



# United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
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## **UNAVCO GPS Station Right-of-Way Authorization** Determination of NEPA Adequacy, DOI-BLM-AK-A010-2013-0020-DNA

Case File, AA-93532

### **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

#### **Background**

The Plate Boundary Observatory (PBO) is the geodetic component of EarthScope, operated by UNAVCO, Inc. and funded by the National Science Foundation. PBO has a network of 1,100 permanent, continuously operating Global Positioning System (GPS) stations, many of which provide data in real-time. EarthScope provides a foundation for applied research throughout the United States that will contribute to the mitigation of risks from geological hazards, the development of natural resources, and the public's understanding of the dynamic Earth.

One of UNAVCO's GPS stations, "Site AC44," is located on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) lands withdrawn for military purposes. At this particular site, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages all surface natural resources for non-military uses. The BLM has responsibility for reviewing and authorizing all activities proposed for non-military purposes with concurrence from the military. Site AC44 was authorized by the U.S. Department of the Army in July 2008 (Army License No. DACA85-3-08-00067). However, the site has never been authorized by the BLM.

In February 2013, UNAVCO applied to the BLM Anchorage Field Office for a right-of-way authorization for Site AC44.

In summer 2012, the BLM Anchorage Field Office prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating the authorization of four communication site application requests at JBER as well as to use that document as the basis for analysis for future similar communication site proposals on JBER (DOI-BLM-AK-A010-2012-0013-EA).

In June 2013, the BLM Anchorage Field Office prepared a Determination of NEPA Adequacy and concluded that the 2012 EA adequately addresses UNAVCO's proposed action. However, although the UNAVCO request is essentially similar to an alternative evaluated in the 2012 EA, Site AC44 was not specifically a feature of the selected alternative in the August 2012 decision. Therefore, the BLM must evaluate the UNAVCO request for significance (BLM 2008a).

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

This action and its effects have been evaluated consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for determining *significance*. Per 40 CFR § 1508.27, a determination of *significance* requires consideration of both context and intensity. The former refers to the relative context in which the action would occur such as society as a whole, affected region, affected interests, etc. The latter refers to the severity of the impact.

### *Context*

The Proposed Action is located in an undeveloped area but on an active military base in an urban setting. The scope of the action, approval of one existing facility, is limited in context.

### *Intensity*

#### *1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The Environmental Assessment (EA) discloses both adverse and beneficial impacts for the alternatives analyzed. The total footprint of the Site AC44 GPS station is less than 1,000 sq. ft. Although the site has introduced a man-made structure in an undeveloped area, the GPS station is relatively low-profile (less than five feet in height compared to some cellular towers that are more than 80 feet tall) and the station is being used to gather data that may increase our understanding of geologic hazards.

#### *2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.*

Public health and safety was not identified as an issue for consideration in either the 2008 or 2012 EAs nor was it identified as a new issue for Site AC44 (2012 EA, p. 6).

#### *3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

No park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas are present at Site AC44 (partially addressed on p. 6 of the 2012 EA). The BLM Archaeologist has determined that the Proposed Action would have no effect on historic properties (see Section 106 clearance in case file).

#### *4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The 2012 EA was made available for public review prior to this Finding of No Significant Impact and the Decision Record. No public comments were received. No known controversy exists concerning the proposed communication sites. The proposed authorization is consistent with or identical to the existing UNAVCO GPS station on Farewell Mountain, existing communication sites currently present on JBER, and other seismic monitoring sites on BLM-managed lands in Alaska (for example, see DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2012-0032-EA and DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2013-0022-DNA).

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The installation and/or construction of communication sites is a common practice at JBER, across the State of Alaska, as well as nationally (EA, p. 2 and see additional NEPA references provided in item #4). There is neither uncertainty nor unknown risks associated with communication sites at this scale. Additionally, similar to the response for intensity factor #4, no public comments were received concerning uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

Similar to the response for intensity factor #5, the installation and/or construction of communication sites is a common practice at JBER (EA, p. 2). Additionally, as described in the DNA, UNAVCO has other GPS stations installed in Alaska and other entities have similar seismic monitoring/communication stations installed on BLM-managed lands. Therefore, this Proposed Action does not establish precedent nor represent a decision in principle for future authorizations.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

Overall, the potential cumulative effects resulting from the Proposed Action is limited. The total disturbance footprint is less than 1,000 sq. ft. At this scale, and with the implementation of best management practices, the Proposed Action would not contribute any measurable increment to cumulative effects resources at JBER (EA, pp. 15-19).

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

The BLM Archaeologist has determined that, “While the area is located on Fort Richardson, which contains many historic properties, the tower was located in an area over one-half mile from any known historic properties, and... therefore would not have an adverse effect on these cultural resources,” (see Section 106 clearance in case file).

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

Based on currently available information, the Proposed Action would not affect any threatened or endangered species or their habitats (EA, p. 6).

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The Proposed Action does not threaten to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements.

## Conclusion

Therefore, on the basis of the information contained in the 2008 EA, 2012 EA and the 2013 DNA (BLM 2008b, BLM 2012, BLM 2013, respectively), and all other information available to me, it is my determination that:

1. None of the environmental effects identified meet the definition of significance as defined by context and intensity considerations at 40 CFR § 1508.27;
2. The alternatives are in conformance with the ROD for the Ring of Fire Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (2008); and
3. The Proposed Action and alternatives do not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment.

Therefore, neither an Environmental Impact Statement nor a supplement to the existing EA is necessary and neither will be prepared.

*/s/ Alan Bittner*

August 6, 2013

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Alan Bittner  
Anchorage Field Manager

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Date

## References

BLM 2013. DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2013-0022-DNA. Alaska Energy Authority – Seismic Monitoring Site (Deadman Mountain) Determination of NEPA Adequacy. FONSI and Decision Record signed July 15, 2013. (Case File: AA-093598).

BLM 2012. DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2012-0032-EA. Alaska Energy Authority – Seismic Monitoring Site Environmental Assessment. FONSI and Decision Record signed September 11, 2012. (Case File: AA-093348).

BLM 2008a. BLM National Environmental Policy Handbook (NEPA), H-1790-1. Released January 30, 2008.

BLM 2008b. Continuous Global Positioning System Station, UNAVCO, Inc., Plate Boundary Observatory Environmental Assessment, AK-010-08-EA-033. Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record signed June 16, 2008.

## Attachments

Determination of NEPA Adequacy, DOI-BLM-AK-A010-2013-0020-DNA