



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS 341st MISSILE WING (AFGSC)**

22 OCT 2020

Mr. John W. Hale, PE
Deputy Base Civil Engineer, 341st Civil Engineer Squadron
39 78th Street North
Malmstrom AFB, MT 59402-7536

Broadwater County Development Corporation
P.O. Box 698, Townsend, MT 59644

Dear Sir or Madam,

The purpose of this letter is to give you an opportunity to review and comment on a proposed action in which the Broadwater County Development Corporation may have an interest pursuant to NEPA, CEQ regs, 32 CFR 989. The United States Air Force (USAF), in cooperation with the National Guard Bureau (NGB), Montana Army National Guard (MTARNG), and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the potential environmental consequences associated with the USAF proposal to construct and operate a new helicopter aerial gunnery range within the MTARNG Limestone Hills Training Area (LHTA), Montana. An associated element of the proposed action is to establish restricted airspace over the LHTA to allow for the implementation of the proposed action. The LHTA is located approximately 33 miles southeast of Helena and 82 miles south of Great Falls, Montana. Attached is a vicinity map of Malmstrom AFB and LHTA.

The USAF proposes to construct and operate the new LHTA aerial gunnery range to meet training mission requirements for the 40th Helicopter Squadron (40 HS), the 341st Missile Wing Security Forces Squadron (341 SFS), and Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC). A key requirement is that the new range must be located within one (1) flight duty period¹ of the squadron's home station. Attached is a map showing proposed flight routes between Malmstrom AFB and LHTA as well as Helena for refueling. Flights between Helena and LHTA would be within the military overflight awareness area recognized in the 2014 Joint Land Use Study². This EA will, as required by laws and regulations, consider the potential environmental impacts of this proposed action.³

The site of the proposed USAF aerial gunnery training range would be in an existing ground-based live fire military training area within the boundaries of the LHTA. The 40 HS would train using UH-1N (Twin Huey) helicopters and the MH-139 (Grey Wolf) helicopter airframe when acquired. Live-fire operations for the AFGSC would include up to 80 sorties per year (individual aerial gunnery practice runs), resulting in up to 320,000 rounds fired per year. The range would be used for both day and night training. All firing would be contained within a weapons danger zone within the existing live fire training boundary.

¹ A Flight Duty Period begins when the aircrew reports for flying duties and ends when the aircrew lands and shuts down the aircraft; it is a maximum of 12 hours for rotary wing aircraft without auto flight control system (AFI 11-202V3_AFGM2018-01, *General Flight Rules*).

² The 2014 Joint Land Use Study was a cooperative land use planning effort involving local communities, state and federal agencies, property owners and the Montana National Guard to develop and implement strategies for reducing the impacts of incompatible activities on the community and military operations.

³ National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 [42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.]; Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508; and Air Force Instruction (AFI) 32-7061, Environmental Impact Analysis Process (32 CFR Part 989).

DETER...ASSURE...STRIKE!



2 OCT 2020

Once annually, Malmstrom AFB would schedule integrated training by the 40 HS and 341 SFS. The training exercise would include off-base convoy movement of up to 15 vehicles (mix of Humvees, BearCat armored personnel carriers, and general-purpose vehicles) on existing roads between the AFB and the LHTA with helicopter overflight surveillance while enroute. While at the LHTA, the convoy would use existing local roads, park along a designated portion of roadway, and training exercises would include tactical communication between the aircrew and SFS personnel as well as ground-based dry-fire training; no live-fire training would occur.

Once completed, the proposed USAF aerial gunnery range also would be utilized for day and night training by the MTARNG, who operates the LHTA. The MTARNG already uses the military overflight awareness area when flying helicopters between their base in Helena and the LHTA for training without aerial gunnery and would use the same flight paths to and from the LHTA for the live fire aerial gunnery training. It is estimated that MTARNG aircrews would conduct up to 80 sorties per year using UH-60 (Black Hawk) and CH-47 (Chinook) helicopter airframes, resulting in up to 300,000 rounds fired per year.

We invite you to submit any comments that you believe would assist us in developing the EA. In order to give your comments, concerns, and suggestions full consideration, we would appreciate receiving your response within 30 days of receipt of this letter.

