

# Federal Aviation Administration

## Airports Division

### Finding of No Significant Impact For Sitka Seaplane Base

#### **Summary**

On behalf of the Federal Aviation Administration, the City and Borough of Sitka prepared the attached Final Environmental Assessment to analyze the potential environmental effects of construction and operation of a new seaplane base on Japonski Island in Sitka, Alaska. The new seaplane base would replace an existing deteriorating seaplane base that has been in operation for 65 years and is at the end of its useful life. The existing seaplane base location across Sitka Channel on Baranof Island has no potential for expansion.

The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 United States Code § 4321 et seq.); Council on Environmental Quality National Environmental Policy Act implementing regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations parts 1500 to 1508); Federal Aviation Administration Order 5050.4B, National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Instructions for Airport Actions; and Federal Aviation Administration Order 1050.1F, Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures.

After reviewing and analyzing available data and information on existing conditions and potential impacts, and the mitigation measures incorporated into the project, the Federal Aviation Administration has determined that, with the conditions contained in this document, the Proposed Action would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and the Federal Aviation Administration is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact. The Federal Aviation Administration has made this determination in accordance with applicable environmental laws and Federal Aviation Administration regulations. The Final Environmental Assessment is incorporated by reference and is attached to this Finding of No Significant Impact.

For any questions contact:

Jack Gilbertsen, Lead Environmental Protection Specialist, Federal Aviation Administration, 222 Seventh Avenue, Anchorage, AK, 99502, [jack.gilbertsen@faa.gov](mailto:jack.gilbertsen@faa.gov), (907) 271-5453.

## **Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the proposed Project is to address capacity, safety, and operational and condition deficiencies at the existing Sitka Seaplane Base. Seaplanes provide essential transportation services for Sitka residents and regional communities in Southeast Alaska where communities are scattered among a number of islands with no road access or land airports. The current base has insufficient capacity and space to accommodate current and future demand; a congested location with conflicting adjacent uses; poor, unsafe dock conditions for fueling and maneuvering on the docks; and congested sea lane and bird hazard conditions.

## **Proposed Action**

The new Sitka seaplane base would be located on a 2.02-acre parcel at the end of Seward Street on the northeast end of Japonski Island. The upland parcel where the facility is proposed would be acquired from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and is adjacent to the U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Sitka.

The marine area for the seaplane base would be acquired from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. The CBS has submitted to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources an application for conveyance of submerged and tidelands and received a preliminary approval for conveyance of tidelands adjacent to the upland parcel to accommodate seaplane floats and operations areas. The marine component of the facility would include a pile-supported trestle, a gangway, a landing float, a transient float, a based seaplane float, and, if needed, a floating wave attenuator north of the floats to attenuate waves from the main harbor entrance gap in the existing breakwater or southeast of the floats to attenuate waves from the channel to the south.

The proposed facility would include:

- Seaplane float (350 feet by 46 feet) with ramps for 14 based seaplanes (4 DE Havilland Beavers and 10 Cessna 206s)
- Transient seaplane float (220 feet by 30 feet) with capacity for four transient seaplanes (sized for DE Havilland Beavers)
- Drive-down gangway (120 feet by 16 feet) and landing float (120 feet by 46 feet) for access to seaplane floats
- Pile-supported trestle (240 feet by 16 feet) with 50-foot turn-out lane at gangway
- Wave attenuators on the north and southeast (if required)
- Vehicle parking area (15 parking spaces)
- Electricity, water, and lighting for the seaplane floats
- Covered waiting area and eventual terminal area
- Safe access between the parking positions and the water operating area
- Fuel storage and access facilities
- Upland seaplane parking areas and maneuvering room
- Seaplane haul out ramp
- Security fencing
- Landscape buffer along southern boundary
- Accommodations for future expansion, including aircraft maintenance facilities

## Alternatives

The Sitka Seaplane Base Environmental Assessment analyzed two alternatives in detail, the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the new seaplane base would not be constructed and seaplane operations in Sitka Channel would continue to be based at the deteriorated seaplane base. Seaplane operations would continue to be limited by the existing site's deteriorated facility, the lack of support services, and the bird hazards related to seafood processing facilities adjacent to the site.

