

# FORMER WURTSMITH AIR FORCE BASE COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAN

## Appendix E



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

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# Site Description

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## Location

Former Wurtsmith Air Force Base (AFB) is located in the east central portion of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, two miles west of Lake Huron. Situated in Iosco County, it lies almost 200 miles due north of Detroit. The incorporated township of Oscoda is approximately two miles south of the base. AuSable Township lies adjacent to Oscoda, to the south. The two townships have a combined population of 30,168.

## *Adjacent Off-Base Land Use*

The Former Wurtsmith AFB covers 5,221 acres in northeastern Iosco County; 1,943 acres are owned by the Air Force, 2,464 acres are leased, and 814 acres are registered as easement tracts. The base is bounded on the north and northeast by Van Etten Lake; on the east and southeast by the township of Oscoda; on the northwest by the Alpena State Forest; and, on the west and south by the Huron National Forest and wooded marshlands. Primary usage of surface water in the area is recreational. The predominant activities are boating, fishing, snow mobiling and swimming. There are no industrial users in the area.

## *Topography*

The former Wurtsmith AFB is located on a five-mile wide sandy plain that is part of a geologic area known as the Oscoda Lake Plain. This plain extends westward from Lake Huron up to some bluffs located at the west side of the base. The base lies approximately 580-650 feet above sea level.

Bedrock beneath Wurtsmith consists of Mississippian sandstone and shale formations that were affected by glacial erosion during the Pleistocene Epoch. Bodies of water located near the base include the AuSable River, Pine River, Van Etten Lake (man-made), Van Etten Creek, Duell Lake, Allen Lake, Dry Creek and Lake Huron. There are wetlands in the general area surrounding the base. There are four storm discharge sewers from the base which flow into local surface waters and wetlands.

Climate in this region is humid, characterized by harsh winters and short, mild summers. There are no significant sources of air pollution in the area, though air quality on the base itself has not yet been monitored.

## History

Chippewa Indians were the primary inhabitants of the area prior to the arrival of French traders and missionaries in the early 18th century. The first county settlement was established in the late 1840s by fishermen and traders who settled near the mouth of

the AuSable River. Logging became a primary industry by the late 1800s. In 1911, most of the buildings in the area were destroyed by a fire that left only 14 homes standing. The rebuilding efforts were slow due to the economic hardship caused by the fire and a declining lumber industry.

The history of Wurtsmith AFB began in 1923 when Army officials proposed to the townspeople of Oscoda that a landing area be cleared nearby for use by fighter aircraft from Selfridge Army Air Field in Mt. Clemens, Michigan. In the summer of 1924, 40 acres of land located immediately west of Van Etten Lake were cleared and ground personnel from Selfridge Field set up tents and targets. By the winter of 1924, Army aviators were landing their ski-equipped Curtiss P-1 pursuit bi-wing fighters on the frozen lake and conducting winter maneuvers to test aircraft and supplies in the extremely cold environment. Later that year, the campsite was named Camp Skeel after Captain Burt E. Skeel, Commander of the 27th Pursuit Squadron at Selfridge. As a subsidiary of Selfridge Field, Camp Skeel was used for gunnery practice and winter maneuvers until World War II.

The camp was renamed Oscoda Army Air Field in 1942. From April to July that year, it was the home of the 100th Pursuit Squadron known as the "Black Panthers". This squadron was an all-black fighter unit that distinguished itself during World War II. In 1943, the Oscoda Army Air Field became the home of the 134th Army Air Force Base Fighter Unit. The 134th was a support unit responsible for the needs of personnel undergoing training for overseas assignments. This included free French pilots training there in preparation for overseas duties. In July, 1944, the Oscoda Army Air Field was designated an independent base, but reverted to a sub-base of Selfridge when the war ended.

At the end of 1945, the field was closed. The personnel of the 134th were transferred and the base was inactive until 1948 when Selfridge again used it for training under the control of the Continental Air Command. P-80 jets and crews from Selfridge moved in for transient duties. The creation of the Department of the Air Force led to another name change in 1948 to Oscoda Air Force Base. Transient fighter aircraft continued to use the base as a stopover in the late 1940s. The 2476th Base Services Squadron arrived in December, 1948; and, in June 1950, action on base was again in high gear when it was placed on alert following the outbreak of the Korean War.

