May 7, 2019

Major Joseph T. Sundy, USAF  
National Guard Bureau  
Air National Guard Readiness Center NGB/A4AM  
3501 Fetchet Avenue  
Joint Base Andrews, Maryland 20762-5157

By US Mail and <usaf.jbanafw.ngb-a4.mbx.a4a-nepa-comments@mail.mil>

CC: US Senator Tammy Baldwin, Congressman Mark Pocan, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi, Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, Keith Freihofer-Air National Guard, Kenneth A. Westlake-Chief NEPA Implementation Section US EPA Region 5, Maria Powell MEJO and others.

Re: Environmental Assessment for Proposed Construction, Renovation and Demolition of Facilities at 115th Fighter Wing, Truax Field, Madison, Dane County, Wisconsin

Dear Major Sundy:

The Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability (CRANES Inc) has a service area that includes communities impacted by the project proposed in the April 2019 Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) regarding major demolition, construction and renovation at Truax Air National Guard (ANG). We submit the following comments:

(1) The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) prohibits separating major projects into segments.

NEPA prohibits separating major projects into segments. Therefore the scope of this EA is inadequate. The EA pre-supposes future approval of the basing of F-35A fighter jets at Truax Field which is another major military project at this same site. Meanwhile the public is still waiting for release of a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the F-35A project.

The two proposed projects are inextricably connected. In Section Five of the Draft EA, mention is made of the potential siting of F-35A jets at Truax. It lists some proposed actions in the EA that may not occur in the event that the F-35s arrive, and other construction and modifications that might happen instead.

It should be obvious that everything in this proposed project should be viewed and considered in light of the proposed future basing of F-35s at Truax. The decision to propose these 27 new construction, demolition, and renovation activities before a final decision is made regarding the F-35s would seem to greatly bias that decision.

(2) This EA fails to adequately analyze the cumulative impacts of the proposed projects as required by NEPA.
In Section Five of the Draft EA, cumulative impacts are defined as impacts “to environmental resources resulting from incremental effects of proposed actions when combined with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future projects.”

In a letter to you on March 18, 2019, Kenneth Westlake, Chief of the NEPA Implementation Section of the EPA, advised you that the EA “should describe cumulative impacts associated with the proposed F-35 beddown project that is being proposed at Truax Field.”

It does not appear that the EA makes any attempt to do this.

(3) The EA is in violation of Executive Order 12898 concerning Environmental Justice obligations of Federal agencies.

Executive Order 12898 directs Federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and/or low-income populations. The EPA letter states “Communities with environmental justice (EJ) concerns are located near Truax Field.” The EPA letter then lists numerous tools available to assist ANG in EJ analyses.

The EA ignores these tools as well as the seven detailed instructions listed by the EPA on how to address the needs of EJ communities.

Other than assertions ANG will follow pollution laws, the EA also fails to address the final paragraph from the EPA which reads: “The EA should also describe ongoing outreach planned throughout the NEPA process and project implementation. Plans to address any disproportionate adverse impacts to environmental justice communities should be included and committed to in the EA.”

Skipping all these requirements of the EO and the advice of EPA, the Air Force concluded that “populations, including minority populations and low-income populations outside the boundaries of the installation and airport, will not be significantly impacted.”

The EA ignores and mis-identifies minority and environmental justice communities impacted by the proposed action. The EA does not mention the nearby trailer park, public housing and schools. We demand that the health and well-being of these Madison residents be adequately considered by the Air National Guard in this EA. It is immoral not to consider that they daily breathe the air, endure the loud and sudden noises and must cope with the increased stormwater runoff and pollution from Truax Field.

The following list itemizes some of the nearby housing and schools where affected individuals and families live year round or attend educational facilities for part of the day

(a) The Community Development Authority (CDA) provides Public Housing for residence only in the City of Madison. Public Housing was established to provide decent and safe rental housing for eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. These properties are federally funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and administered by the Housing Operations Division.

(b) Public housing located on the Northeast side of Madison very near the Truax Airfield include: Truax Park Apartments located at the intersection of Wright Street and Straubel Street and the Wright Street Townhomes located at 1600 Wright Street.

(c) Project-Based Section 8 housing is located along Wright Street and Straubel Street. The Truax Section 8 locations consist of 24 units of family housing extensively rehabbed in 2011 through federal low-income housing tax credits awarded to the CDA by the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA).
(d) Bordering Truax Field are several K-12 Madison public schools and their attendance areas. Please note the high proportion of minority students at the nearby Hawthorne Elementary School

(e) Bordering the Truax Field at 1701 Wright Street is the Madison Area Technical College, a public technical and community college based in Madison. It serves students in parts of 12 counties in south-central Wisconsin.

(f) Bordering the airport are the following neighborhoods (listed west to east): Majestic Oaks, Berkley Oaks, Sherman, Carpenter-Ridgeway, Truax, Hawthorne, Mayfair Park and Greater Sandburg. https://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/planning/documents/Neighborhood_Associations(2).pdf

The details of housing and demographic information are publicly available from the U.S. Census and local government agencies such as the Community Development Authority and the City of Madison Department of Planning, Community & Economic Development. But they are not included in the EA.

