights of 12,500 pounds or less.

Growth in Lewis & Clark County and in recreational activities in the Rocky Mountain area surrounding Lincoln has the potential to contribute to the growth of aircraft usage of Lincoln Airport. Likewise, a national interest in Montana and the recreational opportunities in the Rocky Mountains has resulted in an increase in traffic. Aircraft traffic is projected to increase at a rate of 0.8 percent per year.

The State does not have sufficient land available to allow for improvements to meet FAA design standards and provide for greater runway length. The existing site is confined by Highway 200 to the northeast and the Blackfoot River to the southwest. In order to receive Federal assistance, the Airport must acquire or have authorized use of sufficient land to allow for the proposed upgrade of the facility to meet standards.

Two Federal actions are required before the Sponsor can request FAA approval of funding for an Airport Development Project. These actions are summarized as follows:

1. **Approval of an Airport Layout Plan and Master Plan.** An Airport Layout Plan (ALP) must be reviewed and approved by the FAA. Approval of a Master Plan is contingent on the approval of the Airport Layout Plan.
2. **FAA Decision on EA.** Before the proposed project can proceed, the FAA must conclude the Environmental Assessment process. The FAA may issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) based on this EA or the FAA may determine that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is necessary. If it is determined that an EIS is required, the project cannot proceed until this process is concluded.

The Helena Airports District Office (ADO) of the Federal Aviation Administration has recognized the need for improvements to Lincoln Airport to meet current FAA design standards. In 2003, the Montana Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division or Sponsor received a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration to assist in the cost of engineering for a Master Plan and Environmental Assessment.

In the spring of 2003, the Montana Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Division, hired Stelling Engineers, Inc. to prepare the Lincoln Airport Master Plan. The work completed for the Master Plan included:

- Collecting and reviewing existing data pertaining to the airport facilities and historic use;
- Developing forecasted operations of based and itinerant aircraft by type over the next twenty years;
- Identifying and sizing the facilities required to adequately serve the forecasted aviation activity;
- Developing conceptual airport layout options and evaluating each relative to their ability to accommodate the projected aviation demands;
- Preparing an updated Airport Layout Plan, Part 77 - Airspace Obstruction Drawing, Inner Approach Surface Drawing, and Exhibit "A" Property Map;
- Evaluating the revenue and expenses of operating the airport and the ability to obtain supplemental financing to implement the recommended improvements;
- Preparing an implementation plan and schedule for future airport developments, and;
- Evaluating alternative airport sites in the Lincoln planning area.

The ALP was approved by the FAA on June 29, 2004. FAA Approval for the Lincoln Airport Master Plan was issued on June 30, 2004.

The approved Master Plan has allowed the Sponsor to proceed with an Environmental Assessment of the proposed improvements for the Lincoln Airport. A draft Environmental Assessment for the proposed improvements at Lincoln Airport was advertised for public review and comment in May of 2004. Public comments were accepted through July 1, 2004. Following the public comment period, the Final

Environmental Assessment was prepared. The Federal Aviation Administration signed and issued the FONSI on July 2, 2004.

The May 2004 Lincoln Airport Master Plan and the July 2004 Lincoln Airport Environmental Assessment are included by reference to this document.

Purpose and Need for Action

Purpose: The purpose of the proposed action is to provide the Montana Department of Transportation, through a Special Use Permit, the authorized use of land necessary to upgrade the existing Lincoln Airport to meet current FAA design standards and future aviation requirements.

Lincoln Airport has experienced modest growth over the past several decades. This growth is the result of increased aircraft activity from recreationalists, businesses, government agencies, and itinerant aircraft. The airport is also heavily used by the U.S. Forest Service during active forest fire fighting periods.

Continued growth in aviation activity and the proximity of the airport to the U.S. Forest Service Ranger Station combine to produce increased aviation activity, especially during an active summer fire season. The FAA and the Montana Aeronautics Division are concerned about the continued safety of aircraft users of the facility. Specific concerns include the length of the existing runway, the condition of existing pavements, and the proximity of dense forest to the runway. A more detailed discussion on the purpose and need for the project was included in Section 2 of the July 2004 Environmental Assessment for the Lincoln Airport Improvements.

Need: The proposed action is needed to ensure the continued and future operation of the Lincoln Airport. The land required by the airport is needed to bring the existing facility into compliance with current FAA standards for airport design, remove objects affecting navigable airspace, and upgrade facilities to safely accommodate small aircraft. A more detailed discussion on the purpose and need for the project was included in Section 2 of the July 2004 Environmental Assessment for the Lincoln Airport Improvements.

This action complies with the goals and objectives outlined in the Helena Forest Plan for Management Area A-1, and does not conflict with any of the desired conditions described in that plan (ref. Forest Plan, Helena National Forest, Section III, Page 3-4).

