

MEMORANDUM FOR:	Matthew M. Kuzemchak, NWS NEPA Coordinator
FROM:	Jessica Schultz, Radar Focal Point, National Weather Service
SUBJECT:	Finding of No Significant Impact for Lowering the Minimum Scan Angle of the KMBX Weather Surveillance Radar - Model 1988 Doppler (WSR-88D) serving the Minot, ND, area – DECISION MEMORANDUM

Based on the subject environmental assessment, I have determined that no significant environmental impacts will result from the proposed action. I request your concurrence in this determination by signing below. Please return the memorandum for our files.

1. I concur _____ //signed 4/3/19// _____ Date
2. I do not concur _____ Date

Attachment

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Lowering the Minimum Scan Angle of the KMBX Weather Surveillance Radar - Model 1988 Doppler (WSR-88D) serving the Minot, ND, area

LOCATION: 9 miles north of Granville, McHenry County, ND

SUMMARY: The National Weather Service (NWS) owns and operates the existing Weather Surveillance Radar, Model 1988 Doppler (WSR-88D) serving the Minot, ND, area. The radar identifier is KMBX and the radar is located in an agricultural field about 9 miles north of Granville, McHenry County, ND and about 24 miles east of the city of Minot, ND. The KMBX WSR-88D was commissioned in August 1994 and is one of 159 WSR-88Ds in the nationwide network.

The KMBX WSR-88D antenna transmits a narrow focused main beam with a width of 1 degree. In normal operation, the WSR-88D antenna rotates horizontally to cover all directions (i.e. azimuths). The radar antenna also varies the scan angle at which it points with respect to the horizon. The scan angle is measured along the axis of the main beam and can be changed in 0.1 deg increments. Currently, the KMBX radar operates at a minimum of scan angle of +0.5 degrees (deg) above the horizon. NWS proposes to reduce the minimum scan angle of the KMBX WSR-88D from the current minimum of +0.5 deg to +0.3 deg (the proposed action). Lowering the minimum scan angle would provide enhanced coverage of the lower portions of the atmosphere. No construction activities or physical modification of the KMBX WSR-88D would be required to implement the proposed action; the only change would be to the radar's operating software.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL: Jessica Schultz, Radar Focal Point, National Weather Service, 1200 Westheimer Drive, Norman, OK 73069, Tel. (405)573-8808, email: jessica.a.schultz@noaa.gov

The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. A copy of the finding of no significant impact, and the supporting final environmental assessment is enclosed for your information. Please submit any comments to the responsible official named above by **May 1, 2019**. Also, please send one copy of your comments to me in 1325 East-West Highway, Room 3353, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Sincerely

Matthew M. Kuzemchak
NWS NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
LOWERING THE MINIMUM SCAN ANGLE OF THE WEATHER
SURVEILLANCE RADAR-MODEL 1988, DOPPLER (WSR-88D)
SERVING THE MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA, AREA**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA) SUMMARY

Purpose and Need

NWS is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. NWS operates a nationwide network of 159 Doppler weather radars, which collect data on atmospheric conditions, and include precipitation type and intensity, wind speed and direction, and storms, from near ground level to above 10,000 feet in elevation above the ground. NWS staff uses these data to prepare daily forecasts and issue severe weather watches and warnings, and to further NWS's mission to protect and enhance life and property and the nation's economy. The WSR-88D serving the Minot, ND, area has radio call letters KMBX and is located in an agricultural field about 9 miles north of Granville, McHenry County, ND and about 24 miles east of the city of Minot, ND. Operating this radar at lower scan angles would increase the area of radar coverage, providing additional data on atmospheric conditions to NWS forecasters and other data users. The area covered at 2,000 feet above site level (ASL) would increase by 33.3%.

Description of Proposed Action

The KMBX WSR-88D is an S-band Doppler, dual polarized weather radar, which NWS uses to collect meteorological data to support weather forecasts and severe weather warnings for central and western North Dakota. The KMBX WSR-88D antenna transmits a narrow focused main beam with a width of 1 degree. In normal operation, the WSR-88D antenna rotates horizontally to cover all directions (i.e. azimuths). The radar antenna also varies the scan angle at which it points with respect to the horizon. The scan angle is measured along the axis of the main beam and can be changed in 0.1 deg increments. Currently, the KMBX radar operates at a minimum scan angle (at the center of the beam) of +0.5 degrees (deg) above the horizon. NWS proposes to reduce the minimum scan angle of the KMBX WSR-88D from the current minimum of +0.5 deg to +0.3 deg (the proposed action). Lowering the minimum scan angle would provide enhanced coverage of the lower portions of the atmosphere. No construction activities or physical modification of the KMBX WSR-88D would be required to implement the proposed action; the only change would be to the radar's operating software.