The Air National Guard seems to be claiming that no one residing beyond the confines of the base will suffer any impacts. But this ignores the impacts of air, noise and water pollution caused by the base, which do not respect a fence border and have burdened these neighborhoods for decades. Just one example of the ANG neglect of the well-being of these residents - They are unlikely to feel protected by construction of an earthen berm southeast of the munitions storage area, listed in the EA to provide protection from aircraft artillery. Even in a best-case scenario, how will an earthen berm protect Madison residents from the steady onslaught of air, noise and water pollution that the ANG has subjected them to for decades?

(4) The EA fails to discuss current impairments of affected water bodies under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act and how the proposed actions may affect the impairment.

The EA ignores clear statements by the EPA addressing the need to fully address water quality impacts of the proposal. In a letter to you on March 18, 2019, Kenneth Westlake, Chief of the NEPA Implementation Section of the EPA, advised that the EA “should describe how the proposed action may affect water bodies listed as impaired by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act and their listing status as impaired. We recommend that this section of the document discuss current impairments, and how the proposed action may affect, either positively or detrimentally, the impairment.”

As stated in the EA (page 3-16), “The west branch of Starkweather Creek drains the area around the Dane County Regional Airport and other urbanized portions of Madison. This area of Starkweather Creek received intensive point source discharges of many different toxic substances up to the 1960s and early 1970s. Some of these discharges remain in the sediment of the creek and continue to pose problems for fish and aquatic life (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources [WDNR] 2018). These point source discharges have been managed through various programs. Both Starkweather Creek and Lake Monona are listed on the 2018 Wisconsin Impaired Waters List for multiple pollutants (WDNR 2018).”

The demolition and construction proposed in the EA will almost certainly increase the amount of PFAS and other toxins that migrate from the base into the groundwater and storm water systems and then into Starkweather Creek and Lake Monona.

The over-arching concern that we have with this EA is that it is probably an unrealistic task to accurately measure the environmental harm that may be caused by this project given that there is so little known about the damage already done by the ANG to public health and to stewardship of resources in the Starkweather Creek Watershed.

On June 22, 2018, Michael Schmoller of the Wisconsin DNR wrote to Captain Matthew Shaw of the Wisconsin ANG, in regards to PFAS detected on the base, saying “we believe you are responsible for investigating and
restoring the environment at the above-described site under Section 292.11 Wisconsin Statutes, known as the hazardous substances spill law … Your legal responsibilities are defined both in statute and in administrative codes.” and “The longer contamination is left in the environment, the farther it can spread and the more it may cost to clean up … Unless otherwise approved by DNR in writing, you must complete the work by the timeframe specified.”

But, as the State Journal reported, the ANG never responded. Toward the end of May, 2018, the State Journal noted that ‘all demands were wiped away by a DNR promise to “work cooperatively with Air National Guard staff to develop an agreeable project timeline.”’ But “nine months later there is still no timetable for Truax to take the first steps toward a cleanup by mapping each source of contamination and the spread of pollutants through groundwater that is the city’s source of drinking water.”

The most complete public documentation we citizens have is an April 22, 2019 report by the Midwest Environmental Justice Organization, Madison WI. The MEJO report listed various studies done in 2005 and 2006 that tracked stormwater runoff from Truax to Starkweather Creek, then south through two low-income communities, and on to Lake Monona. Nearly all of the stormwater runoff from Truax Field goes directly to Starkweather Creek; 38 stormwater outfalls discharge to the creek on the airport and military base alone, stated one report.

“From 1988-2012, numerous Installation Restoration Program (IRP) investigations at the Truax Air National Guard base documented extensive soil and groundwater contamination that would have entered Starkweather Creek via stormwater runoff, storm drains/ditches, and leaching of shallow groundwater into the creek,” the MEJO report noted. Among the chemicals were PCE, TCE, PCB, petroleum compounds and metals. “However, the DNR did not ask for Department of Defense investigations to assess these contaminants in creek water or sediments and approved “no further action” for the site.”

A March 2018 Truax ANG report on PFAS found that PFAS levels (PFOA and PFOS combined) in surface water samples were 569 times the EPA health advisory level. Soil PFAS levels were also extremely high in some locations near storm drains.

There is almost no toxic contaminant data relevant to understanding the impacts of stormwater discharge from known polluted sites along the creek and limited data relevant to assessing and addressing several of the contaminants that led to the creek being listed as an impaired waterway, stated MEJO.

The Air Force EA claims that Truax’s WPDES stormwater discharge permit and required Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will prevent increases in surface runoff and “improve the quality of stormwater runoff and thereby improve the quality of receiving waters.” But, as MEJO noted, the Dane County Airport and Truax joint permit does not even mention PFAS or most of the toxic contaminants known to be in soil and groundwater at the airport and base.

“There is little or no evidence that the permit and SWPPP are preventing toxic chemicals from discharging from stormwater into the creek,” MEJO charged. “In fact, there is abundant recent evidence that the section of the creek just downstream from the airport and Truax base is very toxic.” The most recent airport SWPPP report is out of date, it added, and does not include all recent findings of contamination on the airport and Truax land, itself a permit violation.

Given all this, along with other information provided in the MEJO report and newspaper accounts this year, we feel this is not a good time for the Air Force and ANG to be preparing major expansions or bringing F-35A jets into a highly toxic and dysfunctional situation. It is time for the ANG to become good neighbors and truly cooperate with local government agencies to remediate all the environmental harm it has caused to our community.
We ask that you reject this Environmental Assessment as incomplete and reject the proposed project.

Sincerely,

Gary Werner
President