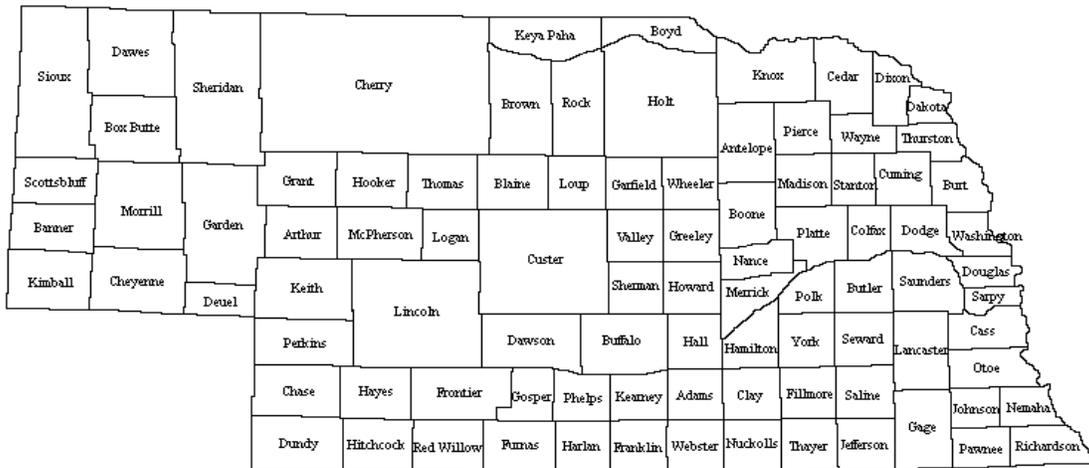


# Environmental Assessment

For

## Greeley County, Nebraska

### Public Safety Communications



*October, 2008*



**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESMENT  
for  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITY**

**GREELEY COUNTY, NEBRASKA**

**REGION 26 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
PO BOX B  
Taylor, NE 68879**

and

**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS)/  
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA)-  
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**October, 2008**

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## **SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND**

### ***1.1 INTRODUCTION***

Funding for this project was awarded to the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)-Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Homeland Security Grant Program – State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP), which is currently administered by FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate (GPD). The project was authorized by the Region 26 Emergency Management who received funding in the amount of \$105,000 from the 2006 SHSGP for communications.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500 through 1508), and DHS Management Directive 5100.1, FEMA must fully understand and consider the environmental consequences of actions proposed for federal funding.

### ***1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED***

It is Region 26 EM's objective to have complete radio coverage throughout Greeley County. In a large portion of Greeley County there are issues related to the loss of radio coverage at this time. Consequently, there is a need to ensure that the public safety telecommunication infrastructure is capable of providing and maintaining radio coverage, especially during an emergency event. Therefore, the specific need addressed in this proposal is that of providing sufficient system capability to achieve radio coverage throughout Greeley County.

## **SECTION TWO: ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS**

The following alternatives were considered to address the need for radio coverage in all of Greeley County: the No Action alternative; Renting space on existing cell tower and further use of existing Region 26 Tower; (Proposed Action); Construction of new 300ft Communications tower for full coverage of Greeley county.

### ***2.1 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND DISMISSED***

Purchasing an existing tower was not an option as there were no towers available to purchase. It was considered to rent space on an existing cell tower however we would not have been able to place our equipment high enough on the tower to have adequate radio coverage. Therefore, this alternative was dropped from further consideration. The existing tower that we use now is only 180ft and not adequate for consistent coverage throughout the county.

## **2.2 ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Under the No Action alternative, Region 26 public safety radio communications system would not receive a radio coverage upgrade. The current coverage is very unreliable and uneven over the entire county of Greeley. Consequently, the risk of coverage loss during an emergency event would continue to jeopardize command control, rescue, or event analysis operations.

## **2.3 ALTERNATIVE 2 - CONSTRUCTION OF TELECOMMUNICATION FACILITY AT GREELEY COUNTY SITE (PROPOSED ACTION)**

The proposed project site is located in Greeley County, approximately 5.5 miles north of Greeley, Nebraska. The site is in section 12, Township 19N, Range 11W, in Greeley County Nebraska. The property is owned by Robert Ita. An aerial photo of the current site was obtained from the Greeley County Assessor's Office and located in attachment 1. Region 26 EM has analyzed the proposed construction of telecommunication infrastructure at the Greeley County site, including a 300-foot tower with 3 guy wires, antennas, cabling, fencing, an equipment shelter, a backup generator, and associated electronic equipment, to provide needed radio coverage to its existing public safety radio communications system. Region 26 EM determined that the proposed Greeley County tower project would successfully address radio coverage issues.