Written comments should be addressed to Mr. Rob Brown, NEPA Program Manager, 341 CES/CENPL, 39 78th Street North, Malmstrom AFB, MT 59402-7536, or e-mailed to robert.brown.124@us.af.mil. Mr. Brown can be reached at (406) 731-7099 if you have any questions or need additional information pertaining to this correspondence.

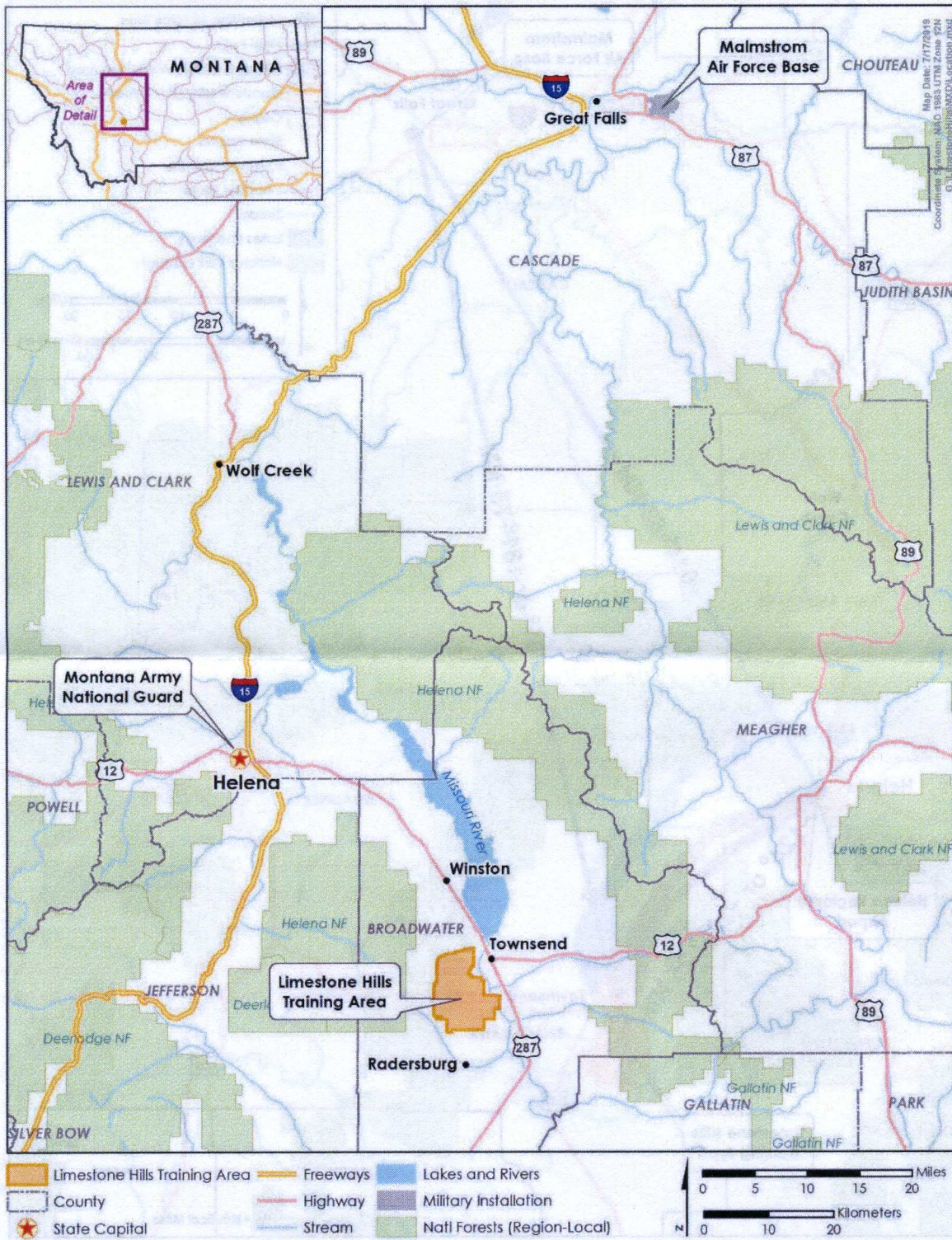
Sincerely,

HALE.JOHN. Digitally signed by