The base was renamed Wurtsmith in 1953, in honor of Michigan's outstanding World War II air hero, Major General Paul B. Wurtsmith. General Wurtsmith was the only flying General to earn the Distinguished Service Medal in combat. In January, 1958, the Air Force announced that Wurtsmith AFB would receive a Strategic Air Command (SAC) bombardment wing. The local community greeted this development with great

enthusiasm and the state of Michigan leased an additional 311 acres of land to the Air Force for expansion. New housing was constructed and flight facilities were improved.

In January, 1961, the 379th Bombardment Wing moved from Homestead AFB, Florida, to Wurtsmith. In 1969, the 379th began combat missions in Vietnam. Throughout the years, the 379th continued to update its capabilities, including utilization of the Air Launched Cruise Missile. The 379th was also involved in the Persian Gulf War, conducting heavy bombing operations into Iraq and Kuwait.

Subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the President of the United States established a Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) to carefully review the size and structure of the military; and, make recommendations as to how certain segments of the military could be closed or realigned in a way that would significantly reduce costs while maintaining some degree of readiness. In 1991, the BRAC Commission recommended that Wurtsmith be closed. That recommendation was approved and on June 30, 1993, Wurtsmith AFB closed.

## **Environmental Actions**

Environmental actions and progress are described by those included in the 2006 BMP and each BMP update. These actions are summarized in the table at the end of this section.

### *Environmental Actions 2006 BMP*

Twenty-one sites have active remedies and four sites have institutional control (IC) only remedies. The remaining environmental requirements were scheduled to be included in a regional or national Performance-Based Remediation (PBR) contract.

### *Environmental Actions 2007 BMP Update*

Twenty-one sites have active remedies and four sites have IC only remedies. The remaining environmental requirements were scheduled to be included in a regional or national PBR contract.

### *Environmental Actions 2010 BMP Update*

A Wurtsmith-specific PBR contract is currently scheduled for award in April 2010. The Air Force is currently in dispute resolution under The Defense State Memorandum of Agreement (DSMOA) Program for the landfill remedy. The State regulators want a RCRA type of cap under Michigan Act 115, at a cost of \$13-15M, in addition to the Air Force selected remedy of pump & treat. A meeting was held between the Air Force and the State regulators in August 2009 on this issue. Both sides agreed to implement the Air

Force proposed remedy and evaluate the effectiveness in a few years to determine if a cap is necessary.

*Environmental Actions 2011 BMP Update*

A Wurtsmith-specific PBR contract was awarded in May 2010. The dispute resolution under DSMOA is on hold while the Air Force constructs and begins operation of a groundwater treatment system. The groundwater treatment system began construction in 2010, and will finish construction and begin full operation in August 2011. Declaration of Restrictive Covenants (DRCs) were delayed due to a State law change requiring certain restrictions placed on the entire parcel of land, regardless of the limits of the applicable area for the restrictions (i.e. the limits of the IRP site). The Air Force is working with Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) to facilitate this, and it may entail redrawing parcel boundaries. Anticipate completion of DRCs is in 2011.

Evaluate PBC objectives to ensure site closure/completion was included as an objective. If not, evaluate for inclusion in AFRPA’s Accelerated Site Completion (ASC) strategy which may include either PBC modification or inclusion in new PBC.

In Progress Actions			
2006 BMP	2007 Update	2010 Update	2011 Update
Execute all Declarations of Restrictive Covenants with MDEQ for all lease terminations and transfers	Moved to FY08	FY08-Moved to FY09  FY10-Execute all Declarations of Restrictive Covenants with MDEQ for all lease terminations and transfers	State law changed has forced a delay in finalizing DRCs. Working with MDEQ and LRA to finalize, may require reparcelization. Planned to complete in 2011.
Execute and complete negotiations with the MDEQ to determine if the current landfill caps on Landfills 30 and 31 can be documented as having technical equivalency to a Michigan Act 115		FY08-Moved to FY10	Formal dispute resolution initiated in 2009 resolved at SAF level March 2012.
Prepare a regional or national contract to manage liabilities for the remaining environmental remediation requirements	Moved to FY09	Planned to move to FY10 as part of North/East PBR contract  Decided to implement Wurtsmith specific PBR contract	Wurtsmith Specific PBR contract awarded in 2010
Develop RAWP and Construct Landfill 30/31 groundwater remedy	Pilot study delayed two years due to funding issues and formal dispute with regulatory agencies	Pilot study initiated in FY08 and scheduled for completion in FY10	Groundwater remedy construction started in 2010, and initiated operation in August 2011
			Execute multi-installation contract to perform cost-benefit analysis on sites where LUC/ICs are the last remaining

