

INSTALLATION MISSION GROWTH

Community Profile

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Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), Florida

Community Contact

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Community at a Glance

Growth Management Organization (GMO):

Tri-County focus, led by the Eglin Installation Growth Committee, with 10 separate subcommittees; Okaloosa County Board of Commissioners is lead agency

Geographic area affected by military installation growth:

Jurisdictions within Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton Counties in Northwest Florida

Regional Population of affected area:

2008, Okaloosa County, 197,597; 2007, Santa Rosa County, 150,523; 2009, Walton County, 53,000

Top growth challenges:

- Transportation
- Housing
- Public Utilities/Infrastructure
- Land Use
- Economic Impacts and Job Creation

Outstanding requirements in support of mission growth:

Project Category	# of Projects	Sum of Project Cost	Sum of Funding Gap
Transportation	12	\$2,475,078,424	\$2,424,978,424
Water and Sewer	2	\$28,000,000	0
Totals:	14	\$2,503,078,424	\$2,424,978,424

Mission Growth at a Glance

Growth Action: Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC)

Personnel Baseline and Growth Projection:

	Baseline (January 2005)	Build-out Projection (FY 2015)
Military Personnel	8,424	12,770
Dependents	15,125	21,551
Civilian Personnel	5,551	5,581
Contractors	4,510	4,660

Source: Eglin Final Environmental Impact Statement, October 2008

Growth Factors affecting community planning: Lack of available alternate transportation corridors; lack of adequate rental housing to meet demand of incoming BRAC personnel who are projected to be unaccompanied married soldiers; potential lack of critical infrastructure in identified growth areas; heavy deployment tempo for new Army unit relocating to the area and affect on the families.

Background

Military growth related to the BRAC 2005 decisions at Eglin AFB looks to have a profound effect on Northwest Florida. Two of those decisions, the creation of the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Initial Joint Training Site (IJTS) and relocation of the U.S. Army's 7th Special Forces Group, Airborne, (7 SFG) from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, stands to have far-reaching impacts on this area. Of specific concern is the tri-county area of Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton Counties and their local jurisdictions. As shown in Figure 1, Eglin AFB occupies significant lands in this area, with Okaloosa County virtually bisected by the Eglin reservation. The remaining two counties are also significantly land-impacted by Eglin.