The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need for the project.

Other alternative sites were evaluated but not carried forward for detailed analysis in the Environmental Assessment. These sites were primarily determined to have greater environmental effects, have more safety hazards associated with open waters and waves, or be too far from the community to be operationally feasible.

## Environmental Impacts

The potential environmental impacts from the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative were evaluated in the attached Final Environmental Assessment for the relevant environmental impact categories identified in Federal Aviation Administration Order 1050.1F. Chapter 3 of the Final Environmental Assessment describes the affected environment and regulatory setting and identifies those impact categories not analyzed in detail. Chapter 4 of the Final Environmental Assessment analyzes the potential environmental impacts and the proposed mitigation measures and documents the finding that no significant environmental impacts would result from the Proposed Action. In addition, Chapter 4 addresses the requirements of special purpose laws, regulations, and executive orders.

A summary of the documented findings for each relevant impact category, including requisite findings with respect to relevant special purpose laws, regulations, and executive orders, follows.

**Biological Resources:** Approximately 1.64 acres of Essential Fish Habitat and endangered species habitat permanently filled to expand upland site, overwater structures would affect 1.34 acres of marine waters. Direct effects to humpback whales and Steller sea lions has the potential to result in Level B (behavioral) harassment (via disturbance reactions and/or masking). Humpback whales and Steller sea lions could experience a temporary loss of suitable habitat in the Project area due to elevated noise levels associated with in-water construction causing their displacement from the area. Displacement of either mammal by noise would not be permanent and would not result long-term effects to the local population. Impacts to marine mammal prey species are expected to be minor and temporary. Mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce impacts of noise on habitat. Therefore, indirect effects on Mexico distinct population segment of humpback whales or Western distinct population segment of Steller sea lions from prey effects from the Project are not expected to be substantial. Incidental Harassment Authorizations would be required from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service for the take of marine mammals under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The Project is not anticipated to have an effect on bald or golden eagles.

Consultation in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is underway with the National Marine Fisheries Service for listed marine species.

**Hazardous Materials, Solid Waste, and Pollution Prevention:** The Proposed Action does not involve a property on the National Priorities List and hazardous waste generation is not anticipated. Construction generated solid waste is not expected to exceed available landfill capacities.

**Historical, Architectural, Archaeological, and Cultural Resources/Section 4f:** The Proposed Action would adversely affect a historic structure that is recommended as eligible to the National Register as part of the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U. S. Army Coastal Defenses National Historic Landmark. Consultation is underway in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act on appropriate mitigation to address this adverse effect. The Proposed Action would also impact an area historically used by the Tlingit and by tribal members for subsistence harvests.

**Section 4f:** The Proposed Action would result in adverse effects to an observation post located on the proposed site that is recommended as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing element to the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U. S. Army Coastal Defenses National Historic Landmark. There are no feasible and prudent alternatives to the use of the site and all appropriate planning is being conducted to address the adverse effects of the use. Consultation is underway with interested parties to determine appropriate mitigation to address this adverse effect.

**Land Use:** Undeveloped land would change to aviation use at the seaplane base. This would increase the use intensity of the land, but is consistent with the adjacent U.S. Coast Guard air base and historic military aviation use of the area. Impacts to adjacent land uses from noise and traffic are described below.

**Noise and Noise-Compatible Land Use:** Aviation use would result in more noise generated from seaplane operations and traffic but noise levels would not exceed land use compatibility standards. Adjacent land uses consist of educational, health care, and residential areas for students and faculty. These areas are currently subject to aircraft noise from seaplane takeoffs in Sitka Channel as well as aviation operations related to the state airport and U.S. Coast Guard operations on Japonski Island. Individual seaplane operations may result in noise levels that are annoying on properties adjacent to or in close proximity to Sitka Channel. There may be more of these annoying noise events as a result of the improved facilities provided with the new seaplane base. These facilities are located in the 55 to 65 decibel Day-Night Level noise contours for the seaplane departure area in the channel, and therefore are considered to be compatible land uses under the Federal Aviation Administration's land use compatibility guidelines.