The ROHN 65G – Equilateral triangular pattern with either steel pipe or solid steel legs, and tubular or angle steel cross bracing with bolted construction. The cross bracing is angular solid tubing and is welded to the legs. The sections are hot-dipped galvanized after fabrication. The triangular size is 2ft across each face of the tower. This tower is tailored to specifically meet and adequately handle the equipment to be installed.

The tower would include Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) lighting and a 10ft x 16ft pre-fabricated Thermo Bond equipment shelter would also be located at the site.

The tower and equipment would be located within a chain link fence compound, located on a presently non irrigated cropland, which had no growing crops in 2007. The facility would be accessed by a driveway, constructed by the county employees. Traffic to and from the site would be limited to maintenance activities.

## **2.4 ALTERNATIVE 3 – TOWER SITES**

Purchasing an existing tower was not an option as there were no towers available to purchase. It was considered to rent space on an existing cell tower however we would not have been able to place our equipment high enough on the tower to have adequate radio coverage, this option also would not be cost effective as the rent would have put a strain on Region 26 Emergency

Management. Therefore, this alternative was dropped from further consideration. The existing tower that we use now is only 180ft and not adequate for consistent coverage throughout the county and the tower is not easily accessible for maintenance and repair. Therefore, this alternative was also dropped from further consideration.

## SECTION THREE: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND IMPACTS

### 3.1 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The following table summarizes the potential impacts of the Proposed Action Alternative, and identifies conditions or mitigation measures to minimize those impacts, where appropriate. Following the summary table, each environmental area is treated in greater detail.

Affected Environment	Impacts	Mitigation
Soils	Construction activities may cause some disturbance, but effects to soils would be minor and temporary.	Storm water BMP during construction
Seismicity		NBBC Standards Required.
Water Resources & Water Quality	No surface water, no effects to ground water.	
Floodplain Management		Action is not located in a floodplain.
Air Quality	Construction equipment may temporarily affect air quality; however, no long-term impacts are anticipated.	Measures to limit emission of fugitive dust, including watering down of construction areas.
Wetlands		Action is not located in or near wetlands.
Threatened and Endangered Species		No adverse effects anticipated.
Migratory Birds	Potential adverse impacts.	Using white / red strobe lights, less likely to attract birds
Zoning and Land Use		No adverse effects anticipated.
Noise		Construction activities may temporarily increase noise levels; however, no long-term effects are anticipated.
Environmental Justice		No adverse effects anticipated.
Farmland		Activity is not located on prime or unique farmland.

Cultural Resources

No adverse effects anticipated.

If historic or archaeological materials are discovered during construction, all ground disturbing activities shall cease and FEMA/NeHSHPO will be notified.

### **3.1.1 Geology, Seismicity and Soils**

Executive Order 12699 (Seismic Safety of Federal and Federally Assisted or Regulated New Building Construction) applies as this is a federally assisted project. The proposed equipment shelter as designed by Thermo Bond Buildings meets or exceeds seismic code requirements for the project location.

The project site is located at elevation 2274' NGVD in an area of rolling hills. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service (SCS) Soil Survey of Greeley County, Nebraska, issued in January 2008, there are two predominant soil types present at the proposed tower site. The western third consists of 55% Hersh and 45% Gates, 17 to 30 percent slope. The remainder of the site is Gates silt loam, 6 to 11 percent slopes, eroded. A copy of the SCS map and soil classification descriptions can be found in the attachment 2.

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) (P.L. 97-98, Sec. 1539-1549; 7 U.S.C. 4201, et seq.), which states that federal agencies must "minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the unnecessary conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses," was considered in this EA. Prime farmland is characterized as land with the best physical and chemical characteristics for the production of food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops (USDA, 1989). Prime farmland is either used for food or fiber crops or is available for those crops; it is not urban, built-up land, or water areas. The proposed project site has not been farmed and has been used as a storage place for hay bales. The proposed project site does not contain prime or unique farmland.

No Action Alternative - Under the No Action alternative, no impacts to seismicity, geology, or soils would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, no impacts to seismicity or geology are anticipated. Construction activities could cause short-term impacts to soils. Appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be used during the construction phase. The proposed site does not contain prime or unique farmland.