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Montana Department of Transportation to meet the purpose and need is for the U.S. Forest Service to issue a Special Use Permit to the Montana Department of Transportation for the continued authorized use of National Forest lands for the operation of the Lincoln Airport. The new Special Use Permit would be established for a period of thirty (30) years, expiring in the year 2035. The permit would provide the Montana Department of Transportation the authorized use of land required for construction of the proposed improvements and the continued operation of the airport facility at the existing location. The permitted land would also ensure compliance with current FAA standards and provide for improved aviation safety at the airport. A total of 39.63 acres of National Forest land would be authorized under the new Special Use

Permit, an increase of 14.06 acres from the 25.57 acres included on prior special use permits. A property map showing all of the land referenced in prior sections and included in the Special Use Permit is provided in **Appendix A**.

The land under authorized use from the U.S. Forest Service would be used specifically for aviation purposes. Improvements related to aviation would be constructed on the property. These improvements would include the following components:

- Asphalt pavements for the runway, taxiways, and aprons.
- Gravel access roads for vehicular travel.
- Aviation navigational aides including runway lighting, segmented circle and windcone, and PAPI.
- 9-foot tall perimeter wildlife fencing.

No buildings or structures of any kind would be constructed upon National Forest land. The Airport Improvement Drawing provided in **Appendix B** shows the proposed improvements planned under the project.

Decision Framework ---

The scope of the decision to be made is limited to whether the proposed action will result in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The USDA Forest Service is the lead agency for this analysis. The responsible official is Amber Kamps, the District Ranger at the Lincoln Ranger District, Helena National Forest.

Public Involvement ---

Extensive public involvement was encouraged throughout the master planning effort and during the preparation of the July 2004 EA. A summary of this public involvement is provided as follows:

Agency Coordination: Contacts were made with several public agencies in the spring of 2004. The purpose of the initial contacts was to solicit comments on the proposed airport improvements and to request information needed for the preparation of the July 2004 Environmental Assessment. The following agencies were contacted during this period:

- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Montana Field Office, Helena
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Helena
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Helena
- Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Missoula
- Department of Fish Wildlife, & Parks, Helena
- State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
- Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Lincoln
- Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Missoula
- Lewis & Clark County Planning Department, Helena

Public Meetings and Hearings: The following is a summary of the public meetings and hearings that have taken place regarding the project. Copies of minutes and transcripts of the following meetings can be found in Appendix G of the July 2004 Environmental Assessment.

December 17, 2003, Public Informational Meeting - A Public Informational Meeting was held at 7:00 p.m. at the Lincoln School on Wednesday, December 17, 2003. The purpose of the meeting was to inform the public of the need for improvements to the Lincoln Airport and present the master planning process. Ten (10) people were in attendance at this meeting including representation from the U.S. Forest Service, the MDT Aeronautics Division, and a local Economic Development agency.

Mitch Stelling, P.E., of Stelling Engineers, Inc. gave a presentation on the existing airport, the reasons the airport does not meet current FAA design standards, and the options for airport improvements. A copy of the minutes to this meeting is located in the July 2004 Environmental Assessment.

March 16, 2004, Public Meeting - A Public Meeting was held at 7:00 p.m. at the Lincoln School on Tuesday, March 16, 2004. The purpose of the Public Meeting was to take public comment on the *draft* Master Plan for Lincoln Airport. Thirty (30) people were in attendance at this meeting. With the exception of the Project Consultant and MDT Aeronautics staff, all attendees were locals or landowners adjacent to the airport.

Mitch Stelling, P.E., of Stelling Engineers, Inc., gave a presentation of the *draft* Master Plan including his recommendations, environmental concerns, and financial options. A copy of the agenda and a written summary of the meeting are included in the July 2004 Environmental Assessment.

During his presentation, Mitch went over the five (5) alternatives presented in the *draft* Master Plan for airport development including the four (4) alternative sites presented in the Site Selection Study. At the end of his presentation, he opened the floor for public comments. Public comments and responses in regard to the May 2004 Lincoln Airport Master Plan.

June 23, 2004 – Public Hearing – A Public Hearing was held at the Lincoln Community Center on June 23, 2004 to obtain comments on the *draft* EA. A copy of the transcript of this meeting can be found in the July 2004 Environmental Assessment. Ten (10) people were in attendance at this meeting. The majority of the attendees were either hangar owners or landowners adjacent to the airport.

News Releases and Editorials. The following is a summary of the news releases and editorials that have been published in the Helena Independent Record and the Blackfoot Valley Dispatch. Copies of the articles and editorials can be found in Appendix D of the July 2004 Environmental Assessment.

November 26 – December 11, 2003 – Notice, Blackfoot Valley Dispatch – Legal Notice published three times for Master Plan Informational Meeting.

November 26 – December 17, 2003 – Notice, Helena Independent Record – Legal Notice published four times for Master Plan Informational Meeting.

February 29 – March 14, 2004 – Notice, Blackfoot Valley Dispatch – Legal Notice published three times for the *draft* Master Plan Public Hearing.