Traffic would increase on Seward Avenue increasing traffic noise levels at facilities along Seward Avenue. Seaplane base generated traffic is estimated at an average of 21 one-way trips per day, with up to 136 one-way trips on the peak season peak day.

**Natural Resources and Energy Supply:** No impacts to existing infrastructure (water, sewer, electric grid) are anticipated. Sufficient capacity for utilities and fill materials.

**Socioeconomics:** The project would have positive impacts on the Sitka economy and transportation system.

**Environmental Justice:** No disproportionately high and adverse effects on protected populations.

**Children’s Health and Safety Risks:** Adjacent uses include clinical facilities for outpatient behavioral health treatment. Maximum noise levels inside clinics are unlikely to change substantially but noise annoyance may occur more often. Noise levels at the school and clinical facilities would remain within land use compatibility standards. Vehicle traffic would increase but unlikely to result in any substantial increase in safety risks.

**Visual Effects:** View from adjacent uses would change. Lowering the site elevation, buffering landscape at the cul-de-sac, and reorientation of floats to the north reduces visual impacts to adjacent uses.

**Wetlands:** Site development would result in fill of .06 acres of terrestrial wetlands, 0.17 acres of intertidal waters, and 1.47 acres of marine waters, for a total fill of 1.7 acres. A Clean Water Act Section 404 wetland fill permit would be required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prior to construction.

**Floodplains:** The Project would result in 3.03 acres of fill in the Coastal High Hazard Area and would require a Development Permit under Sitka floodplain regulations.

**Surface Waters:** Approximately 2.98 acres of Sitka Channel would be affected by the Project. Approximately 1.64 acres of fill would be placed in Sitka Channel, and approximately 1.34 acres of Sitka Channel would be affected through construction of pile-supported trestles or shaded by floating or anchored elements (wave attenuator, floats). A Section 10 Rivers and Harbors Act would be required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prior to construction and would include a U.S. Coast Guard navigation hazard review to minimize the potential for adverse effects to navigation in Sitka Channel.

Please refer to Chapter 5 for a full discussion of each of the environmental impact categories. Chapter 5 also addresses the potential for cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. The Federal Aviation Administration has determined that the Proposed Action would not result in significant cumulative impacts in any environmental impact category.

**Mitigation Measures and Environmental Commitments**

The City and Borough of Sitka has committed to the following mitigation measures and environmental commitments as part of the Proposed Action listed in this Finding of No Significant Impact.

