

BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE

Community Profile

November 2009

Grand Forks Air Force Base, North Dakota

Community Contact:

Diane Blair
Coordinator
Base Realignment Impact
Committee (BRIC)
600 DeMers Avenue, Suite 501
Grand Forks ND 58201
701-746-2723
dianeblair@grandforks.org

Web Address:

www.gfcounty.nd.gov/?q=node/97

Installation Contact:

Col John Michel
Wing Commander
GFAFB
460 Steen Boulevard
Grand Forks AFB, ND 58205
701-747-4150
john.michel@grandforks.af.mil
www.grandforks.af.mil

State Contact:

Don Larson
Senior Policy Advisor
Office of Governor Hoeven
600 E Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck ND 58505-0001
701-328-2201
ddlanson@nd.gov
www.nd.gov

Realignment at a Glance

Economic Adjustment Organization:

Base Realignment Impact Committee (BRIC)

Geographic area affected by realignment:

Grand Forks; North Dakota Metropolitan Statistical Area; Counties of Grand Forks, Nelson, Traill, and Walsh in North Dakota; Polk County in Minnesota

Population of affected area (before realignment): 122,059

Total Acres to be Disposed: 0 acres

Estimated Job Loss Impact:

	Jobs Lost
Military Personnel	1,224
Civilian Personnel	290
Contractors	286

Source: GFAFB Realignment Final Report – Economic Impact Study, 2006

Economic Adjustment Challenges

- Diversify regional economy to create jobs to replace those lost because of the realignment of Grand Forks Air Force Base (GFAFB). Focus industry sectors are aviation, energy and environment, and life sciences.
- Leverage regional assets to enhance activities at GFAFB for current and future missions.
- Assist the University of North Dakota to align its capabilities in the areas of research, pilot training, and general aviation knowledge to complement the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) mission at GFAFB.
- Position the Grand Forks region as a nationally-recognized center for UAS education, training, and research.
- Promote the Grand Forks region's assets and opportunities to address the negative perception of the region.

Organization

As Grand Forks (through the Council on Military Relations) worked to “Save the Base,” community leaders assigned a small group to plan for the worst – base closure. The group consisted of the County Administrator, the Grand Forks Region Economic Development Council (EDC) President, and the City Administrator. When the BRAC recommendations were finalized, Grand Forks was relieved to learn that GFafb was to be realigned and not closed.

To address the impact and the opportunities related to the realignment, the small planning group became the BRIC. The original members were the Grand Forks County Administrator, the Grand Forks City Administrator, and the Grand Forks Region Economic and Development Corporation (GFREDC) President/Chief Executive Officer.

A BRIC Coordinator was hired in 2006. As BRIC worked on its economic diversification projects, it became evident that the University of North Dakota (UND) played a major role in the areas of life sciences and aviation. The membership of BRIC was expanded to include two individuals who were appointed by UND’s President: the Dean of the College of Business and Public Administration and another representative from the Center for Innovation.

Near the end of 2008, BRIC, under the direction of the Mayor and County Commission Chair, created the Community Base Enhancement Initiative (CBEI). The initiative brings together the organizations and agencies that are working to build upon the opportunities at, or related to, GFafb. The initiative’s mission is to create a unified voice and encourage base enhancement issues that will build upon and advance initiatives that capitalize on the assets at GFafb, in the City of Grand Forks, and in the surrounding region. The CBEI members are representatives of:

- BRIC (representing City, County, GFREDC and UND)
- Chamber of Commerce
- Congressional Delegation
- Council on Military Relations
- Office of the Governor

Several resource groups are also involved with this initiative. They include:

- Grand Forks Air Force Base
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Customs and Border Protection (CBP)
- Red River Valley Research Corridor
- The UAS Center for Research, Education and Training
- Grand Forks Public Schools
- UND Aerospace Foundation
- North Dakota Air Guard

Studies

BRIC’s first study was an economic impact analysis that was funded through a U.S. Department of Labor National Emergency Grant. The analysis included four counties in North Dakota (Grand Forks, Traill, Walsh, and Nelson) and one county in Minnesota (Polk). Information concerning the impact on the real estate market, schools, and social services was included in the economic impact analysis. The impact was based on the loss of the tanker mission and on an estimate of the number of Air Force personnel needed to support the new UAS mission. The study determined that the impact will be concentrated in Grand Forks County.