February 29 – March 14, 2004 – Notice, Helena Independent Record – Legal Notice published three times for the *draft* Master Plan Public Hearing.

May 3, 2004 - Editorial, Helena Independent Record – This editorial briefly described the proposed project and discussed some of the issues and concerns of local residents and pilots.

This EA and the associated project record were made available for public review and comment from March 17, 2005 through April 16, 2005 at Stelling Engineers, Inc. in Great Falls, the Lincoln Ranger District in Lincoln, and the MDT Aeronautics Division in Helena. The EA was also available for review at www.stellinginc.com. The Notice of Availability advertisement was published on March 17, 2005 in the Helena Independent Record and the Blackfoot Valley Dispatch. Included in the advertisement was notice for a Public Meeting in Lincoln on March 24, 2005.

During the public comment period, only one (1) comment was received. This comment was submitted per the requirements for 36 CFR 215 and was determined to be “substantive”. The responsible official reviewed the comment and prepared a response. A copy of the comment and response are included in **Appendix D** of this document.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, adjacent landowners, and local pilots (see *Issues* section), the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address.

Issues

If there are any significant issues raised by the public, the interdisciplinary team, or other agencies, they must be identified in the EA. Public scoping is a process used to help identify these issues. Significant issues, if identified, are used to formulate alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures, or analyze environmental effects. In general, a “significant” issue constitutes a point of debate or dispute about environmental effects. Issues are “significant” because of the extent of their geographic distribution, the duration of their effects, or the intensity of interest or resource conflict.

During the public scoping process issues were separated into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, “...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)...”

One of the goals established for the Lincoln Airport Improvements project was to identify “significant” issues early in the life of the project and incorporate design elements into the project that either eliminate the issue or minimize the impacts. This approach was followed throughout the public scoping process. Issues identified at each of the public meetings were recorded in the meeting minutes and then changes were made in the

design to eliminate the issue or minimize the impact. The results of this approach were that by the completion of the July 2004 EA, support for the project was high. Minutes containing public comment from each of the prior public meetings were included in the July 2004 Environmental Assessment and in the project record. A brief summary of these meetings is presented below. Ultimately, no “significant” issues were identified.

December 17, 2003: The first public meeting was held to provide the public information on the project. The intended purpose was to inform the public of the project, meet local residents and pilots, and ascertain any preliminary issues or difficulties in proceeding with the project. The majority of the issues discussed at the meeting were specific to aviation needs and requirements at the airport. The only non-aviation issue presented at the meeting was that one landowner on the west end of the airport might be planning a future subdivision or development.

March 16, 2004: The second public meeting was held to present the findings of the *draft* Lincoln Airport Master Plan (included in the project record). Issues discussed at this meeting were primarily focused on the Master Plan’s recommendation to move the airport to a new site located one mile south of the existing airport, on the south side of the Blackfoot River. The predominant consensus from those in attendance was opposition to development at the new site, and support for development at the existing site.

Anticipating strong public opposition to relocating the airport to the alternate site, the Montana Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Division chose to reject the recommendation of the Master Plan and proceed with development at the existing airport site.

June 23, 2004: This public meeting was held to accept comment on the draft EA for the proposed improvements at the existing Lincoln Airport site. The majority of the comments and/or questions were specific items related to the proposed development. Airport operation, hangar relocation, weed management, storm water management, and land acquisition procedures were the predominant items of discussion.

March 24, 2005: This public meeting was held at the Lincoln Community Center at 7:00 p.m. on March 24, 2005 to discuss the Lincoln Airport Special Use Permit EA with the public. Four (4) members of the public were in attendance in addition to two (2) representatives from Stelling Engineers, Inc., and two (2) USFS representatives from the Lincoln Ranger District. The engineering representative presented a brief overview of the Lincoln Airport Special Use Permit EA and then asked the public for comments or questions. There were no substantive comments received pertaining to the Special Use Permit or the EA during the public meeting.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes and compares the effects of a no action alternative and the alternatives considered for the proposed action, the authorized use of National Forest lands for the operation of Lincoln Airport. It does not include development alternatives for the airport. Different development alternatives were presented and evaluated in the July 2004 Environmental Assessment for the Lincoln Airport Improvements project.

Since an EA has already been prepared for development alternatives at the Lincoln Airport, only the “Proposed Action” and “No Action” alternatives will be evaluated under this EA. Both alternatives presented in this section include a description of the alternative. A map has also been provided for the “Proposed Action” alternative in Appendix B. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public.