### **3.1.2 Water Resources and Water Quality**

Water resources at the site were investigated as part of the Environmental Assessment. The project site lies above the High Plains Aquifer, according to the USGS map of the topography of Greeley County. The nearest monitored water body is Cedar Creek, which flows northeast approximately 7 miles north of the proposed project site. A search by the Lower Loup Natural Resources District

found no Federal wells however a private well was found within 1 mile.

A letter from Lower Loup Natural Resource District states that there shouldn't be a substantial effect to the aquifer as long as construction doesn't intersect the water-bearing formation. As per a phone conversation on October 9, 2008 the High Plains aquifer is greater than 150ft beneath ground level and the greatest depth in construction is 10ft. (Attachment 3)

No Action Alternative - Under the No Action alternative, no impacts to surface or ground water resources would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, potential impacts to surface or ground water resources would be minimal, due to the type of activity and the small size of the project area (less than 5 acres). A National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit is not necessary for this project.

### **3.1.3 Floodplain Management (Executive Order 11988)**

Executive Order (EO) 11988 (Floodplain Management) requires federal agencies to take action to minimize occupancy and modification of the floodplain. Specifically, EO 11988 prohibits federal agencies from funding construction in the 100-year floodplain unless there are no practicable alternatives.

Greeley County opted not to do a Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) after they did a preliminary report. At the request of Region 26 Emergency Manager had Rasmussen Land Surveying did a preliminary survey in June 2008. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 in a phone conversation with the owner Steve Rasmussen, he stated there would be no problem with flooding at the projected tower site.

### **3.1.4 Air Quality**

The Clean Air Act requires the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. The Act established two types of national air quality standards: primary standards set limits to protect public health, including the health of "sensitive" populations such as asthmatics, children, and the elderly, and secondary standards set limits to protect public welfare, including protection against decreased visibility, damage to animals, crops, vegetation and buildings. The current criteria pollutants are: Carbon Monoxide (CO), Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), Lead (Pb), Particulate Matter (PM<sub>10</sub>), and Sulfur Dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>).

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action alternative, there would be no impacts to air quality because no construction would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, there could be short-term minor impacts to air quality during the construction phase due to heavy equipment use. Measures would be taken to limit emission of fugitive dust, including watering down of construction areas. No long-term impacts to air quality are anticipated.

## **3.2 BIOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT**

### **3.2.1 Terrestrial and Aquatic Environment**

The proposed project site is currently non irrigated cropland. The property is not being farmed, and areas immediately adjacent to the proposed tower site are farmed and next to a state highway. Therefore, the area is considered to have limited value for wildlife species

A formal request was submitted to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) to determine if the proposed project will impact any state Wilderness Areas or Wildlife Preserves .

In a letter received by email, dated October 1, 2008 (Attachment 4), was received from NGPC, which says the project will not impact any park areas or wildlife management as there are none located in the area. They did advise to use pulsating white lights at night as they are less likely to attract migrating birds, however we will be following the Federal Aviation Administration regulations and have dual lights with medium intensity using red at night and white during the day.

No Action Alternative - Under the No Action alternative, no impacts to terrestrial or aquatic environments would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, to use a red strobe light in the night time hours and white strobe lights during day hours per FAA regulations. The tower will be next to the Nebraska Highway 281, however, using the red light at night will not affect the vision of drivers.

### **3.2.2 Wetlands (Executive Order 11990)**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regulates the discharge of dredged or filled material into waters of the U.S., including wetlands, pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Additionally, Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands) requires federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, adverse impact of wetlands.

A formal request was sent to the USACE Omaha District to determine if the proposed project would impact any known wetlands. In a response letter dated November 13, 2008 (Attachment 5), the US Army Corps of Engineers has stated the project will not involve a regulated discharge of fill material. Therefore, the activity is not subject to Department of the Army regulatory authorities and no permit pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act is required from the U.S. Army Corp for the proposed tower project. No Action Alternative - Under the No Action alternative, no impacts to wetlands would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, no impacts to wetlands are anticipated, because the proposed project site is not located in or near a wetland.

### **3.2.3 Threatened and Endangered Species**

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, the project area was evaluated for the potential occurrences of federally listed threatened and endangered species. The ESA requires any federal agency that funds, authorizes, or carries out an action to ensure that their action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species (including plant species) or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitats (FEMA 1996).

