

NEPA's integrated environmental planning supporting U.S. Space Force

By AFCEC Environmental Directorate

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas -- The Air Force Civil Engineer Center's National Environmental Policy Act Division is providing expertise in integrated environmental planning to support the U.S. Space Force.

The Space Force's mission is to organize, train, equip and provide forces and capabilities to the U.S. Space Command (USSPACECOM), a unified combatant command of the United States Department of Defense, responsible for military operations in outer space.

AFCEC's Environmental Directorate is playing a key role in supporting the Space Force by providing NEPA program support expertise, technical advice and assistance in execution when analyzing the potential environmental effects of USSF proposed mission requirements under NEPA. Examples of proposed actions that must be analyzed before implementing a mission include strategic basing and beddowns, major construction projects, basing new weapon systems and executing new operations within an air space.

In general, NEPA is a federal law that requires all federal agencies to apply better decision-making principles through an integrated Environmental Impact Analysis Process. EIAP is the Air Force's NEPA compliance program. During EIAP, the Air Force conducts environmental analysis on proposed missions to include identifying factors to air and water quality, noise, and endangered species, and more, as well as undertaking consultations with interested parties. Consultations include communicating with other agencies, local governments, and indigenous tribes, and conducting public hearings to allow for public comment. One such recent example includes AFCEC providing NEPA assistance with the strategic basing process for the new USSPACECOM Headquarters. The Air Force anticipates making a final decision for the location of USSPACECOM Command Headquarters in spring 2023, pending the results from the required environmental impact analysis.

Lindy McDowell, one of 10 NEPA program managers, assists with future NEPA actions and execution strategies for the six bases under the USSF and the USSPACECOM. Each year, the PMs guide Air Force MAJCOMs and installations through the NEPA Planning Programming, Budget, and Execution process. This is the annual process that serves as the framework for leaders to decide which programs and force structure requirements to fund based on the AF's strategic objectives. This year, AFCEC is working to improve

the NEPA PPBE process by providing MAJCOMs and the USSF with a more predictable funding stream for EIAP/NEPA efforts to prevent unexpected delays in mission execution.

In July 2021, the call for NEPA requirements will be included in the upcoming FY23-27 Integrated Data Call. This will embody AFCEC director Maj. Gen. John Allen's and AFCEC's push for a "Unity of Effort" with the directorate working with other AFCEC directorates and AFIMSC to identify EIAP requirements for built infrastructure, real estate, enhanced used leases, energy, and installation planning requirements.

In the U.S. Air Force's established history of taking the lead in extending the nation's defense into the "final frontier" of space, AFCEC is privileged to support the USSF, our nation's newest military branch.