

Bases get new criteria for placement of F-35

Supporters say Luke meets all conditions

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Air Force officials last month announced additional criteria that will be weighed when deciding where to permanently place the new F-35s.

The jets will eventually replace at least 13 types of aircraft, including the F-16s, which are scheduled to remain in service with the Air Force through 2025.

Until recently, Luke had been up against only one other base, Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho. Plans were later expanded to examine all bases nationwide and add more criteria to the selection process.

Now being taken into consideration is airspace, flight training ranges, weather, support facilities, runways, taxi ramps, environmental concerns and cost factors.

"It's very impressive how Luke is positioned for the next F-35," said Steve Yamamori, executive director of Fighter Country Partnership. "I think proof of the matter is that we are home to the largest fighter wing in the world, and that's for a reason. We have the infrastructure, we have the weather, we have the community support already well evidenced here at Luke. I think we stack up extremely well, and I'd say we are the base to beat."

More than 200 potential sites will be evaluated. Once that is complete, other factors will be measured, such as combatant commander requirements, aircraft retirements and delivery schedules, aircraft maintenance and logistics support and integration with the Air National Guard and Reserve.

Supporters of Luke say it is uniquely positioned to take on the F-35 mission because of its proximity to the Barry M. Goldwater Range, which comprises 2.7 million acres owned by the federal government and is used for bombing and gunnery training.

"Generations of joint service fighter aircraft have used this range for decades to achieve the highest levels of combat capability," Goodyear Mayor Jim Cavanaugh wrote. "This is not the time to change as we enter the era of the fifth-generation fighters, F-22 and F-35."

After the release of the candidate bases, a formal environmental impact analysis process will begin, allowing communities to participate and provide input.

Based on the results, the Air Force expects to announce the preferred locations in late spring next year. A final decision could be made in early 2011.

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F-35 Joint Strike Fighter

New Web site launching to keep public informed

Fighter Country Partnership, an advocacy group for Luke Air Force Base, is launching a Web site this month to give people the opportunity to show support for the base and its mission.

The Glendale base, which is the largest fighter wing and the only active-duty F-16 training site in the world, is on a quest to land the military's new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jet.

The Web site, lukeforward.com, provides updated information about Luke, the Joint Strike Fighter and the process for selecting a home for the new jet.

"What we hope to do is keep in close contact with all of our supporters and send e-mails out to everyone who's registered to keep them informed of what the steps are, how we're doing, any issues that might be coming up and any help they might be able to offer," said Steve Yamamori, executive director of Fighter Country Partnership.

The organization also has speakers who are willing to travel anywhere in Arizona to give a briefing about how important the F-35 is for the state, Yamamori said.

Imaginary Trout, a Phoenix-based Web design and management firm, donated its services to create the site.

"They've done a great job of being able to capture all the letters of support and all the individuals who come on and show their support," Yamamori said. "If you go online and register, it pops up in a matter of minutes."

Hundreds of residents and elected officials from across Arizona have already signed up on the site.

"It's actual proof of just how much impact Luke Air Force Base has on not just the West Valley, but all throughout the state," Yamamori said.

With year-round flying capability, Luke performs more than 150 training missions a day. It also contributes more than 7,000 jobs and \$2.17 billion annually to the local economy.

"Luke AFB is a consistent economic powerhouse that does not see the peaks and valleys, the booms and busts, of many other economic contributors," Litchfield Park Mayor Thomas Schoaf wrote in a letter.

The base also has an impact on the surrounding community, with personnel volunteering more than 100,000 hours a year at local schools, churches, youth sports leagues and nonprofit organizations, Yamamori said.