<b>In Progress Actions</b>			
<b>2006 BMP</b>	<b>2007 Update</b>	<b>2010 Update</b>	<b>2011 Update</b>
			remedy
			Complete baseline review of compliance sites

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## Community Background

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Former Wurtsmith AFB is located in Iosco County, which is primarily rural, service and retail industry-oriented. Tourism and recreation provide the primary base for the economy. According to the 2010 US Census, Iosco County has a population of 25,887.

Most of Iosco County's development is along Lake Huron in the communities of Tawas, East Tawas, Oscoda and AuSable. Urbanized areas utilize less than one percent of the county's total land area and the development of these areas involves primarily second homes and tourist/recreation activities.

Approximately 70 percent of the county is forested, comprised of the Huron National Forest and Alpena State Forest. The majority of this land is held by the federal and state governments. Inland waters and wetland occupy 8.6 percent of the county's surface. Agricultural uses account for approximately 20 percent of the county's land area. The base itself was a primary market for goods and services made or sold in the area. Also, military personnel, their families, and civilians whose employment was directly tied to the base contributed significantly to the local economy by spending a portion of their income in the area. The regional economy consists of 13 counties in the northeast lower peninsula of Michigan. Six of these counties, Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Ogemaw and Oscoda, are directly affected by the closure. The economy of the region depends on tourism and recreation.

Iosco County is overseen by a board of commissioners. Additionally, the county is served by a clerk, treasurer, register of deeds, and other officials in charge of courts, law enforcement, social services and so on. Both Oscoda and AuSable are charter townships directed by their respective boards of trustees and headed by a part-time supervisor. Oscoda Township's daily management is directed by a superintendent. The board of trustees meets twice per month in the Oscoda Township Building. The township provides municipal services including sewer, water, police, fire, library and public education.

### Community Involvement Overview

In October 1977, a base housing resident complained about a peculiar odor and taste in the drinking water. The suspected source of contamination was building 43, the jet engine repair shop, where a 500-gallon underground storage tank (UST) was used to temporarily store Trichloroethylene (TCE) after it had been used to degrease engine parts. Excavation of the tank showed that a leak occurred at the connection between the filler pipe and the tank, which confirmed the tank was the source of the TCE in the groundwater.



By December 1977, community relations efforts were in full swing at the base. In response to the initial TCE discover news releases were written and radio and television interviews given. The focus of the original news releases was to assure on and off-base residents that steps were being taken to halt the spread of the TCE. Media from Alpena to Bay City responded to the original release.

The first inquiries from private citizens off-base about the effects of the contamination came in April 1978. Two West Shore Drive residents inquired about the effects of TCE on their health; and, on the efforts that the Air Force had taken to clean up the contamination. One off-base resident also questioned if the Air Force was trying to cover up a much bigger problem.

Geologic surveys and studies discovered numerous contamination sites, and remediation activities were quickly initiated. Media attention continued through 1979 as the state of Michigan announced plans to sue the military over groundwater contamination and to speed up the clean-up of the TCE. Community interest in the environmental problems peaked in 1980 when contamination was detected off-base at a private residence. The base immediately provided an alternate water source and continued investigation to determine the source of contamination.

Further investigations of the base through 1980 also detected TCE in base water supply wells and observation wells at various locations. Analyses of water from private wells in the vicinity of the base showed that water from all but one well was free of TCE.

Water from the contaminated well contained enough TCE to make it unsuitable as a domestic supply. An alternate water source was supplied. The United States Geological Survey continued investigating groundwater at the base and identified plumes of TCE, DCE and benzene.

In April 1985, 29 sites were identified in the IRP and additional sites were added over time. Presently, 53 sites have been identified for investigation at Wurtsmith AFB. Throughout the 1980s, media coverage of the groundwater contamination and the state of Michigan's suit continued. Press coverage was again sparked in the late 1980s when the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) released that Wurtsmith AFB ranked in the top ten worst polluted sites in the state.