Alternatives

Alternative 1

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, a new Special Use Permit would not be issued by the U.S. Forest Service to the Montana Department of Transportation for use of National Forest land for the operation of Lincoln Airport. The airport would be able to continue operations through December 31, 2014, the expiration date of the existing Special Use Permit, by Amendment No. 5. Realistically, the airport would need to be closed prior to that date. Existing pavements have been rapidly deteriorating and have already exceeded their useful life. Because of the severe frost-thaw cycles in the Lincoln area, some amount of pavement failure would be expected within the next five years. Without significant repairs, the airport would become unsafe for aviation activity. The MDT Aeronautics Division does not have the financial resources necessary to maintain these pavements without Federally-funded FAA assistance. However, the FAA requires that airports obtain the necessary land interests that meet FAA requirements for a minimum of twenty years. Without the necessary land requirements throughout the twenty year period, the FAA will not support any financial assistance to the airport. At some point up to December 31, 2014, the Lincoln Airport would need to be permanently closed. Site rehabilitation requirements identified as clauses in the current permit would be executed.

Alternative 2

The Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action alternative, management plans of this administrative area would continue in a similar manner for the project area since the original Special Use Permit was issued in 1964. A new Special Use Permit would be issued by the U.S. Forest

Service to the Montana Department of Transportation for authorized use of National Forest land for the operation of Lincoln Airport for a period of 30 years. The airport will then have acquired, or have authorized use of the necessary land requirements to meet FAA standards, and the proposed reconstruction of Lincoln Airport would be eligible for Federal funding. Under this alternative, reconstruction of the airport would be performed during the summer of 2005, during which time the airport would be closed for aviation use. Upon completion of the reconstruction project, the airport would be reopened for aviation use. The only differing elements from prior conditions would be a new perimeter wildlife fence, a new runway lighting system, and tree clearing around the perimeter of the airport. The new wildlife fence would be constructed around the perimeter of the airport with the sole purpose of restricting wildlife movement across airport property. The new runway lighting system will allow for nighttime aviation operations. The lighting system will not be in operation continually through the night, but rather will only be turned on “as-needed” for take-offs and landings. The system is pilot controlled through the use of radio signals in the aircraft. Vegetation clearing would be done to meet FAA obstruction standards.

A drawing showing all of the major elements for the proposed development is included in **Appendix B**. Under the Proposed Action alternative, Lincoln Airport would be upgraded to current FAA design standards, and therefore remain eligible for funding on future projects. Future projects would most likely include pavement maintenance and the construction of a new taxiway for development on MDT owned property. No future improvements are planned or anticipated on National Forest land. .

Mitigation For The Proposed Alternative _____

Using interdisciplinary team input and in response to public comments and agency comments on the proposed development and construction of the improvements, mitigation measures were identified and would be incorporated into the Contract Documents for the Lincoln Airport Improvements project if the decision is made to authorize the proposed land use. Specific mitigation measures would include special requirements for construction in areas adjacent to the Blackfoot River and stringent storm water and erosion control measures. These items have been addressed in the July 2004 Environmental Assessment. Specific to the Proposed Action identified above, no additional mitigation requirements are proposed for the continued operation of the airport on National Forest land.

Comparison of Alternatives _____

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information provided in **Table 2** is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Table 2
Comparison of Alternatives

	<u>Alternative 1</u> <u>“No Action”</u>	<u>Alternative 2</u> <u>“Proposed Action”</u>
Noise	No Affect	No Affect
Compatible Land Use	Not Likely to Affect	No Affect
Social Impacts	Not Likely to Affect	No Affect
Induced Socioeconomic Impacts	Not Likely to Affect	No Affect
Air Quality	No Affect	No Affect
Water Quality	No Affect	No Affect
Section 4(f) and 6(f) Lands	No Affect	No Affect
Historic and Archeological Resources	No Affect	No Affect
Biotic Communities	No Affect	Not Likely to Affect
Endangered & Threatened Species	No Affect	May Affect, But Is Not Likely to Adversely Affect
Light Emissions	No Affect	May Affect, But Is Not Likely to Adversely Affect

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for comparison of alternatives presented in the chart above. The environmental consequences discussed in this section pertain exclusively to the use of National Forest land for aviation activity. Consequences related to the development of the proposed improvements were evaluated in July 2004 Environmental Assessment for the Lincoln Airport Improvements project.

Noise

Affected Environment: FAA Order 5050.4A *Airport Environmental Handbook* states that “No noise analysis is needed for proposals involving Design Group I and II airplanes on utility...Airports whose forecast operations in the period covered by the environmental assessment do not exceed 90,000 annual adjusted propeller operations...”

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. Up to that point in time, aviation operations will likely decline as the airport pavements slowly become hazardous to the aircraft and the existing facilities become unsafe for operations. As aviation operations decrease, noise levels will also decrease. Decreased noise levels may eventually effect wildlife movement in the area. As human impacts to the environment decrease, the presence of wildlife in the area would be expected to increase.