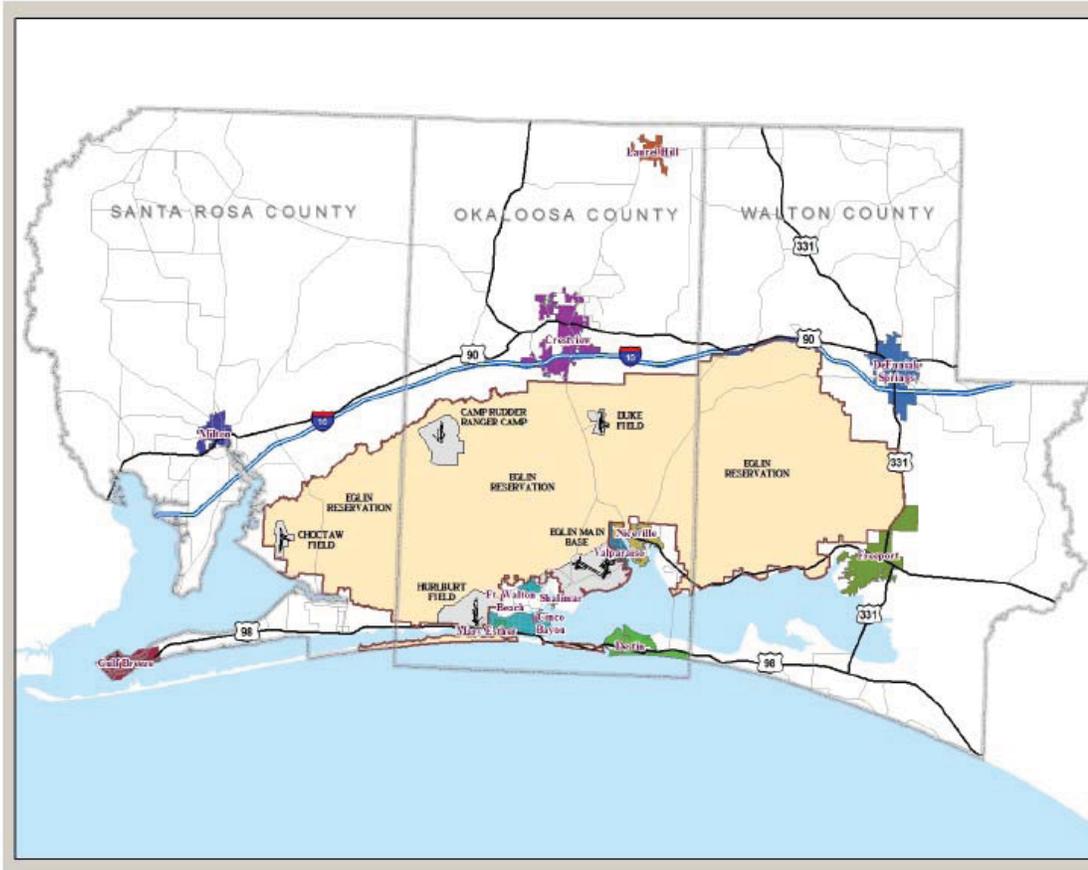


Figure 1: Eglin AFB in the Tri-County Area

The military is the predominant factor in the foundation of these three counties' economy. A recent study by the Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development at the University of West Florida said "at build out in 2015, the staffing changes and BRAC realignments will result in increased economic activity (Gross Regional Product) of \$451.3 million and increased sales (output) of \$287.7 million fixed 2000 dollars¹. Eglin AFB has a military economic impact of approximately \$1.54 billion annually. The addition of the new JSF IJTS and relocation of the 7 SFG will bring nearly 11,000 new personnel to the tri-county area in a relatively short period of time.

The Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) engaged with Okaloosa County leadership shortly before the BRAC 2005 announcements, as Eglin AFB had already self-nominated for a Joint Land Use Study (JLUS). County officials took the lead on two separate but complimentary study efforts to assist the local communities: a JLUS and a comprehensive

¹ Haas, 2007

Growth Management Plan (GMP). Okaloosa County serves as executive agent and OEA grantee for these studies and is supported by formal resolutions of support from every jurisdiction in the tri-county area.

The JLUS was started in April 2007 under the direction of the JLUS Policy Committee, comprised of elected officials from every affected local jurisdiction, citizen representatives, and leadership from Eglin AFB. The committee is chaired by the Chairman of the Okaloosa County Commission. The committee, while spearheaded by Okaloosa County, was open to participation from affected jurisdictions in the tri-county area. In addition to the Policy Committee, a Technical Advisory Group was formed that included the professional staff members of applicable functional areas of local government (planning, transportation, etc.), similar functional experts from Eglin AFB, and interested citizen representatives. The Technical Advisory Group was in essence the working staff that coordinated with the selected consulting firm, the Growth Project Coordinator (GPC), and the Policy Committee. The JLUS was completed in August 2009 and will be an integral part of the GMP. Actions are underway now to formulate an implementation strategy using the same basic organizational structure the JLUS used.

The GMP was started in June 2008 under the direction of the Eglin Installation Growth Committee (EIGC) to address military growth concerns related to the BRAC 2005 decisions at Eglin AFB. Like the JLUS Policy committee, the EIGC is composed of representatives from Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton Counties. The EIGC is governed by a 12-member Executive Committee chaired by a member of the Okaloosa County Board of Commissioners. Ten subcommittees operate under the Executive Committee:

- Transportation
- Housing
- Public Utilities/Infrastructure
- Land Use
- Economic Impacts and Job Creation
- Public Safety and Emergency Services
- Health and Social Services
- Education
- Quality of Life
- Environmental Concerns

Each subcommittee has a chairman, vice chairman, and secretary, plus other members as needed from the community and Eglin AFB. The GMP is scheduled for completion in May 2010, with a draft GMP due out in late 2009 for public review and comment. Management of both processes comes from the GPC, a full-time Okaloosa County employee who reports directly to the EIGC Executive Committee, funded by OEA.

The community takes an extremely active role in efforts to support and promote the military in this area. The State of Florida created the Committee for a Sustainable Emerald Coast (CSEC), a four-county (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton), 25-member panel charged with identifying growth issues until 2030. An overarching theme in the group's planning was the maintenance and sustainability of a viable Eglin AFB now and into the future. The subcommittee members of the EIGC were thoroughly integrated with the established working groups of the CSEC to better inform them of the work done by this group in advance of the formal start of the GMP process.