A formal request was submitted to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) and Fish and Wildlife Service to determine if the proposed project will impact any state-listed threatened or endangered species. A response letter, dated October 1, 2008 (Attachment 4), was received from NGPC, which says the project is not likely to adversely affect state-listed threatened or endangered species. Also a letter dated September 25, 2008 (Attachment 6), was received from Fish and Wildlife Service stating the same.

No Action Alternative - Under the No Action alternative, no impacts to threatened or endangered species would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, no impacts to threatened or endangered species are anticipated.

### **3.2.4 Migratory Birds**

Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, taking, killing or possessing migratory birds is unlawful. Migratory birds are a federal trust resource that the USFWS is authorized to protect, and the Service has put forth recommendations for communication tower design and height to mitigate collision-related mortality. We have been advised by the US Fish and Wildlife that it is now a requirement to have diverters on guy wires to prevent migratory birds from flying into the wires or tower.

No Action Alternative - Under the No Action alternative, no impacts to migratory birds would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, tower design and location would mitigate collision-related bird mortality. The tower would have the white/red pulsating combination per the suggestion of the NGPC according to the FAA regulations. Sensitive bird habitats are not present in the project area and the tower would not be located in a flyway area however as per Fish and Wildlife requirements we will be installing diverters according to specification.

## **3.3 SOCIOECONOMICS**

### **3.3.1 Zoning and Land Use**

The project is located in the zoning jurisdiction of the county of Greeley, however, it is considered an "essential service" and have received approval from zoning.

(Attachment 7)

### **3.3.2 Noise**

Noise is generally defined as unwanted sound. Sound is most commonly measured in decibels (dB) on the A-weighted scale, which is the scale most similar to the range of sounds that the human ear can hear. The Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) is an average measure of sound. The DNL descriptor is accepted by federal agencies as a standard for estimating sound impacts and establishing guidelines for compatible land uses. EPA guidelines, and those of many other federal agencies, state that outdoor sound levels in excess of 55 dB DNL are “normally unacceptable” for noise-sensitive land uses such as residences, schools, or hospitals. A letter dated October 7, 2008 from the Loup Basin Public Health Department states that they perceive no health risks and have no knowledge of any significant impacts on public health. The letter also states the new tower will far outweigh the minimal noise that could occur during construction and after the tower has been placed in Greeley County. (Attachment 8)

No Action Alternative - Under the No Action alternative, no impacts to noise would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, temporary short-term increases in noise levels are anticipated due to construction activities and the use of heavy equipment. The proposed project does not readily create noise, except for exterior HVAC equipment cooling units for the shelter and occasional backup power generator activation, which is located over ½ mile from any residence or public areas. There do not appear to be any noise sensitive land uses within the area of potential effect.

### **3.3.3 Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)**

Executive Order 12898 (Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations) mandates that federal agencies identify and address, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no disproportionately high and adverse effects on minority or low-income populations. All populations could potentially be adversely affected by a loss of radio coverage during an emergency.

Proposed Action – Under the Proposed Action, no disproportionately high and adverse impacts on minority or low-income populations are anticipated. The radio coverage upgrade would benefit all populations by improving communication related to public safety.

## **3.4 CULTURAL RESOURCES**

In addition to review under NEPA, consideration of impacts to cultural resources

is mandated under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), as amended, and implemented by 36 CFR Part 800. Requirements include identification of significant historic properties that may be impacted by the Proposed Action. Historic properties are defined as archaeological sites, standing structures, or other historic resources listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

As defined in 36 CFR Part 800.16(d), the Area of Potential Effect (APE), "is the geographic area or areas within which an undertaking may directly or indirectly cause changes in the character or use of historic properties, if such properties exist."

### **3.4.1 Historic and Archaeological Resources**

The Nebraska State Historical Society (NeSHS), in a letter dated October 14, 2007, determined that construction of a telecommunications facility does not contain recorded historic resources and will not require a survey. It also states that the tower will have not effect for archaeological, architectural, or historic properties. (Attachment 9)

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, no impacts to cultural resources are anticipated. If historic or archaeological materials are discovered during construction, all ground disturbing activities shall cease and FEMA/NSHS will be notified.

### **3.4.2 Indian Coordination and Religious Sites**

Section 106 of the NHPA requires consultation with Federally-recognized Indian tribes who may have potential cultural interests in the project area, and acknowledges that tribes may have interests in geographic locations other than their seat of government. Letters were sent to four tribes requesting their opinion on the project area. The names of the tribes are as follows: Santee Sioux Nation, Winnebago Tribal Council, Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, Omaha Tribe of Nebraska. (Attachment 10) No responses were received from any of the tribes.