Environmental Resource	Mitigation Measure/Environmental Commitments
<b>Biological Resources</b>	
Essential Fish Habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimize the areal extent of fill in Essential Fish Habitat to the extent practicable, especially in areas that support managed species (eelgrass).</li> <li>• Slope fill to maintain shallow water, photic zone productivity; allow for unrestricted fish migration; and provide refuge for juvenile fish.</li> <li>• Use the fewest number of pilings necessary to support the dock structure and to allow light into under-pier areas, minimizing impacts to the substrate.</li> <li>• Require aircraft to operate at sufficiently low speeds to reduce wake energy, and follow no-wake zones designated near sensitive habitats.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop operations protocols to minimize contamination from bilge waters, seaplane accidents, general maintenance, fueling, and nonpoint source contaminants from upland facilities related to vessel operations and navigation.</li> <li>• Implement practical measures to reduce, contain, and clean up petroleum spills.</li> <li>• Pile installation and removal timeframes would be negotiated with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the National Marine Fisheries Service to minimize impacts during sensitive time periods when larval and juvenile stages of Essential Fish Habitat fish species are present. Pile installation will not occur during Herring spawning periods.</li> <li>• Minimize use of impact hammer; drive piles as deep as possible with vibratory hammer and socketing prior to impact hammer use.</li> <li>• Surround pile driving areas with a silt curtain during pile driving and temporary pile removal.</li> <li>• Remove temporary piles slowly to allow sediment to slough off at or near the mudline to reduce suspended sediment and turbidity.</li> <li>• Develop BMPs to prevent or minimize contamination from seaplane fueling, general maintenance, and non-point source contaminants from upland facilities.</li> </ul>
<p>Marine Mammals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An Incidental Harassment Authorization and a finding of No Jeopardy will be obtained from the National Marine Fisheries Service for impacts to humpback whales and seals prior to any ground disturbance on the site.</li> <li>• An Incidental Harassment Authorization will be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for impacts to sea otters prior to any ground disturbance on the site.</li> <li>• Minimize fill in marine waters, do not use dredging or in-water blasting during construction or operations.</li> <li>• Use the smallest-diameter and number of piles practicable.</li> <li>• Surround pile driving areas with a silt curtain during pile driving and temporary pile removal.</li> <li>• Do not ground floats or barges at any tidal stage.</li> <li>• Require construction contractor to maintain a spill cleanup kit on-site at all times and regularly check equipment for drips or leaks.</li> <li>• Make oil spill prevention and response equipment readily available for oil or other fuel spill containment and response.</li> <li>• Implement Best Management Practices to prevent petroleum products, cement, chemicals, or other deleterious materials from entering surface waters.</li> <li>• Implement a National Marine Fisheries Service-approved marine mammal monitoring plan during construction activities. The plan would include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implement a 10-meter shutdown zone for construction-related activity when marine mammals are present. For activities that could cause acoustic injury, monitor beginning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>15 minutes prior to initiation of the activity until the activity is complete.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have Protected Species Observers (PSOs) present during pile driving and removal. Do not begin pile driving/removal until PSO gives notice to proceed.</li> <li>▪ Use pile caps (pile softening material) to minimize the noise generated during pile installation.</li> <li>▪ Use a “soft start” technique for impact pile driving with an initial set of three strikes from the impact hammer at 40 percent energy, followed by a one-minute waiting period, then two subsequent three-strike sets.</li> <li>▪ Survey the shutdown zone for marine mammal presence for 30 minutes prior to pile driving. Delay pile driving/removal until marine mammals are confirmed to have moved outside of and on a path away from the area, or until 15 minutes (for pinnipeds or small cetaceans) or 30 minutes (for large cetaceans) have elapsed since the last sighting of the marine mammal within the shutdown zone.</li> <li>▪ Implement a shutdown if a marine mammal appears likely to enter a shutdown zone.</li> <li>▪ Perform all work during daylight hours and under appropriate weather conditions to allow for visual monitoring.</li> </ul>
<p>Invasive Species</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pressure wash construction equipment to remove soil, seed, and plant material prior to moving onto or off the project site.</li> <li>● Use clean fill material, native plants, and certified native seed mixes to reduce risk of introducing invasive species.</li> <li>● Stabilize disturbed areas as soon as practicable.</li> </ul>
<p>Hazardous Materials, Solid Waste &amp; Pollution Prevention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Require construction contractor to have a Hazardous Materials Response Plan and Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures plan.</li> <li>● Manage and dispose of construction waste in accordance with all state and federal solid-waste-management laws and regulations.</li> <li>● Require contractor to stop work and immediately notify City and Borough of Sitka and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation if contaminated soil or groundwater is encountered during construction.</li> </ul>
<p>Historical, Architectural, Archaeological &amp; Cultural Resources and Section 4(f)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Execute a Memorandum of Agreement with the State Historic Preservation Officer, the National Park Service, the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, and the Sitka Historic Preservation Committee to document appropriate mitigation to resolve adverse effect on the observation post (SIT-01115) on site.</li> <li>● Lower the site elevation and use landscaping on the south side of the facility to minimize direct views of upland facility from National Historic Landmark.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate with National Park Service, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, and Mount Edgecumbe High School on blast plan to address minimization of blast impacts and monitoring.</li> <li>• Develop an Inadvertent Discovery Plan in coordination with the State Historic Preservation Officer and Sitka Tribe of Alaska with notification protocols for any discoveries.</li> <li>• Stop work if any human remains or archaeological artifacts are discovered and implement Inadvertent Discovery Plan notification process.</li> <li>• Provide archaeological and tribal monitoring for ground disturbing activities as coordinated with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska and the State Historic Preservation Officer.</li> </ul>
<b>Noise &amp; Noise-Compatible Land Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate with National Park Service, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, and Mount Edgecumbe High School on blast plan to address minimization of blast impacts and monitoring.</li> <li>• Coordinate with seaplane pilots, Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, and Mount Edgecumbe High School to develop a Fly Friendly noise minimization plan for the seaplane base.</li> </ul>
<b>Visual Impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower the site elevation and use landscaping on the south side of the facility to minimize direct views of upland facility from National Historic Landmark.</li> </ul>
<b>Water Resources</b>	
Wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 permit would be obtained prior to any disturbance of or fill in Waters of the U.S. Appropriate compensatory mitigation for wetland and marine impacts, if required, would be determined during 404 permitting.</li> </ul>
Floodplains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A development permit would be obtained from the Building Official prior to site development.</li> </ul>
Surface Waters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Section 10 permit would be obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Coast Guard prior to construction in marine waters. The U.S. Coast Guard may require lighting on the wave attenuators and floats to minimize potential navigation hazards in low light conditions.</li> <li>• Construction activities would be conducted according to the Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System General Permit for Discharges from Large and Small Construction Activities.</li> <li>• The construction contractor will be required to prepare a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan that identifies receiving waters and appropriate Best Management Practices to prevent erosion and to prevent untreated runoff from reaching nearby waterbodies during construction.</li> <li>• Any new fuel systems would have a spill prevention and response plan and oil spill cleanup supplies on site.</li> </ul>