The JLUS provided over 20 recommendations, not all applicable to each jurisdiction, but many focusing on land use issues and approaches to remedy sometimes long-standing incompatibilities. It also identifies areas of low-level flight activity related to Eglin and its missions that need to be further studied so the appropriate growth controls can be enacted in these critical pathways.

The GMP has provided local communities with an Atlas of Existing Conditions, the first deliverable in the planning process, which provides an in-depth look at the current inventory of local infrastructure, schools, medical care and facilities, etc., and uses that as a baseline for future planning and analysis.

Other studies and analyses used in the conduct of the JLUS and GMP include the Eglin AFB Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ) study; the Eglin AFB Range Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (RAICUZ) study, the Eglin AFB FEIS Record of Decision (ROD) for the BRAC impacts at the installation; local community Comprehensive

Plans and Land Development Codes, Transportation Master Plans, Capital Improvement Plans, and Parks and Recreation Master Plans.

Implementation and Partnering Strategies

Transportation

The map on page 2 (Figure 1), highlights the most significant challenge for the area – transportation. For Okaloosa County, there is only one major north-south artery that serves our residents, State Route (SR) 85. In addition to serving the population for access to both the north and south areas of the county, it is the main hurricane evacuation route, and is also used by those that flee during less severe storms affecting the coastal areas. The stand-up of the JSF IJTS, while of concern, is not as critical due to the drawn-out nature of the organization's start, which is aligned with delivery of new airplanes from the manufacturer. The arrival of the 7 SFG is a more pressing concern, as they must be in place and operational by September 2011.

A completely new operating location (cantonment area) is being constructed for 7 SFG as part of the BRAC Military Construction (MILCON) program and is located four miles due west of Duke Field on the Eglin reservation. Primary access to the site is via SR 85. Additional vehicle trips generated by the influx of additional Army personnel will reduce the Level of Service (LOS) calculation on SR 85 from its current "C" to an "F," which creates additional negative impacts on the ability for growth to occur in northern Okaloosa County. In essence, at LOS F, virtually no new permits can be issued for new building activity, either commercial or residential.

It was originally thought that most of the soldiers and their families would choose to live in the northern community of Crestview. More recent interactions with the soldiers indicate they may be attracted to areas in the south not originally thought to be attractive, as well as areas in the adjoining counties (Santa Rosa and Walton) which provide greater choices to live in a truly rural area. Additionally, both Santa Rosa and Walton Counties are experiencing similar transportation issues. SR 87 is the major north-south artery in Santa Rosa County and U.S. Highway 331 (US 331) is the major north-south artery in Walton County. While SR 85 is a 4-lane road, only portions of SR 87 and US 331 have been widened to four lanes. Initiatives continue in those counties to widen those roads to a minimum of four lanes throughout.

East-west travel is also a concern. In the southern end of all three counties lies US 98, which provides direct access to Hurlburt Field in Okaloosa County. It is also the only road that provides direct access to the Gulf of Mexico and the beaches, which are a main component of the tourist industry in the tri-county area. It is also the only main artery that provides access to Hurlburt Field by personnel living west of the installation in Santa Rosa County. Any traffic incident on US 98 has the ability to tie up traffic for miles, taking hours to clear.

Strategies are still being developed as part of the GMP. Local jurisdictions continue to work issues as do the local and regional Transportation Planning Organizations. The Mid Bay Bridge Authority has begun the first of a three-phase project to provide a connector road to take the traffic out of urban areas and funnel it to the bridge that provides instant access to the Destin area.

The Northwest Florida Transportation Corridor Authority was founded to study and formulate a strategy to address the myriad challenges with US 98. Okaloosa County just submitted a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant to provide for multimodal capacity improvements along the SR 85 corridor. There are twelve projects identified in the OEA Project Needs Assessment including the 7 SFG Overpass at Duke Field/SR 85 intersection, which is an extremely high priority. The community is seeking funding through the TIGER and Defense Access Road programs.

Housing

Another major growth impact is housing, although the devalued market has helped ease this problem to some degree. One of the main concerns is the availability of adequate rentals, both single and multi-family, to meet the needs of

incoming 7 SFG soldiers and their families. Discussion with Army representatives is leading local officials to believe that some of the married soldiers will opt to leave their families in the Fort Bragg area and come to Eglin AFB unaccompanied, rather than uproot the family. As a result, more of these geographically-separated soldiers will most likely be seeking housing on the rental market, rather than buying another single family home.