Alternatives Considered

NWS evaluated the benefits and potential impacts of lowering the minimum scan angle of the KMBX WSR-88D to each angle between +0.4 and -0.2 deg in 0.1 degree increments. That

analysis found that a minimum scan angle of +0.3 deg would result in improvement of radar coverage while not causing significant environmental impacts. Based on this information, NWS selected a minimum scan angle of +0.3 deg as the proposed action.

Operating the KMBX WSR-88D at minimum scan angles between +0.4 deg and -0.2 deg other than the proposed +0.3 deg would result in similar environmental effects as the proposed action. Like the proposed action, significant environmental effects would not result. A minimum scan angle of +0.4 deg would increase the radar's coverage area, but by less than the proposed action (i.e. minimum scan angle of +0.3 deg). Minimum scan angles of +0.2 deg or lower would not increase radar coverage compared to the proposed action and would increase undesirable ground clutter returns. Because a minimum scan angle of +0.3 deg would result in the greatest improvement in radar coverage area while avoiding significant environmental impacts NWS rejected the alternatives of operating the KMBX WSR-88D at minimum scan angles of +0.4, +0.2, +0.1, 0.0, -0.1, or -0.2 deg.

Environmental Consequences

NWS prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzing the potential environmental consequences of the implementing the proposed action in compliance with the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act implementing regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500 – 1508) and NOAA Administrative Order (NOA) 216-6A: *Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act , Executive Orders 12114, Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions; 11988 and 13690, Floodplain Management; and 11990 Protection of Wetlands.* (April 22, 2016).

Lowering the minimum scan angle of the KMBX WSR-88D would not require physical changes to the radar, vegetation removal, or ground disturbance. The proposed action would not result in significant effects in the following subject areas:

- Land Use and Coastal Zone Management
- Geology, Soils, and Seismic Hazards
- Drainage and Water Quality
- Transportation
- Air Quality
- Flood Hazards
- Wetlands
- Biological Resources / Protected Species
- Cultural and Historic Resources
- Environmental Justice Socioeconomic Impacts
- Farmlands
- Energy Consumption
- Visual Quality/ Light Emissions

- Solid and Hazardous Waste
- Wild and Scenic Rivers.

At a scan angle of +0.3 deg, no terrain or structures within three miles of the WSR-88D would be affected by the WSR-88D main beam. No hazards to persons or potentially sensitive activities would result. Because the KMBX WSR-88D operates in a frequency band dedicated to government radiolocation services and the main beam would not impinge on the ground surface in the radar vicinity, the proposed action would not cause radio interference with television, radio, cellular telephone, personal communications devices (PCDs), electro-explosive devices, fuel handling, active implantable medical devices, or astronomical observatories.

Public and Agency Review of the Draft EA

The NWS distributed the Draft EA to interested members of the public and government agencies for review and comment. To facilitate that review, NWS prepared a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft EA and distributed it to interested parties. In addition, NWS posted the NOA and an electronic copy of the Draft EA to the public accessible web sites maintained by the Radar Operations Center and the Bismarck, ND, Weather Forecast Office. Comments on the Draft EA were accepted by NWS during a 30-day comment period ending on March 11, 2019. No comments on the Draft EA were received during the comment period.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The CEQ Regulations state that the determination of significance using an analysis of effects requires examination of both context and intensity, and lists ten criteria for intensity (40 CFR 1508.27). In addition, NAO 216-6A, Section 6.01(b) 1 – 11, provides eleven criteria, the same ten as the CEQ Regulations and one additional for determining whether the impacts of a proposed action are significant. Each criterion is discussed below with respect to the proposed action and considered individually as well as in combination with the others.

1. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to cause both beneficial and adverse impacts that overall may result in a significant effect, even if the effect will be beneficial?

No. The EA report analyzes the potential for implementation of the proposed action to cause environmental consequences based on established standards and criteria. The proposed action would not require construction or vegetation removal and would not result in ground disturbance. The only environmental consequence would be a slight increase in RF power density in a small portion of the atmosphere. WSR-88D RF emissions would comply with national and international safety standards for human exposure.

2. Can the proposed action be expected to significantly affect public health or safety?

No. The lower minimum scan angle would not result in the KMBX WSR-88D main beam impinging on the ground or structures within 3 miles of the WSR-88D site. The proposed action would slightly increase RF exposure levels in the vicinity of the KMBX WSR-88D. As described in the answer to question 1 above, RF emissions from the WSR-88D operating at a minimum scan angle of +0.3 deg would conform to ANSI/IEEE, FCC, and OSHA safety standards at all ground locations and structures in the vicinity of the WSR-88D. RF emissions from the WSR-88D would also comply with RF exposure standards for implantable medical devices established by the FCC and the Association for Advancement of Medical Instrumentation and would not interfere with operation of those devices.

3. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in significant impacts to unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas?

