

# Study: F-35 twice as loud as F-15

By Bruce Rolfsen - Staff writer  
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The Air Force is very quiet about a noisy fighter.

At military housing areas and base schools on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., noise from F-35 Lightning II operations will be twice as loud as current Eglin F-15 flights, reaching 83 decibels.

Off base, F-35 noise will be even louder, reaching up to 90 decibels in civilian neighborhoods under an Eglin flight path.

All that is revealed in an environmental impact study prompted by plans to set up the joint F-35 pilot and maintenance training school at Eglin.

But the impact of the study goes beyond Eglin, as the Air Force looks to stand up F-35 units at bases across the country. The service has not yet decided where that would be, but is looking at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska; Luke Air Force Base, Ariz.; Moody Air Force Base, Ga.; Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho; and Shaw Air Force Base, S.C.

Air Force officials declined to discuss the report other than to say its findings have their attention.

"The Air Force is committed to being a good neighbor to the communities which surround Eglin and the future installations selected for F-35 basing," Kathleen Ferguson, deputy assistant secretary of Air Force for installations, said in a written statement.

"We are diligently exploring methods to mitigate the impact."

Around Eglin, much of the public's environmental concerns center on jet noise.

People living near the base are accustomed to the roaring jets at the base and don't look twice when a fighter circles for a landing or takes off at full military power.

In fact, the seal for Okaloosa County, where Eglin is located, pictures two airborne F-15s.

But when the Air Force issued a preliminary environmental study in June showing an F-35's single engine would generate more noise than the two engines of an F-15, people started paying attention.

In the city of Valparaiso, along the north side of Eglin, civic leaders bristled at suggestions the residents and businesses under the F-35's flight path should move to quieter areas.

The preliminary findings were confirmed in the environmental assessment released by the Air Force on Oct. 10.

"At military takeoff power, noise from the F-35 is about 9 decibels higher — or twice as loud — than an F-15C at military takeoff power," the report said.

The F-35 is even louder coming in for a landing. "During approach, noise from the F-35 is about 19 decibels higher than noise from an F-15C," the report said. "This corresponds to the F-35 being about four times as loud as the F-15C" when it lands.

There should be plenty of opportunities at Eglin to hear just how loud an F-35 is. On training days, about 125 F-35s will take off and land at Eglin, the study said.

Overall, the combination of louder engines and different flight patterns drastically expands the areas where engine roar will reach 75 decibels and higher.

The number of people living near Eglin exposed frequently to sound levels of 75 decibels or more would rise by more than 1,500 percent, jumping from 142 people to 2,174 people, the report said.

The study calmly noted that once sound levels exceed 75 decibels, more than one third of the people are "high annoyed."

Still, the new center might bring some good news: jobs.

Overall, 2,146 airmen, sailors and Marines would be assigned to the training wing, including 109 student pilots and 436 student maintainers. In addition, 180 civilians would work for the wing.

The training wing replaces the operational 33rd Fighter Wing, now phasing out as its two squadrons of F-15s are retired or sent to other units.

Regardless of the F-35 basing, Eglin would continue to be home to several Materiel Command units, including the 46th Test Wing and Air Armament Center, and Air Combat Command's 53rd Wing.

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