The population of the 7 SFG is more senior in rank and time in service, and some believe these soldiers would rather come to Eglin unaccompanied, even for a number of years, than uproot their families. A heavy deployment tempo adds to this decision. It is very difficult for the area to plan for the increase created by the 7 SFG because the final population will not be determined until September 2010. It is believed that either through sales of existing housing stock, or local builders' ability to react with new construction in a timely manner, the market will be able to accommodate most of the 7 SFG's housing needs. However, the GMP currently underway will define growth corridors in various parts of the tri-county area that will be recommended for development to meet the remaining BRAC need.

Public Utilities and Infrastructure

The personnel migration, in conjunction with the mission growth, creates challenges for public utilities and infrastructure, especially in the rural areas of the tri-county area. Once growth corridors are defined, there may be limited utilities and/or infrastructure available in those areas. This is especially true in areas served by small, independent water districts with limited excess capacity to adapt to an increased need. Additionally, most of the rural areas do not have sewer service; rather they depend on individual septic tanks. Urban areas are dealing with aging infrastructure and the need to retrofit existing systems to meet current and projected needs based on development and redevelopment plans.

Interface continues between local jurisdictions, individual utility providers, and Eglin AFB to address the infrastructure issues. The 7 SFG force main project is fully funded through BRAC MILCON and the new force main and supporting infrastructure for the 7 SFG cantonment is currently underway by the Okaloosa County Water and Sewer Department.

Economic Impacts and Job Creation

Economic impacts and job creation, particularly spousal employment, is a major concern. Initial demographic data from the 7 SFG indicates a majority of the military spouses work. The challenge is identifying their current skill sets and determining the needs of the Eglin AFB area in order to absorb this new talent pool. Further, if the military spouses' skills do not align with the needs of the local Eglin community, programs need to be put in place to help with retraining so the relocating spouses can be competitive in our local job market. The same holds true for relocating Department of the Army employed spouses, who have difficulties transitioning into Department of the Air Force openings due to the differences in service-specific civilian personnel rules.

The Workforce Development Board (WDB) of Okaloosa and Walton Counties has created the BRAC Families Transition Council to address military spouse employment and relocation issues. WDB also has a Business Competitiveness Council that focuses on the ability to implement retraining programs to relocating military spouses. The WDB received funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the State of Florida to help pay for emerging training needs.

Public Safety and Emergency Services

The concerns in this area stem from ensuring the correct level of services for the current population, as well as the influx of new BRAC-affiliated personnel, especially in the current economy that continues to see local governments struggle with providing the funding sufficient to cover those needs. In the tri-county area, fire protection is provided by independent fire control districts that are funded by local millage applied to a property owner's total annual tax bill. Some local districts have attempted to raise their millage rate and thus their available revenue, only to be denied by the voters in the district they serve. Therefore, local entities are faced with possible staff layoffs to meet budget shortfalls. Their hope is that with the new personnel coming to the area, additional revenues can be raised via new tax dollars. Also of concern is adequate capacity in the local correctional facility, which is operated by Okaloosa County Department of Corrections.

Jurisdiction is another issue being discussed. Eglin AFB is a large land mass in the middle of the tri-county area. There are occasions when local vs. Air Force jurisdiction comes into play, as Eglin also has a Range Patrol with sworn, civilian law enforcement personnel that provide security on the 464,000 acre reservation. Local law enforcement agencies and Eglin AFB security forces personnel continue to discuss this issue.

Health and Social Services

Providing for the health care and social service needs of the incoming BRAC personnel continues to be a priority issue for local and Eglin AFB leaders. This is especially true considering the operations tempo of the 7 SFG and the potential need to provide long-term care for wounded warriors returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. While Eglin AFB deploys large numbers of personnel to support the effort, having an active Special Forces unit in the area will potentially present new challenges in health care for soldiers, as well as their families, due to the traumatic stress that normally results from combat death and injuries suffered from frequent deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Local hospitals have already begun preparations for the increase in population that will result from BRAC growth. Fort Walton Beach Medical Center continues to work on upgrading its trauma certification level, providing extra measures of care for the benefit of everyone in our area. The medical center is also working closely with Eglin AFB medical personnel to provide trauma training so that they will be better prepared for future needs.

The North Okaloosa Medical Center will break ground shortly on a new 40-bed hospital expansion, bringing their total to 150 beds in the primary hospital serving northern Okaloosa County. They have also recently completed the addition of another surgical suite and have fully upgraded their cardiac catheterization lab to meet projected future needs.

