

Military Facilities—Airspace Impact in the Gulf of Mexico and the SIS

Background

Florida law (339.64 F.S.) requires that Florida's SIS Strategic Plan be updated at least every five years, with the current update to be adopted by early 2010. This update will include:

- A comprehensive review of SIS goals, objectives and policies;
- Development of strategies to make SIS implementation more effective;
- Update and clarification, as needed, of the criteria and thresholds used to designate SIS facilities; and
- Update and clarification, as deemed appropriate, to existing SIS Strategic Plan implementation guidance and other supporting documents.

Leadership Committee, at first meeting on January 26-27, asked about Gulf of Mexico airspace and the implication of reconfiguration of this airspace for SIS airports in the region.

Current initiative in respect to reviewing airspace impacts in Gulf of Mexico (GRASI)

- Gulf Regional Airspace Strategic Initiative (GRASI) is currently underway.
- A two-year, U.S. Air Force funded study, anticipated to be completed in 2010. GRASI is looking to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of airspace utilization in the Northwest Florida Panhandle. The goal is to reach a consensus proposal that will equally preserve and protect the airspace requirements of users now and for the foreseeable future.
- Current airspace congestion and expected mission changes, new aircraft, and increased personnel in the area as the result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closing (BRAC) Commission recommendations are the motivators for this study
- Bill Ashbaker, State Aviation Manager, is serving on the GRASI Executive Steering Committee which has met once in Atlanta. Richard Null, Aviation Operations Manager, and Sergey Kireyev, Airspace and Land Use Manager, are serving as technical advisors and observers to the GRASI Stakeholders Working Group (SWG), which has met twice.
- The USAF has assistance in the project from consultants at Virginia Tech University, Georgia Tech University, University of West Florida, and Florida State University. The goal is to reach a consensus proposal that will equally preserve and protect the airspace requirements of each user now and for the foreseeable future.
- Florida's commercial service airports—SIS facilities-- (Northwest Florida Regional Airport – Okaloosa County, Panama City-Bay County International Airport, and Pensacola Gulf Coast Regional Airport) and one general aviation airport (DeFuniak Springs Airport) have representation on the SWG.
- Northwest Florida airspace supports multiple military and civilian aviation purposes, Primary military users are the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force. Civilian use of the area serves both commercial and general aviation requirements.
- Gulf region airspace is part of the National Airspace System under the control of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Airspace is a national resource which is essential to our national security strategy.

- Efficient, coordinated scheduling, use of improved technology for airspace control and communications, and involvement of potential users, military, commercial and general aviation and ability of the airspace system to respond to emergencies and natural disasters are keys to improved airspace management.
- Base Realignment and Closing (BRAC) Commission, (2005) recommended relocation of the 7th Special Force Group from Fort Bragg, NC to Eglin AFB, FL and replacing the 33rd Fighter Wing (F-15s) at Eglin AFB with a joint service and international forces training mission for the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF).
- Recent Record of Decision (ROD) allocated 59 F-35 aircraft to Eglin: original proposal was 107 (Subsequent EIS to be submitted for 48 additional aircraft)
 - DoD Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) helps communities adjust to BRAC
 - MILCON funding is \$750 million; construction to be complete by 9/15/011

Summary of GRASI in relation to Airspace actions in the Gulf of Mexico

- Active study is on-going, involving representatives of the military, appropriate state and other governmental agencies, and specific representatives from the three SIS airports in the region.
- Airspace study recommendations for the Gulf of Mexico and final adoption by FAA will enhance and improve the utilization of the airspace, and coordinative efforts between the military and civilian users.
- Implementation of these recommendations will increase the economic benefits to Florida, improve air flight safety, and allow the SIS (and general aviation airports) improved capacity and operations.

Airspace and SIS issues.

- The GRASI initiative recommendations will help improve SIS airports by combinations of operational and scheduling improvements, which ultimately provide better service to air travelers.
- SIS issues involving military facilities will be fleshed out during the SIS Plan update and presented to the Leadership Committee for review, refinement and approval.
- Increased military personnel in Northwest Florida will impact the need for transportation and other infrastructure improvements. Construction of new base facilities to comply with the BRAC and other DOD decisions will impact the transportation network, especially highways leading to the military facilities.
- Proposed highway and other modal improvements will be coordinated with the appropriate military staff and District 3 staff, and recommended for action in the established planning process.

Summary and Recommendation: The GRASI study will reflect regional needs for airspace in the Northwest Florida area. Recommend:

- FDOT aviation staff continues to serve on the GRASI initiative.
- Airspace alternatives be dropped from SIS issue list.
- SIS update team be advised by aviation office of GRASI actions which have the potential for SIS involvement or to provide staff support