Proposed Action: The *May 2004 Master Plan* predicted that there would be approximately 3,700 annual aircraft operations at the airport by the end of the twenty year planning period, primarily from propeller driven aircraft. An aircraft operation is any aircraft movement on a runway such as a landing, a take-off, or a touch-and-go. Because the projected annual propeller operations are less than 90,000, no noise analysis was conducted for the proposed action. The FAA has found that adjusted propeller operations below this level will result in cumulative noise levels below 60 Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) more than 5,500 feet from start to takeoff roll or below 65 DNL on the runway itself. Since the proposed action does not trigger requirements for a noise analysis, it can be reasonably concluded that noise impacts from the proposed action result in a no affect determination.

Compatible Land Use

Affected Environment: With the exception of the Forest Plan for the Helena National Forest, there is currently no land use or planning document that specifically address the vicinity of the Airport. The U.S. Forest Service administers the lands of the northeast ¼ of Section 19, Township 14 north, Range 8 west, south of Highway 200. The ranger station is located just off of the highway. Most of the properties surrounding the airport and National Forest land are low density residential and/or recreation properties. These

properties are typically large in size (10+ acres) and only a few of them contain dwelling structures.

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. Since the airport was originally constructed in 1964-1965, most of the surrounding properties were developed with the airport as a primary consideration. Some adjacent landowners have even indicated that they relocated to this area because of the close proximity of the airport to their property. This statement is documented in the Minutes to the Public Meeting held on March 16, 2004 (ref. July 2004 Environmental Assessment). The no action alternative would likely cause some controversy among adjacent landowners.

Proposed Action: The compatibility of existing and planned land uses near an airport is usually associated with the extent of noise impacts related to the airport. Since the proposed facility will not produce the number of annual operations required to conduct a noise analysis, it can be concluded that there are no noise sensitive uses adjacent to the airport that would be adversely affected.

Under the Proposed Action, an Airport Influence Area ordinance will need to be enacted to establish acceptable land uses on airport property and in the immediate vicinity of the airport and to restrict specific uses that are incompatible with aviation operations at the airport. Preparation of the ordinance will involve a Public Scoping Process to determine current and future land uses around the airport. The Sponsor will be coordinating with Lewis and Clark County in the preparation and implementation of this ordinance. Land use restrictions are typically incompatible uses of land that can cause safety issues when in the proximity of airports. Because there are no known plans for the development of new noise sensitive land uses in the area, and land use restrictions are not likely to affect National Forest land, it can be reasonably concluded that compatible land use from the proposed action would result in a no affect determination.

Social Impacts

Affected Environment: The proposed action would be considered to cause social impacts if it results in the relocation of residences or businesses; substantially alters surface transportation patterns; divides or disrupts established communities; disrupts orderly, planned development; or changes area employment.

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. One of the major drawbacks of airport closure for the community of Lincoln and surrounding areas would be the loss or restrictions to air ambulance service. Presently, air ambulance service in Lincoln is provided from Great Falls and Missoula. Airport closure would require that air ambulance service find alternative landing areas for their helicopter based service.

Another important loss to the Lincoln area from airport closure would be the airports historical use as a tanker base for forest fire fighting activities. Lincoln airport has been frequently used in the past by the U.S. Forest Service as a base for forest fire fighting. The proximity to Lincoln also provides for a quick response to protect the community if needed. The no action alternative would result in a minor disruption to the community and therefore it is likely to cause adverse social impacts to the area.

Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would not cause adverse social impacts because it would not require the relocation of residences or businesses; divide or disrupt an established community; disrupt orderly, planned development; or create an appreciable change in employment in the project area.

The acquisition of approximately 15 acres of private land and the additional 14 acres of National Forest land (Special Use Permit) is necessary FAA development standards. The majority of the lands needed for the proposed improvements are undeveloped and forested. Because there will be no significant changes in this area, it can be reasonably concluded that social impacts from the proposed action would result in a no affect determination.

Induced Socioeconomic Impacts

Affected Environment: Induced socioeconomic impacts are the induced or secondary impacts on the surrounding community that result from the proposed action. The proposed action in this case results in the continued operation of Lincoln Airport. These impacts are typically measured by determining shifts in patterns of population movement, population growth, increased demands on public services (like police and fire protection and solid waste collection), and changes in business and economic activity to the extent influenced by the airport operation.

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. Because the Lincoln area is a recreational based community, airport closure would negatively impact the community. A certain number of recreationalists that frequent this area because of the airport would be lost. In addition, the potential to attract future recreationalists to this area that travel by aircraft would be gone. Although this trend would be minor in scale, the result is likely to cause adverse induced socioeconomic impacts to the area

Proposed Action: The proposed action would not cause major shifts in the patterns of population movement and growth, extensive demands for public services, or substantial changes in business or economic activity. The airport will continue to operate and service the Lincoln area. The operation of an improved aviation facility could generate additional visitors to Lincoln and the Lincoln area. Minor economic benefits would be realized within the community as the number of transient air travelers increase and make local purchases of food and lodging.