In July 1990, a session was called to lay groundwork for a Citizens' Advisory Committee on the Wurtsmith AFB contamination. State Representative Tom Alley and representatives of the MDNR were present at the meeting. Local residents said that information about the contamination, as well as action to clean up the contamination, was necessary. It was observed that only through three-way communication between

the state, the Air Force, and local citizens could the contamination issue be properly addressed.

While residents now have a clean water supply, some residents still harbor resentment over having to pay for water versus the use of residential wells. While a majority of the contamination has been contained, there are still a few plumes of contamination the USAF is working to address. Additionally, the former Wurtsmith AFB landfill is polluting beach front at a local YMCA camp with approximately 1,000 feet of beach front tainted in red. While this pollution is not harmful, it is being addressed.

The former Wurtsmith AFB was also a bombing practice range so there is an issue related to Discarded Military Munitions (DMM). The Air Force is actively mitigating this through notices on the property and community outreach on how to recognize and report DMM to the Military Munitions Response Program (MMRP).

### **Key Community Concerns**

Key community concerns are primarily related to issues around the beachfront pollution and the potential to encounter MMRP. While leadership at the YMCA camp receives briefings, they are concerned about how the pollution could impact their ability to fulfill their mission. At this point, due to the issue being below ground, the YMCA faces an annual decision as to whether to open the camp for summer operations. They have also expressed the desire for more frequent communication and concern over the pace at which the program is advancing.

Stakeholders within the Township administration would like to see more direct contact from the Air Force to announce key information pertaining to remediation activities and not rely solely to posting notices in the Oscoda Press. During interviews, one stakeholder suggested a semi-annual report to disseminate information to stakeholders and board members.

With regards to MMRP, the Base Environmental Coordinator works closely with local law officials to monitor and respond to reported devices. Key stakeholders include Township Superintendent Robert F. Stalker II, Ann Richardson, Community Development Coordinator, the Oscoda/Wurtsmith Airport Authority, the local YMCA, and property owners affected by remaining plumes of contamination. The base is expected to complete a whole base transfer in December 2013.

# Recommended Community Involvement Approach

Given the localized nature of clean-up efforts, strategies recommended for the former Wurtsmith AFB include those appropriate for the Proposed Plan, Record of Decision, Remedial Design/Remedial Action, and Operation & Maintenance.

	Information Repository	Administrative Record	Fact Sheets	Open Houses, Poster Board Sessions, and Site Tours	Public Notices	News Releases/Media Relations	Neighborhood Notices/Flyers	Public Meetings	Public Comment Period	Responsiveness Summary	Speaking Engagement/Outreach Mtgs
Proposed Plan (PP)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Record of Decision (ROD)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Remedial Design (RD)/Remedial Action	●	●	●	●		●					●
Operation & Maintenance (O&M)	●	●			●	●			●	●	●

For guidelines on each of these community relations strategies please see the main document. Base-specific recommendations are detailed below.

## Information Repository

The information Repository is located at the Oscada Township Public Library. If possible, the Information Repository and Administrative record should be reviewed once a year to ensure contents are complete and current. Further, there should be a process in place to incorporate the names of individuals who visit the repository into the stakeholder mailing list. With regards to the Administrative Record, an onboarding brief should be developed so new staff are aware of the AR, its contents, and how and when to incorporate new documents.

## Fact Sheets

Fact sheets should be developed on an as needed basis. A fact sheet around the remaining contamination plumes, landfill contamination, and MMRP reporting process are recommended. Fact sheets about the remaining contamination plumes should be distributed to property owners specifically affected and could include information on how to build above-ground gardens. The landfill contamination fact sheet could be developed in such a way to provide the YMCA stakeholder with a tool to address concerns raised by potential camp attendees. The MMRP reporting process fact sheet should be updated to include current contacts. It should be distributed throughout the community in both a print and electronic form.