### Conditional Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The Sitka Seaplane Base Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is conditioned upon successful completion and acquisition of the follow process approvals and permits.

<b>Approval Process/Permit</b>	<b>Legal Authority</b>	<b>Condition</b>
Incidental Harassment Authorization – NMFS	Marine Mammal Protection Act	CBS must obtain an IHA from NMFS before any construction begins.
Incidental Harassment Authorization - USFWS	Marine Mammal Protection Act	CBS must obtain an IHA from USFWS before any construction begins.
No Jeopardy Finding	Endangered Species Act, Section 7 Consultation	CBS must obtain a finding of No Jeopardy from the NMFS for listed species.
Memorandum of Agreement	National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 Consultation	CBS must complete the Section 106 consultation process and obtain a signed MOA documenting how the adverse effect on the observation post will be addressed.
		The MOA must also address inadvertent discovery of human remains and notification procedures.
Section 404 Permit	Clean Water Act	The CBS must obtain a Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prior to any fill in Waters of the U.S.
Section 401 Water Quality Certificate	Clean Water Act	The CBS must obtain a Section 401 certificate from the State Department of Environmental Conservation prior to any fill in Waters of the U.S.
Section 10 Permit	Rivers and Harbors Act	The CBS must obtain a Section 10 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (with review from the U.S. Coast Guard) prior to any construction in or over Sitka Channel.

**Federal Finding and Approval:**

I have carefully and thoroughly considered the facts contained in the attached EA. Based on that information, I find the proposed Federal Action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives of Section 101(a) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). I also find that proposed Federal Action with the environmental commitments and required

mitigation referenced above will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or include a condition requiring any consultation pursuant to Section 102(2) (C) of NEPA. As a result, FAA will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for this action.

Signed,

Kristi A. Warden  
Director  
FAA Alaskan Region, Airports Division