BRIC’s next step was to identify opportunities in the industry sectors that could assist in the diversification of the affected area’s economy. The Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) provided assistance with the next two studies, which developed business development roadmaps in the areas of life sciences and unmanned aviation. These reports identified near- and long-term opportunities for the region.

Since the realignment of GFAFB will impact several rural communities in Grand Forks County, BRIC wanted to provide them assistance to insure they had the infrastructure needed to be competitive. Telecommunications (cellular and broadband) were identified as a necessity for community development. OEA provided funds to complete a study of telecommunications in the region, concentrating on Grand Forks County and the towns of Northwood, Larimore, and Hatton. The report showed that cellular service was lacking in Hatton and rural parts of Grand Forks County. An expanded study was completed that identified the location for towers as well as the equipment needed to address the gaps in service. Grand Forks County is working to partner with local telecommunications companies to use federal stimulus money to solve the connectivity problems in the rural areas of the County.

The availability of land for industrial development was also identified as necessary for competitiveness. The Grand Forks Industrial Park was near capacity and the EDC believed the City needed to purchase additional land to expand the existing park or develop a new industrial park. With support from OEA, a Regional Industrial Development Land Study was completed. The study looked at 13 different sites (three within Grand Forks, one within East Grand Forks, and nine adjacent to communities in Grand Forks County). The study evaluated 16 categories – proximity to regional transportation, existing land use, availability of land, value of land, zoning, natural features, distance to potential employees, localized transportation, utilities, cost of improvements, weight restrictions, emergency services, soil characteristics, cultural and historical resources, drainage, and overland flooding. The completed study was distributed to the planning and zoning agencies that had oversight of the sites. The EDC and city staff utilized the land study results to determine the most suitable site for additional industrial development land within the city. Based on this report and the recommendation from the EDC and city staff, the City of Grand Forks purchased 129 acres of land. The City has also begun the extension of the main street through this land as well as the associated infrastructure (water, sewer, etc.).

UND is an important partner in diversifying the region's economy. OEA provided funding for two projects that focused on these opportunities. The first is the Life Sciences Industry Roundtable. The intent of the roundtable is to coordinate regional experts in industry, education, and economic development, to examine key and critical elements needed for the development of the life science industry in the region. This project has been delayed and will be completed in Fall 2009. The second project worked with UND's UAS Center for Research, Education, and Training to develop the "Unmanned Systems in North Dakota Implementation Plan." The plan focused on five broad strategies and developed six strategic goals. Each of the strategic goals has a series of objectives and action plans for the UAS Center.

BRIC's current project employs the UAS Business Development Roadmap and the Unmanned Systems in North Dakota Implementation Plan to create the community's vision for the future of GFAFB. This study will look at military, industrial, and education partners to research, develop, and commercialize initiatives at GFAFB.

Challenges and Responses

Diversify regional economy to create jobs to replace those lost because of the realignment of GFAFB. Focus industry sectors are aviation, energy and environment, and life sciences.

- The Grand Forks community is actively working to develop the focus industry sectors. With the assistance from OEA, the community researched two of the three sectors. The aviation sector provides many opportunities with the emergence of the unmanned aviation. Legislators have been working very hard to remove the major roadblock to unmanned aviation – access to airspace. The community is working to be prepared (workforce, land availability, community support) for the anticipated interest in the region when airspace is available.
- UND recognized the importance of the unmanned aviation industry sector and established the UAS Center for Research, Education, and Training. This is a multi-discipline center with partners from the departments of aerospace, engineering, psychology, nursing, atmospheric sciences, and innovation. Several new positions have been created and Predator training has begun through a contract with General Atomics.

- In the area of life sciences, REAC 1 (Research Enterprise and Commercialization Park) has opened. REAC is a 50,000 square foot building that houses the Center of Excellence in Life Sciences and Advanced Technology. Seven businesses have already located in REAC 1. It is anticipated that within the next three years over 100 jobs will be created as a result of REAC 1 and the companies it houses.

Implementation and Partnering Strategies

Leverage regional assets to enhance activities at GFAFB for current and future missions.