### **Public Notices/Open Houses/Public Meetings/Public Comment Period**

Public notices should be published any time a public meeting or event is scheduled or in relation to a public comment period. Open houses and public meetings should be scheduled as needed and tied to specific decision-making points in the process. For example, input from the public could be solicited when considering alternative methods for mitigating the remaining contamination plumes or if the USAF needs to modify a previously approved plan. Feedback suggests not relying solely on public posting of announcements or key information, but direct contact should be made with LRA members and major stakeholders. Comment periods are also required in conjunction with a Record of Decision and Deletion from the National Priorities List.

### *Meeting Location*

Previous meetings have been held at:

Oscoda Township Hall Conference Center  
208 South State  
Street, Oscoda, Michigan

### **Media Relations/Flyers**

These strategies are specifically useful for advertising upcoming meetings or events. An updated media list is attached for distribution purposes. Flyers should be available in both a print and electronic format. The electronic version can be emailed to stakeholders and to community partners for further distribution. They can also be posted to social media sites to help reach a larger audience.

Also suggest that a semi-annual status summary be prepared for key stakeholders, including members of the LRA, the YMCA, Oscoda-Wurtsmith Airport Authority and Township of Oscoda. The report should keep in mind the technical level of the audience.

### **Speaking Engagement/ Outreach Meetings**

Given the limited impacts of the on-going contamination issues, targeted meetings with key stakeholders may be more appropriate than a full-scale public meeting. This approach provides a low-cost option to target specific stakeholders without alarming other community members no longer affected by on-going mitigation efforts.

# ATTACHMENT 1: Stakeholder Database

BRAC'ed Base	Senator	Congressman	Governor	Superintendent	Board of Trustees
<p><b>Wurtsmith AFB Oscoda, Michigan</b></p>	<p>Senator Debbie Stabenow (D) 3280 E. Beltline Court NE Suite 400 Grand Rapids, MI 49525 616-975-0052</p> <p>Senator Carl Levin (D) 515 N. Washington Avenue, Suite 402 Saginaw, MI 48607-1370 989-754-2494</p>	<p>Congressman Dan Benishek (R-MI 1st) 810 S. Otsego Ave., Ste 105 Gaylord, Michigan 49735 989-448-8811</p>	<p>Governor Rick Snyder 234 West Baraga Avenue Marquette, MI 49855 (906) 228-2850</p>	<p>Robert F. Stalker II Township of Oscoda Superintendent 989-739-8299 superintendent@oscodatwp.com</p>	<p>Township of Oscoda</p> <p>James Baier, Supervisor Jaimie McGuire, Treasurer Christine Carrasco, Clerk Mike Ballor, Trustee Matthew Hinckley, Trustee Richard Binkowski, Trustee Stephen Pappas, Trustee</p> <p><i>No emails available. Contact through Township Superintendent.</i></p>

#### Additional Stakeholders:

- Gary W. Kellan, Airport Manager  
Oscoda-Wurtsmith Airport  
3691 E. Airport Drive  
Oscoda, MI 48750  
(989) 739-9111  
[oscairport@charter.net](mailto:oscairport@charter.net)
- Scott Landry  
YMCA of Detroit  
1401 Broadway, Suite 301  
Detroit, MI 48750  
(313) 530-2344
- Oscoda/AuSable Chamber of Commerce
- Oscoda Office for Economic Adjustment
- Charter Township of AuSable
- Iosco County Board of Commissioners

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## ATTACHMENT 2: Media List

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### Former Wurtsmith AFB

Radio Station	Phone	Website
WCMB-FM 95.7 FM	800-999-5656	n/a
WWTH 100.7 FM	989-739-7655	n/a
WKJC	989-362-3417	www.wkjc.com
WIOS	989-362-3627	www.wiosradio.com
HITS	989-362-3418	www.hitsfm.net

TV Station	Phone	Website
WCMU-TV PBS	989-774-3105	www.wcmu.org
WBKB-TV CBS	989-356-3434	www.wbkb11.com
WJBK-TV FOX	248-557-2000	www.myfoxdetroit.com
WDIV-TV NBC	313-222-0500	www.clickondetroit.com
WXYZ-TV ABC	248-827-7777	www.wxyz.com

Newspaper	Phone	Website
<i>Iosco County News Herald</i>	989-362-3456	www.iosconews.com
<i>Alpena News</i>	989-354-3111	www.thealpenanews.com
<i>Detroit Free Press</i>	313-222-6400	www.freep.com
<i>The Detroit News</i>	313-222-2300	www.detroit.news