Eglin Hospital continues its upgrades, having just recently completed a full facility renovation. The addition of a Veterans Administration (VA) Clinic immediately adjacent to Eglin Hospital has helped provide care for the large veteran population in the area. Additionally, Congressional interest in building a new wing on the Eglin Hospital to expand VA healthcare offerings continues through Congress and the VA.

Education

Another major concern of the relocating 7 SFG personnel is the education of their children. The Okaloosa County School System consistently ranks as the best public school system in the State of Florida, with neighboring Santa Rosa and Walton Schools also placing high in the state's rankings. With its innovative program, Community High: Okaloosa Institutes for Career Education (CHOICE), Okaloosa County has completely revamped career technical education, transforming it from the vocational/technical education of old, to a business-focused system of institutes designed around local workforce needs. It has been so successful that the Florida Legislature recently enacted a law that requires replication of the CHOICE model in every school system in the state. Also of concern is meeting the post-secondary education needs for active duty personnel.

Many of the education concerns are being addressed through the WDB BRAC Families Transition Council that has representation from the three county school systems. Special program needs are being vetted through this organization. The identification of additional strategies to address these needs will be identified in the GMP. The CHOICE Program continues unparalleled success in using career-education as a resource to prepare students for entering the local workforce or continuing on in their pursuit of higher education. Funding for individual CHOICE institutes is always a concern. Overall school system funding, based on actual student population count, is a concern due to the timing of 7 SFG children's arrival in relation to the specified count days as mandated by the state. Many existing schools are approaching 40+ years in age and are more costly to maintain and upgrade. Some new schools have been built in all three systems.

Quality of Life

The Emerald Coast boasts some of the whitest beaches found anywhere, and are a magnet for tourists from around the world. There are a wide range of recreational activities to be found, from golf, to boating and other water-related activities, to hiking and camping, hunting, and more. Though hot and humid in the summer, the area's moderate climate during the fall, winter, and spring make it an ideal spot for year-round activity. Eglin AFB is working its

MILCON program to provide upgraded and additional fitness facilities to meet the anticipated demand with BRAC growth. The local community has seen a recent increase in commercial fitness facilities. Local communities fund and maintain public parks and other recreation infrastructure as best as they can given current economic realities. Two new Child Development Centers are also in Eglin's MILCON program, which will help meet current and future needs. However, the local community may need to meet the increased demand for child care, depending on the locations in which the new BRAC families eventually settle. The local communities continue to provide facilities and infrastructure as budgets allow.

Environmental Concerns

Many of the environmental concerns come from the impact of the new military missions. The JLUS has preliminarily identified areas that could ultimately be severely impacted by jet noise from the new F-35 JSF. Potential new construction to support BRAC growth, in now-rural areas, could adversely impact wetlands, wildlife habitat, etc., if not properly managed. Any time additional people are introduced to an area, there is a potential to adversely impact the environment.

The JLUS has recommended a series of Small Area Studies of the mostly rural areas which are the low-level flight corridors providing ingress and egress to the Eglin AFB reservation. The anticipated outcome of these studies will be a series of development measures that will limit, if not eliminate, any adverse impact to the environment. Additionally, the JLUS has also recommended further noise abatement studies to provide a strategy for retrofitting public and private structures against aircraft noise. County officials anticipate additional strategies in the GMP.

Eglin AFB has been very successful in working with The Nature Conservancy, using available funding from the Florida Forever Program as well as DoD's Resource Environmental Protection Initiative dollars to provide encroachment buffering around the Eglin reservation. Naval Station Whiting Field, in Santa Rosa County, has had tremendous success using its 2003 JLUS as the foundation for seeking similar funding for buffer lands around that installation.

Successes/Lessons Learned

Successful completion of a JLUS depends on the availability of relevant data and continued communication with all parties involved – the military installation and the local affected communities. Completing the JLUS using JSF data derived from the Air Force's FEIS activities proved to be a challenge at times due to the timing of the JLUS effort vs. the FEIS effort. Maintaining constant dialogue is critical.

Continued dialogue with affected local communities is required to ensure successful completion of BRAC growth planning initiatives. Local communities are constantly changing to meet increased demands for services. Capturing that information for the purposes of BRAC-related studies requires constant cross-talk to ensure the most current and relevant data is available. The same logic applies to the military installation that is affected by BRAC growth as community documents and processes may differ with military ones in regard to managing growth.

Advertising public meetings in support of BRAC planning initiatives is mandatory. In spite of great efforts to get the word out, turnout for meetings are most often small and be mainly populated with opponents, not supporters, to the plan.