W.1006835933 HALE.JOHN.W.1006835933
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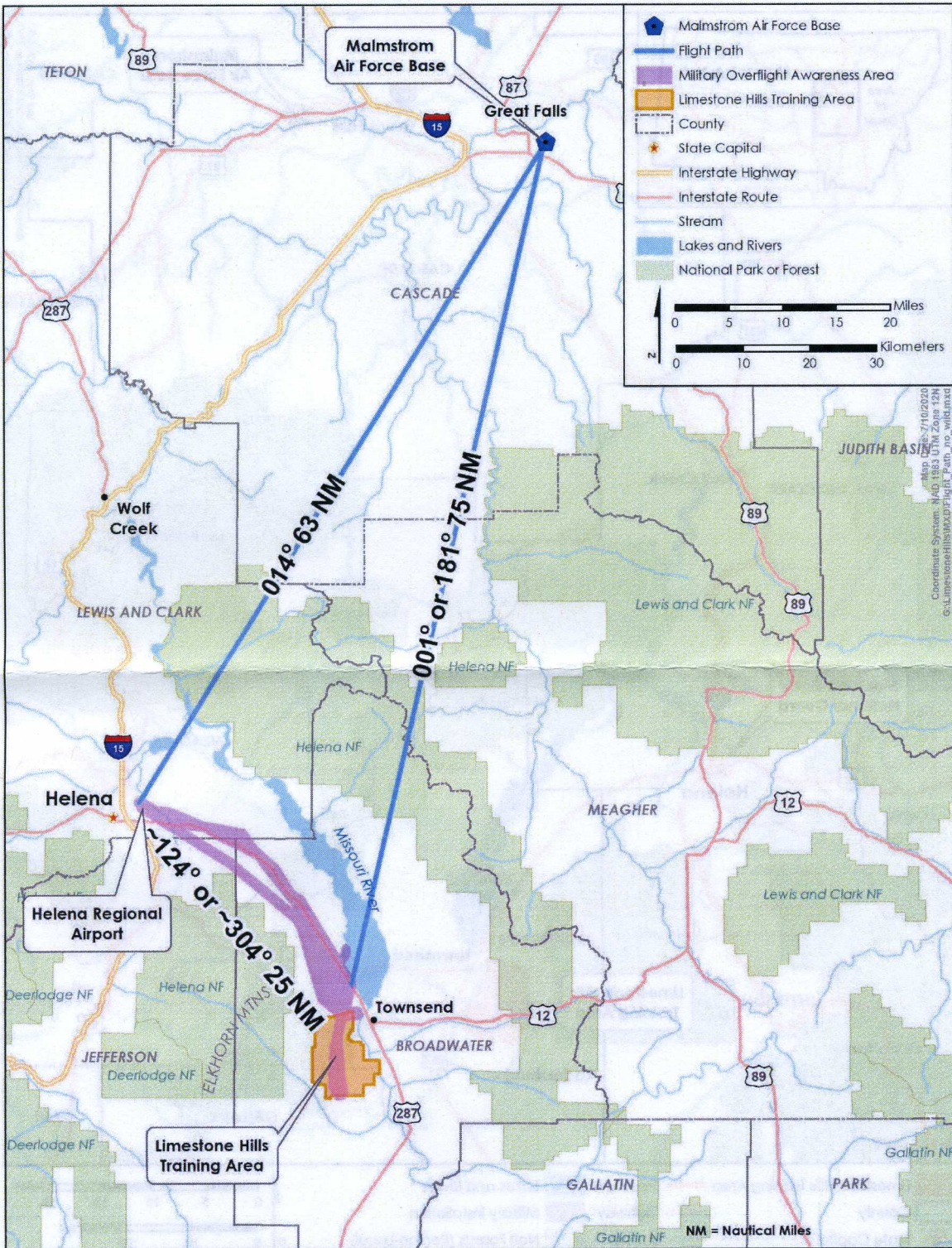
JOHN W. HALE, P.E., Deputy Base Civil
Engineer, 341st Civil Engineer Squadron

Attachments:

1. Vicinity Map
2. Flight Route Map



Vicinity Map for Malmstrom AFB and Limestone Hills Training Area



Proposed Helicopter Flight Paths to and from LHTA