



JOINT BASE LEWIS-McCHORD

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JBLM removes helicopter landing zones from consideration

JOINT BASE LEWIS-McCHORD, Wash. – Proposed helicopter landing zones (HLZs) identified in the June 2015 Northwest Aviation Operations Off-Base Helicopter Training Areas Scoping Document have been removed from consideration, and will not be included in any follow-up environmental assessment.

After analyzing the 2,350 public and private stakeholder comments received during the scoping document's extended public comment period, JBLM leadership took this step.

Analysis of potential helicopter training areas and HLZs elsewhere in the state to support JBLM's requirements is still underway. The assessment is for helicopter landing zones only: Soldiers would not disembark from the aircraft to conducting training. No timeline has been set for the ongoing assessment, which is under review by base leadership.

The initial July 1-30, 2015 comment period was extended twice to Nov. 4, 2015 so residents displaced by Eastern Washington wildfires could review the document and submit their comments. The Army used this input to more narrowly define potential sites for helicopter training areas and HLZs in the state.

JBLM initiated this National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) action because its on-base training areas cannot adequately support aviation training requirements due to restrictions on how many helicopters can safely operate in these areas and scheduling conflicts with other range users. Since JBLM doesn't have dedicated off-base training areas and HLZs, this training must take place at local municipal airports or, when weather conditions permit, at the larger Yakima Training Center (YTC) in Eastern Washington.

Approximately 140 Active Duty, Guard and Reserve MH/UH-60 Blackhawk, AH-64 Apache and MH/CH-47 Chinook helicopters are based at JBLM.

Background information:

The 2015 scoping document identified JBLM's need for a local mountain training area where aircrews can conduct high-altitude training. Currently, aircrews must travel out-of-state to conduct this training. The scoping document also identified three potential areas in Southwest Washington for low-level helicopter training.

This helicopter training shortfall is significant because JBLM aviators require areas and HLZs where they can conduct rigorous, realistic and comprehensive training. Military aircrews must attain and maintain strict flight proficiency requirements to ensure their readiness for short-notice, worldwide deployments. Although JBLM helicopter aircrew can conduct aerial training statewide, they can only practice approach, takeoff and landing procedures at JBLM, YTC and local municipal airports. This restriction concentrates training in a relatively small area near built up population centers, which increases training's impact on residents of these areas. Creating off-base training areas and HLZs away from built up areas would allow aviators to train with less impact on local airports and communities.

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