No direct relationship can be made between the proposed action at the Lincoln Airport and growth in the Lincoln area. The need to improve the airport is based on more safely serving the aircraft that use, and can be expected to use, the facility, not on attracting more use. National, regional, and State-level sources of information on future trends in aviation anticipate that aircraft activity will continue to increase over the foreseeable future. Because there will be no significant changes in this area, it can be reasonably concluded that induced socioeconomic impacts from the proposed action would result in a no affect determination.

Air Quality

Affected Environment: FAA guidance states that projected activity levels at a general aviation airport must be examined to determine if an air quality analysis is necessary in states that do not have applicable indirect source review requirements. Indirect sources of pollution are stationary sources that attract or may attract sources of pollution and indirectly cause the emission of air contaminants. Airports, highways and roads, parking facilities, and office buildings are indirect sources of air pollution. The State of Montana has no indirect source review requirements, therefore, an air quality analysis is required only if the forecasted annual operations at the airport exceed 180,000 during the twenty-year planning period.

The air quality in the Lincoln area is anecdotally thought to be good; however, no air quality studies have actually been conducted in the area. During periods of low cloud cover in the winter months, a noticeable haze hangs over the Lincoln Townsite. Wood burning heating devices and vehicles are the main sources of emissions that contribute to the haze. The haze does not appear to be a health concern at this time. The installation of newer and more efficient wood-burning devices, such as pellet stoves, would significantly reduce the wintertime accumulation of pollutants within the Townsite.

The Lincoln Airport is not in a geographic location designated by the State of Montana as either a Nonattainment or Maintenance Area for air quality under the *Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990*. Since the number of forecasted annual operations at the Lincoln Airport will not exceed 180,000 with or without the proposed improvements, there is no need to undertake a detailed air quality analysis to determine if National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) will be exceeded.

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. Up to that point in time, aviation operations will likely decline as the airport pavements slowly become hazardous to the aircraft and the existing facilities become unsafe for operations. Since the actual number of aviation operations is far below the FAA established threshold of 180,000 annual aviation operations, the no action alternative would result in a no affect determination for air quality.

Proposed Action: The proposed action is located in a relatively undeveloped area with no history of air quality problems. The number of forecasted annual operations at the Lincoln Airport will remain far below the FAA established threshold of 180,000 annual operations for general aviation airports. Considering the relatively low level of aviation activity and the type of aircraft (primarily propeller operations) using the facility, air pollutants would not exceed State or national air quality standards. Since the threshold will not be approached or exceeded, it can be concluded that there is no potential for significant air quality impacts to occur. Therefore, the proposed action would result in a no affect determination for air quality.

Water Quality

Affected Environment: Water quality impacts may occur if the proposed action results in direct discharges into surface water or infiltration into ground water that cause a

substantial degradation of water quality. Potential causes are either construction related (surface runoff, erosion and sedimentation of disturbed areas), or operations related (spills of fuel, deicing fluids, or other contaminants). Impacts are determined by evaluating the predicted levels of various water quality parameters with State water quality standards.

The Lincoln Airport is located on top of a bench along the Blackfoot River approximately one (1) mile east of Lincoln. With the Blackfoot River in such close proximity to the airport, water quality is a significant concern, primarily during construction. The primary concern following construction is the potential that fuel or oil spills associated with the operation of an airport facility could be discharged from airport property and into the Blackfoot River.

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. Up to that point in time, aviation operations will likely decline as the airport pavements slowly become hazardous to the aircraft and the existing facilities become unsafe for operations. As aviation activities decline, the potential for spills and accidents will also decline. Once the airport closes, there will be no risk of these types of accidents. Therefore, the no action alternative would result in a no affect determination for water quality.

Proposed Action: The new development that will occur under the proposed action will result in an increased amount of impervious (paved) surface area at the airport. This will, in turn, result in minor increases in storm water runoff. Drainage provisions will be included in the construction of the longer runway and taxiway to adequately handle the increase in runoff. Potential pollutants contained in storm water runoff would be attenuated by their transport and infiltration in shallow surface drainage ways along the runway and taxiway. Adequately sized culverts would be installed to convey surface water runoff as needed.

The potential for pollutants to reach the Blackfoot River are minimal. Currently there are no fueling operations or deicing operations at the airport. Even if these services were added in the future, they would be minor in scale of operations. The facilities would be located north of the runway in the area between the new fixed-wing apron and the hangar development area. This location is situated several hundred feet from the banks of the river. At the time any of these future services are provided, a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and Spill Prevention Plan would need to be prepared to ensure the continued protection of Blackfoot River and fisheries.

Based on the current preventive measures undertaken on this project and future planning there will be no affect determination on water quality impacts from the proposed action.

Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) _____

Affected Environment: *Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act states that “the Secretary shall not approve any program or project which requires the use of any publicly owned land from a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, State, or local significance or land of an historic site of national, State, or local significance as determined by the officials having jurisdiction thereof unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of such land and such*

program or project includes all possible planning to minimize harm resulting from the use.” Based on a review of land ownership and use and a cultural resource survey of the project area, it was determined that no public parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or significant historic sites would be affected by the proposed airport improvements.

