

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**  
**Joint Unmanned Systems Testing in Collaborative Environment**  
**(Project JUSTICE)**  
**Multiple Sites, Mississippi**

**NAME OF ACTION**

The continued and proposed research, development, test, evaluation, and training (project activities) of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate Joint Unmanned Systems Testing in Collaborative Environment (Project JUSTICE) at Mississippi State University (MSU) Raspet Flight Center in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi (MS); Camp Shelby, Perry County, MS; and Singing River Island, Pascagoula County, MS.

**BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION**

DHS S&T has developed and administers Project JUSTICE UAS mission-related testing and evaluation activities. Project JUSTICE supports homeland security operations and training by providing UAS flight and exercise support facilities needed for the research, development, test, evaluation, and training (project activities) of UAS in a variety of applications and scenarios.

Under the Proposed Action, DHS would continue implementing Project JUSTICE activities at Camp Shelby and proposed new UAS project activities at MSU Raspet and Singing River Island. The Proposed Action is expected to continue through 2021, with an option for extension through 2024.

Project JUSTICE training exercises may include both UAS and small UAS (sUAS). The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) uses the term sUAS to categorize UAS weighing less than 55 pounds at takeoff and conducting non-recreational operations. Project JUSTICE activities may also involve UAS up to, but not exceeding, 100 pounds.

Project JUSTICE may test and evaluate both fixed wing and rotary aircraft. UAS may be launched remotely or with human assistance (such as propelling a fixed-wing UAS into the air). All UAS are powered by on-board batteries and are flown manually and in the line-of-sight of the operator. UAS are not operated autonomously (i.e., controlled by artificial intelligence software). Project JUSTICE includes a maritime search and rescue program, implemented at Singing River Island. Project JUSTICE maritime search and rescue exercises would not limit, disrupt, or otherwise interfere with commercial or recreational boating in any way, because they occur close to shore and outside of navigation channels. As warranted, maritime exercises are coordinated in advance of all Project JUSTICE project activities with cooperation from the U.S. Coast Guard.

A total of 12 Project JUSTICE test events are planned to occur each year, with one exercise typically occurring each calendar month of the year at one of the three locations. Concurrent project activities at two or more locations are not planned. Each training event lasts less than five consecutive days. All project activities are conducted during weekdays and during daylight hours. Approximately 10-20 participants attend each event, typically with 6-8 participants from each participating organization (MSU, DHS and other government agencies, and UAS vendors).

The maximum altitude that UAS fly during Project JUSTICE activities is highly variable and primarily depends on the type of UAS being tested and the location of the operation. To date, the maximum

altitude observed during Project JUSTICE activities is 400-feet above ground level (AGL). However, altitudes up to 6,000-feet AGL are accessible/attainable if needed for Project JUSTICE UAS evaluation operations.

Project JUSTICE test and evaluation scenarios have been developed in conjunction with MSU Raspet Flight Research Laboratory to research, develop, test, and evaluate third-party vendor UAS.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

DHS did not identify any reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Action. DHS did consider the No Action alternative, under which Project JUSTICE activities would cease. Under this alternative, DHS would not have an established program to effectively test UAS under specified controlled, conditions. Thus, the No Action alternative does not meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action.

## **ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

According to the analysis in the accompanying EA, referenced herein in its entirety, implementation of the Proposed Action would result in no significant environmental impacts of an adverse nature in any resource category, in particular: human health and safety; airspace management, biological resources, water resources, or cultural resources. Other than having a minor beneficial impact on socioeconomics through continued expenditures on testing programs, implementing the Proposed Action would not significantly affect existing conditions at any of the three Project JUSTICE test locations.

## **IMPACT MINIMIZATION MEASURES**

Under Project JUSTICE, UAS undergo research, development, test, evaluation, and training activities. These project activities are continuously evaluated and reviewed for compliance with applicable environmental regulations, including airspace. Wildlife avoidance measures have been and continue to be performed at the Project JUSTICE test areas at all three locations where native wildlife is present. Additionally, at all three locations, measures used to ensure that potential adverse impacts remain insignificant include implementing existing pre-flight checklists to prevent impacts to avian wildlife, maintaining flight altitudes consistent with FAA requirements, and maintaining control of UAS through line-of-sight operations.

## **STAKEHOLDERS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The EA has been coordinated with appropriate stakeholders, including local, state, and federal agencies, and Native American Tribes, having an interest in the Proposed Action. Additionally, a Notice of Availability (NOA) was published on March 5, 2021, in the *Clarion-Ledger*, a daily print newspaper with circulation throughout Mississippi, announcing the availability of the Draft EA and opportunity to provide input about the Proposed Action during the subsequent 30-day comment period. DHS S&T also provided written letters to stakeholders and elected officials notifying them of the opportunity to review the EA and provide input during the same 30-day comment period. No comments on the Draft EA were received during the review period. The final EA was issued without further revision.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

The EA for this project was prepared according to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] 4321 *et seq.*); the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] §§1500-1508); DHS Directive 023-01 Revision 01, Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (October 31, 2014); DHS Instruction Manual 023-01-01 Revision 01 (November 6, 2014); and other pertinent environmental statutes, regulations, and compliance requirements. The analyses described in the EA demonstrate that the Proposed Action would result in no significant impact on the environment. As a result, no additional analysis or documentation (i.e., Environmental Impact Statement) is required under NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) or CEQ's Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA

(40 CFR §§1500-1508). DHS S&T would continue to utilize all practical means to minimize or avoid the potential for adverse impacts to the human and natural environment.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the information presented in the EA, the undersigned finds that the Proposed Federal Action is consistent with the existing national environmental policies and objectives as set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), and that it will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

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