No. The proposed action's area of potential effect (APE) is defined as area within 1,740 feet of the WSR-88D where here radiofrequency radiation levels within the WSR-88D main beam could exceed safety standards hazards during infrequent stationary antenna operation. Twelve places in McHenry County are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), but none are within the APE. No historic places are within the APE and none would be affected by the proposed action.

4. Are the proposed action's effects on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?

No. The proposed action would not result in construction or ground disturbance and would comply with safety standards for human exposure to RF emission. The WSR-88D can cause harmful electromagnetic interference (EMI) with charge-couple devices (CCDs) which electronically record data collected by astronomical telescopes. The potential for harmful EMI would arise if the WSR-88D's main beam would directly impinge on an astronomical observatory during low angle scanning. NWS identified one astronomical observatory within 150 miles of the WSR-88D. Although the WSR-88D main beam could theoretically impinge on the Minot State University Observatory, the terminal building at Minot International Airport and multi-story commercial buildings are located directly between the WSR-88D and the observatory and provides substantial structural blockage. Given this structural blockage, it is unlikely that the lowered WSR-88D main beam would cause EMI with the observatory.

5. Are the proposed action's effects on the human environment likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks?

No. The proposed action would not increase the radar's power output, but would spread those emissions over a larger portion of the atmosphere. RF power densities at the newly covered area would be the same as at existing covered portions of the atmosphere. The EA contains

detailed calculations of RF exposure levels and compares projected exposure levels to safety standards for RF exposure of the general public and workers, potentially RF sensitive activities (e.g. fuel handling, use or transport of electro-explosive devices), and active implantable medical devices. The proposed action would comply with all safety standards. There is very little potential for unknown or uncertain impacts to result.

6. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration?

No. The proposed action is limited to lowering the minimum scan angle of the existing KMBX WSR-88D serving the Minot, ND, area, and the EA analysis is specific to that radar. If the NWS were to consider lowering the minimum scan angle of another WSR-88D in the nationwide network, they will perform a site specific analysis of potential effects for that radar in compliance with NEPA and NAO 216-6A. No precedents would result for future actions with significant effects or a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. Is the proposed action related to other actions that when considered together will have individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts?

No. The Final EA report evaluates the potential for the proposed action, in conjunction with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions to cause significant environmental effects. The proposed action is not reliant upon or connected to other actions, nor is it relied upon for the occurrence of other actions. Therefore, the proposed action will not result in a significant cumulative impact to the human environment.

8. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to 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 historical resources?

No. As discussed in the answers to questions 3 and 4, no historic places occur with the proposed action's APE and no electromagnetic effects would result to astronomical observatories.

9. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to have a significant impact on endangered or threatened species, or their critical habitat as defined under the Endangered Species Act of 1973?

No. Based on information obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), six species listed under the Endangered Species Act could potentially occur in McHenry County: Dakota skipper (*Hesperia dacotae*), Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), piping plover (*Charadrius melodus circumcinctus*), and red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*) are listed as threatened and gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) and whooping crane (*Grus Americana*) are listed as endangered. The WSR-88D is not located in designated critical habitat for any of these species.

The proposed action does not include construction activities and would not result in ground disturbance or vegetation removal. Lowering the minimum scan angle to +0.3 deg from the current +0.5 deg would result in a thin sliver of the atmosphere, which is currently below the main beam coverage area, being exposed to the main beam of the WSR-88D. The portion of this atmosphere above the newly exposed sliver of atmosphere is currently within the main beam and RF exposure levels would not change. The nearest ground to be directly illuminated by the lowered WSR-88D main beam would be over three miles from the radar. At that distance, the WSR-88D main beam would comply with all safety standards for human RF exposure. Exposure to RF energy from the WSR-88D would not be harmful to wildlife in the vicinity. The proposed action would not require vegetation removal and would not adversely impact habitat for listed species

10. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to threaten a violation of Federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for environmental protection?

No. The effect of the proposed action on the human environment has been analyzed relative to applicable Federal, state and local environmental laws or regulations. No regulatory violations or other significant environmental effects are expected to result.

11. Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in the introduction or spread of a non-indigenous species?

No. The proposed action has no potential to cause the transport, release, propagation or spread of non-indigenous species.

DETERMINATION

After careful and thorough consideration of the Final EA report, the undersigned finds that lowering the minimum scan angle of the KMBX WSR-88D serving the Minot, ND, area from the current +0.5 deg to +0.3 deg is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives set forth in sections 101(a) and 101(b) of NEPA and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise result in any condition requiring consultation pursuant to section 102(2) (c) of NEPA.

As described in section 5.03c of NOA 216-6A, a Finding of No Significant Impact is supported and appropriate for lowering the minimum scan angle of the KMBX WSR-88D from the current +0.5 deg to +0.3 deg. as analyzed in the EA report. Preparation of an environmental impact statement for this action is not necessary.

//signed 3/22/19//

Jessica Schultz
Radar Focal Point
Radar Operations Center
National Weather Service

Date