Section 6(f) of the *National Land & Water Conservation Fund Act* requires that coordination be undertaken to determine if Federal funds were used to acquire or improve any lands in the project area for recreation or water conservation purposes. The National Park Service has designated the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MDFWP) as the agency responsible for administering the Land and Water Conservation Fund program at the State level in Montana.

No Action: Since there are no public parks, recreation areas, wildlife refuges or waterfowl refuges in the project area, a no affect determination is made for Section 4(f) or 6(f) lands under the no action alternative.

Proposed Action: Since the National Forest land required for the proposed action has not been deemed as a public park, recreation area, wildlife refuge or waterfowl refuge, a no affect determination is made for Section 4(f) or 6(f) lands under the proposed action alternative.

Historic & Archeological Resources

Affected Environment: The *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966* and the *Archeological And Historical Preservation Act of 1974* have been implemented to protect cultural resources. These laws specify the thresholds for cultural resource impacts that must be considered in the EA.

The *National Historic Preservation Act* requires a review of the project area to determine if any properties are on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and coordination with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). If such resources are present, the Criteria of Adverse Effect (36 CFR 800.3) must be applied to determine if the proposed action would directly or indirectly affect the characteristics of the property that qualified it for inclusion in the NRHP. Coordination with the SHPO and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) is required if an adverse effect to significant cultural resources occurs.

The *Archeological And Historical Preservation Act of 1974* provides for the survey, recovery, and preservation of significant cultural resource data when such data may be destroyed or lost due to a project with Federal involvement. The law requires the results of the cultural resource survey, if one is done, to be disclosed in the environmental document. If significant resources are present, the effects of the project on such resources must be evaluated as required by the *National Historic Preservation Act*. If significant resources are adversely affected, the Sponsor must consider modifications to avoid the loss or destruction of the resources.

A cultural resource inventory of existing airport property and property needed for the expansion was conducted in August and September 2003. A copy of the Cultural Resource Report is located the July 2004 EA. The archaeological consultant performed

the investigation on the 69.86 acres of current airport property, including National Forest land, on their original visit and returned to complete the survey on the buffer areas around the airport. No significant cultural properties were identified in the inventory. A file search of the site records at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the University of Montana's Archaeological records revealed there were no previously recorded sites within one mile of the proposed project.

No Action: Since the inventory did not identify any "significant" cultural sites and concluded that the likelihood of encountering unrecognized sites or buried cultural materials in the area was slight, it can reasonably be concluded that a no affect determination on historical or archeological sites will occur.

Proposed Action: Since the inventory did not identify any "significant" cultural sites and concluded that the likelihood of encountering unrecognized sites or buried cultural materials in the area was slight, it can reasonably be concluded that a no affect determination on historical or archeological sites will occur.

Biotic Communities

Affected Environment: Impacts on wildlife are considered to occur if the proposed action removes or substantially alters wildlife or waterfowl habitat, dislocates wildlife species, or substantially changes the use of habitat by wildlife species. Adverse effects to water resources, wetlands, sensitive plants or wildlife may also be indicative of impacts.

A Biological Resource Investigation and wetlands evaluation was conducted on existing airport property and buffer areas surrounding the airport in September 2003. A copy of the *Final Biological Resources Report for the Lincoln Airport Improvement Project (December 2004)* and the *Biological Evaluation for Threatened and Sensitive Aquatic Species (December 2004)* is available for review upon request. The project area provides habitat for a variety of birds, mammals and reptiles. Commonly observed wildlife in the vicinity of the airport include elk, deer, small mammals and a variety of birds. Vegetation in the area of the airport consists of native species typical of coniferous forestlands along the Blackfoot River. Grasses and forbs dominate within the airport fence line and Highway 200. Trees surrounding the airport fence line include large Ponderosa Pine mixed with aspen, cottonwood, lodgepole, and spruce.

Wetlands, as defined in Executive Order 11990, are lands that are either inundated with surface water or saturated with ground water for a long enough period each year to support a prevalence of vegetation or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands typically include such areas as swamps, marshes, sloughs, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats and natural ponds.

Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management, and DOT Order 5650.2, Floodplain Management and Protection, establish Federal policies to avoid taking an action within an area that would be inundated by a 100-year flood. The 100-year floodplain is the area subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year. These regulations require that every effort be made to minimize the potential risks to human safety and property damage and the adverse effects on natural and beneficial floodplain values.

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. Up to that point in time, aviation operations will likely decline as the airport pavements slowly become hazardous to the aircraft and the existing facilities become unsafe for operations. Since the airport will eventually close, very little maintenance would be anticipated, including the removal of trees. Eventually, timber would begin to fill-in and the area would be reforested. Therefore, the no action alternative would result in a no affect determination on the biotic communities.