The assets identified are productive workforce, visionary leadership, training programs, research and testing, open airspace, and available land. Through BRIC and CBEI, the community is able to exchange information on these assets and utilize them to support to activities at GFAFB.

To assist the region with enhancing the activities at GFAFB, the North Dakota Legislature created the Center of Excellence Enhancement Grant program. Appropriate uses for the \$5 million fund include grants to enhance economic development and employment opportunities associated with GFAFB resulting from BRAC actions; infrastructure and economic development projects or programs to accommodate growth in proximity to or at GFAFB; and infrastructure and economic development projects or programs to enhance the capacity of a research university to interface and collaborate with private industry on research, development, demonstration, and commercialization of technology. BRIC is currently working with the UAS Center and the U.S. Department of Commerce on a grant application to purchase a Predator simulator, which would be used to establish a training program on GFAFB.

BRIC is investigating the anticipated needs of the Global Hawk subcontractors. A business plan, including pro forma, needs to be completed to determine if there is an adequate need to establish a UAS Business Park on or near GFAFB. This park would utilize the community's workforce, training programs, and ability to do research and testing. Financial assistance will be needed to develop the business plan and pro forma. BRIC is currently working with OEA to secure the financial assistance.

Assist UND to align its capabilities in the areas of research, pilot training, and general aviation knowledge to complement the UAS mission at GFAFB.

UND's UAS Center for Research, Education, and Training has hired its first dedicated director, a significant step towards building upon UND's training, research, and general aviation knowledge. The new director has been getting acquainted with the community and regional opportunities. He has also been writing a grant application to the state's Center of Excellence Enhancement Grant program. The reports prepared for BRIC (UAS roadmap and UAS implementation plan) have been very helpful with the director's initial work. The reports gave the director a good understanding of the opportunities and the region's potential which he utilized in the grant application. The UAS Center is currently negotiating a lease for 21,000 square feet of building space on GFAFB. The plan is to develop 5,000 square feet of the building for the Predator simulator training program. The UAS Center director also participated in CBEI.

Position the Grand Forks region as a nationally recognized center for UAS education, training, and research.

The unmanned aerial systems sector is in its infancy stage. The applications for the military and federal agencies (e.g., DHS) are increasing rapidly. According to a recent study, \$3.4 billion is currently spent with this sector worldwide and it is estimated the market will grow to at least \$7.3 billion annually within ten years. Grand Forks is the home to GFAFB with an unmanned mission and UND's UAS Center for Research, Education, and Training. The 119th Wing of the Air National Guard, which already flies unmanned missions, is located in Fargo, ND, and will be launching planes from GFAFB. As the UAS industry grows, Grand Forks will build on existing assets to be nationally recognized as a center for UAS.

Promote the Grand Forks region's assets and opportunities to address the negative perception of the region.

With OEA's assistance, BRIC created an information piece about the region. The piece highlighted GFAFB, leadership, infrastructure, workforce, skills and training programs, research, energy, and regional opportunities. The Red River Valley Research Corridor, in conjunction with Senator Byron Dorgan, hosted the UAS3 Summit in May 2009. The information piece was unveiled at this event and given to all participants. The Council on Military Relations sent the information piece to over 30 Air Force leaders and contractors.

Attending professional conferences is one action step to address this challenge. The State of North Dakota's Department of Commerce purchased a booth at the 2009 Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International conference in Washington, DC. BRIC and UND representatives were part of the statewide delegation that attended the conference and manned the booth. Another action step is to host conferences and symposium in Grand Forks. By doing this, the participants get first-hand information on the opportunities and assets the region offers.

The Red River Valley Research Corridor has organized three unmanned aviation action summits since 2006. The attendance has increased from 192 participants representing four states and two Canadian provinces to 311 participants with 108 out of state individuals representing 21 states and two Canadian provinces.

As a result of the successful UAS3 Summit, the Air Force, in partnership with UND, hosted an Academic Symposium in Grand Forks to bring together key members of the Air Force and invited leaders of the national academic community in order to identify new basic research directions and funding opportunities for UAS in areas such as airspace integration, UAS integrated lifecycle management, UAS training, airborne networks, small UAS development, artificial intelligence, computer vision, and to introduce the Air Force Unmanned Aircraft Systems Flight Plan for 2009-2047. Over 100 individuals from 31 educational institutions, private companies, and the Air Force attended the symposium.