No Action Alternative - Under the No Action Alternative, no impacts to Indian religious or archaeological sites would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative - Under the Proposed Action, no impacts to Indian religious or archaeological sites are anticipated.

## **SECTION FOUR: CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

Cumulative impacts are those effects on the environment that result from the incremental effect of an action when added to past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (federal or nonfederal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

There are no known on-going or planned projects in the vicinity of the proposed

project site. Therefore, no cumulative impacts are anticipated.

## **SECTION FIVE: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

A Public Hearing regarding the proposed project will be advertised in the October 9, 2008 edition of the Greeley Citizen, Greeley County legal newspaper. The Greeley County Board of Commissioners, Greeley County Emergency Manager and the Greeley County Sheriff Office have had discussions at various meetings including the regular commissioners meetings, Region 26 Council and Region 26 Communications Board concerning the building of the tower, which were all advertised meetings with the agenda available at the clerks office. There has been meetings with Mike Jeffres CIO of Nebraska Department of Communications, Loup Valley Mutual Aid, NEMA and with the board of commissioners, Greeley County Emergency, Greeley County Sheriff and the Chief dispatcher for the county and Region in which it was decided to build one 300 foot tower in which to cover Greeley County. The State of Nebraska would put there equipment on for service in Nebraska for the state wide communications system. There was no opposition from the residents who attended, and the Commissioners voted unanimously in favor of permitting the telecommunication facility to be constructed. Region 26 Emergency Management will notify the public of the availability of the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) through the publication of a public notice in a local newspaper dated October 9, 2008.

## **SECTION SIX: MITIGATION MEASURES AND PERMITS**

In accordance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations, the applicant would be responsible for acquiring any necessary permits prior to commencing construction at the proposed project site, including any that might be required by the FAA.

Region 26 Emergency Management applied for building the communications tower with the FAA, approval was granted June 13, 2008, stating there would not be a hazard to air navigation. (Attachment 11) The project requires a building permit from Greeley County, which was received on June 13, 2008.

As previously mentioned, under the Proposed Action, the tower will be built in accordance to all FAA regulations and conditions.

## **SECTION SEVEN: CONSULTATIONS AND REFERENCES**

The following agencies and organizations were contacted and asked to comment on the proposed project. Responses received are included in Appendix A.

- Greeley Planning and Zoning
- Loup Basin Public Health District
- Nebraska State Historical Society
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

- Federal Aviation Administration
- Natural Resource District
- Natural Resource Conservation Service at Greeley, Nebraska

## **SECTION EIGHT: CONCLUSION**

No impacts to geology, floodplains, wetlands, socioeconomic resources, environmental justice, or cultural resources are anticipated under the Proposed Action. During the construction period, there are potential short-term and minor impacts to soils, surface water, air quality, and noise. All short-term impacts require conditions to minimize and mitigate impacts to the proposed project site and surrounding areas. The proposed 300-foot telecommunications tower could have potential adverse impacts on migratory birds. However, the tower's location outside of sensitive habitats and flyways would mitigate collision-related bird mortality.

The new system set up on the 300 foot communications tower would be a great asset to the residents of Greeley County in the event of an emergency. Fire fighters, rescue squad and the sheriff's department would be able to communicate with each other in almost every point of the county.

This tower is also part of the North Central Region's Plan for interoperability in connecting all of the surrounding counties communications for mutual aid.

There will be room on the tower for the State of Nebraska to place their equipment as part of the state plan.

## **SECTION NINE: LIST OF PREPARERS AND ATTACHEMNTS**

This EA was prepared by Alma Beland, Region 26 Emergency Manager and Linda Lewis Emergency Manager Deputy.

Attachments are as follows:

1. Greeley County Assessor – Aerial map of tower site
2. Natural Resource Soil Services – Soil map and classification
3. Lower Loup Natural Resources District - Letter
4. Nebraska Game and Parks - Letter
5. US Army Corps of Engineers - Letter
6. US Fish & Wildlife Approval - Letter
7. City / County Planning & Zoning – Special Use Permit
8. Loup Basin Public Health Department - Letter
9. State of NE Historical Society - Letter
10. Tribal Letters
11. Federal Aviation Administration - Letter

Additional Documents Attached

12. Risk Assessment
13. Soil Map
14. AD 1006 Form
15. Statement of Work
16. NEPA Checklist
17. Color photo of site
18. Color photo of site