Proposed Action: Under the proposed action, a new wildlife security fence will be installed around the perimeter of the airport property. The fencing will eliminate the possibility of wildlife entering the property and creating a hazard to air traffic. The new fence will therefore, result in a minor loss of wildlife habit in the area. Wildlife will need to negotiate travel through the area around the fenced perimeter of the airport.

The proposed action will also require tree clearing on National Forest land for the new airport development and for FAA required clear areas adjacent to runways and taxiways. Tree clearing will result in a minor loss of habitat for birds and other animals that frequent trees.

During the biological investigation of the airport, the Blackfoot River corridor, within the project area, was surveyed for wetlands. Within the river corridor, water channels are dynamic and dependent upon yearly snow accumulation, precipitation, and irrigation use. During field surveys in September 2003 water levels in the Blackfoot River corridor were extremely low. Stream flow was very slow and discontinuous, creating isolated pools of water and algae. Vegetated islands occur within the river corridor. In some places wetland vegetation extends from the bank to the middle of the channel. The fluctuation in water levels allows for emergent wetland vegetation to establish within the active channel. The results of the field investigation did not identify any wetlands on the National Forest land considered under this Special Use Permit.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has prepared flood plain maps for the Lincoln area. The 100-year flood plain is generally associated with the jurisdictional waters of the Blackfoot River. The National Forest land considered under this Special Use Permit is located on a bench outside of the limits of the 100-year flood plain. **Appendix C** shows the existing airport and proposed development in relation to the 100-year flood plain.

Considering that the Impacts to the biotic community under the proposed action will be limited to a minor loss of habitat for both birds and wildlife associated with the new fence and loss of trees; and that there are no anticipated impacts to wetlands or floodplains, the proposed action is not likely to affect biotic communities.

Endangered & Threatened Species _____

Affected Environment: The Final Biological Resources Report for Lincoln Airport Improvement Project dated December 2004 identified the following threatened or endangered species in the Lincoln area.

- Bald Eagle (Threatened)
- Gray Wolf (Threatened)
- Grizzly Bear (Threatened)
- Canada Lynx (Threatened)
- Bull Trout (Threatened)

To effectively evaluate impacts on these species from construction of the airport improvements and the continued operation of aviation activities at the airport, a *Biological Evaluation for Threatened and Sensitive Aquatic Species* and *Biological Assessment for Threatened and Endangered Terrestrial Species* were conducted. Both of these reports were finalized in December of 2004.

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. Eventually, timber would begin to fill-in and the area would be reforested. Therefore, the no action alternative would result in a no affect determination on endangered and threatened species.

Proposed Action: The conclusions arrived at in the *Biological Assessment for Threatened and Endangered Terrestrial Species* indicated a determination that the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the Bald Eagle or grizzly bear, and will have a no affect on the gray wolf and Canada lynx.

The conclusions arrived at in the *Biological Evaluation for Threatened and Sensitive Aquatic Species* indicated a determination that the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the bull trout.

Light Emissions

Affected Environment: The proposed action would have an impact if the beam angle, intensity, color, or flashing sequence of airport lighting would create an annoyance for people or wildlife in the vicinity of the airport.

No Action: The no action alternative will ultimately lead to closure of the airport and an end to aviation activities at this location in the Lincoln Area. The new runway lighting system would not be installed and eventually, the airport would cease airport operations. The existing beacon would remain in use at its current location. Therefore, the no action alternative results in a no affect determination for light emissions.

Proposed Action: The development that will occur under proposed action will include a new Medium Intensity Runway Lighting (MIRL) system along the proposed runway, and retro-reflective markers along the taxiway. Additionally, a single Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPI) would be installed on Runway 4. The existing 90-foot tall beacon will be relocated to the north, closer to the highway. The new lighting system would be pilot operated and used only during take-offs and landings. Pilots would use the radio in their aircraft to turn on the lights when needed and a timer would turn the lighting system off a preset time period later. Due to the facility's location within a dense corridor of 100-foot tall conifer trees, light emissions from aircraft strobes, headlights, or runway lights and the beacon would have a minimal effect on people or wildlife in the vicinity of the airport. Most of the residential structures near the airport are visually obscured from airport property due to the dense timber. Moving the beacon closer to U.S. Highway 200

could potentially cause issue with nighttime traffic on the highway. If this were found to be the case, shielding would be implemented to the beacon to obstruct the beacon light in the directions of concern. Considering the short amount of time that the lighting system would be in operation and the dense forage in the area, the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the environment with light emissions.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The U.S. Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

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Federal, State & Local Agencies _____

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- Murdo, D. 2004. Cultural Records Manager, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana. Letter responding to request on historical and archaeological sites near project area dated April 9, 2004.
- Steinle, A. 2004. U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena, Montana. Letter responding to concerns on the project dated May 24, 2004.
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- Wilson, M. 2004. Field Supervisor, USDI Fish & Wildlife Service, Helena, Montana. Letters responding to request for concerns on threatened and endangered species in the project area dated April 13, 2004 and June 8, 2004.

Others

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