

## F-35 cut to cost jobs, money (DOCUMENT)

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2010-03-20 20:01:54

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE — Okaloosa County stands to lose out on hundreds of millions of dollars and hundreds of jobs if 48 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters originally expected to head here end up at another base.

In 2005, the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County commissioned the University of West Florida's Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development to study the economic and population impacts of the arrival of 107 F-35s. The analysis was updated in 2007.

Since then, the number of aircraft definitely coming to Eglin Air Force Base has been cut to 59. The EDC had the Haas Center do another update.

"With the Joint Strike Fighter Initial Training Center coming to Eglin Air Force Base, it will bring an enormous economic impact to our community, providing jobs not only to our military but to our civilian families," said Kay Rasmussen, the EDC's director of defense and economic initiatives. "Even with a lower number of aircraft, we're still going to benefit from 59 aircraft that are coming here."

The total economic impact of bringing 107 F-35s to Eglin was estimated at \$2.15 billion between 2010 and 2016. However, the Haas Center's report estimates that number drops by roughly \$480 million to \$613 million if the 48 additional F-35s are stationed elsewhere.

After the F-35 training center is fully operational, which the study estimated would be by 2016, revenues would be down between \$200 and \$250 million annually if Eglin receives 59 jets instead of 107.

"We were not surprised. We knew the numbers were going to be lowered," Rasmussen said.

It is possible the remaining 48 F-35s could come to Eglin. The Air Force and Department of Defense are working on Supplemental Environmental Impact Study that looks exclusively at the remaining 48 F-35s, Rasmussen said.

The study will look at the impact the additional jets would have on the area. It will evaluate noise levels, environmental issues and air space congestion. The study also will look at having those 48 planes, which represent two squadrons, be assigned to a different base.

The study is expected to be completed in September. The DOD will use it to decide where the planes will go.

If all 107 F-35s come to Eglin, Rasmussen said the added personnel would exceed the number of people who left when the F-15s flew out last year. There will be a shortfall of about 2,000 personnel if Eglin receives only the initial 59 F-35s.

While the potential loss of 48 F-35s represents a 45 percent reduction in aircraft, the study states that would only result in a 20 percent reduction of permanent pilot instructors. The study says Eglin has indicated the original number of 134 instructors would be reduced to 105.

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