UND is hosting another symposium in October. This session is titled "Complying and Flying" and will cover legal and technical issues related to operating unmanned aerial vehicles in law enforcement.

Job Creation and New Economic Activity

To address the need to create new jobs to offset the adverse BRAC impact, the North Dakota Legislature created the Center of Excellence Enhancement Grant program. This program focuses on high-value employment opportunities and the leverage opportunities for these grant funds. These grants (totaling \$5 million) are available to the research universities under the control of the state Board of Higher Education or nonprofit university-related foundations for use in infrastructure or enhancement of economic development and employment opportunities. The first grant proposal will assist in developing the Predator training program at UND. This would create jobs for pilot instructors, sensor instructors, and technicians. BRIC is working with UND's UAS Center and the state's Department of Commerce to utilize the grant money to create jobs and leverage additional funds.

The new unmanned mission at GFAFB will introduce Global Hawks to North Dakota. The community needs to determine if a UAS Business Park should be created on or near GFAFB. The business park would be designed to meet the requirements of the subcontractors of Northrop Grumman, manufacturer of the Global Hawk. The subcontractor jobs would replace some of those eliminated due to the realignment.

DHS established North Dakota UAS Operations at GFAFB. Currently one Predator is located at this center. DHS has also selected the North Dakota UAS Operations as the site for their Predator training. The University of North Dakota and local leaders are working with the Deputy Director, Air Operations, North Dakota Unmanned Aerial System Operations Command to capitalize on more opportunities for DHS at GFAFB. Jobs were created when General Atomics opened an office to handle Predator maintenance needs and UND provided instructors to train the operators.

The creation of new jobs and the offset of the economic impact will be slow, but the community will continue to work together to identify all feasible opportunities to strengthen the region's economy.

Partnering Actions

BRIC has created a venue for the City, County, EDC, and UND to work together with the focus being GFAFB and the economy of the region. CBEI is BRIC's opportunity to discuss the potential at GFAFB and in the region with a broader community-based group. Through the diverse membership on CBEI, BRIC is in contact with the Air Force, CBP, Congressional Delegation (Senators Kent Conrad and Byron Dorgan, and Representative Earl Pomeroy), state agencies (Governor's office and ND Air National Guard), and local agencies (Grand Forks Public Schools, Red River Valley Research Corridor, Council on Military Relations, Chamber of Commerce, UAS Center, and UND Aerospace Foundation). Through monthly meetings, these agencies/organizations stay informed on the goals/needs of GFAFB and CBP while the community is able to work together to provide their support.

The first line of connection with the Military Departments (Air Force and Air Guard) is through local leadership. A representative from the Air Guard Air Component Command and the GFAFB Wing Commander are active participants on the CBEI. Both have met with BRIC members and provided direction for community involvement

During efforts to "Save the Base," the Council on Military Relations developed important relationships with Air Force leadership. The Council is utilizing those relationships to identify future missions and opportunities for GFAFB. The Council has strong connections with Air Mobility Command (AMC) and is working to create that same connection with Air Combat Command (ACC), as the base transitions from an air refueling mission (AMC) to an unmanned aviation mission (ACC).

Successes/Lessons Learned

The community had several organizations/agencies that had interests in the future of GFAFB, but these organizations did not have a venue to meet and discuss the issues. The creation of the Community Base Enhancement Initiative (CBEI) provided that venue. Now, these organizations/agencies have a much better understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and activities taking place to support GFAFB. Including the Congressional Delegation and Governor's Office in the CBEI, ensures elected officials remain informed about how the community is addressing the realignment and new opportunities. When the community needs to reach out to the Congressional Delegation or the Governor, their staffs are up to date on our activities and are able to provide us the requested direction. CBEI also creates the unified voice for the region as it pertains to economic diversification, GFAFB, UAS Center, and DHS.

Successes, described in detail under "Implementation and Partnering Strategies," include:

- Creating high-value jobs through the Center for Excellence Enhancement Grant Program, established by the North Dakota Legislature
- Successful hosting of national conferences and symposiums which help change the negative perception of our region
- Creation and distribution of information materials to promote our regional assets