

Wm. Weston J. Newton, Chairman
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Bringing the new F35-B Joint Strike Fighter to Marine Corps Air Station-Beaufort will boost our local economy, protect the base against future closure, and continue Beaufort County's long history of supporting the military. It's right for America – and it's right for Beaufort County.

The Air Station contributes \$615 million to Beaufort County's economy each year, and the military combined has a \$1.2 billion impact. That's a major factor in our county's financial health. We can't afford to lose that – and we'd prefer to grow it! The F35-B Joint Strike Fighter is an investment in our country, our security, our community and our future. Without the Air Station, our county's quality of life won't be the same.

The Navy's preliminary recommendation is that Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort receive three operational squadrons and two training squadrons of the next generation stealth fighter-attack jet, the F35-B Lighting II. A final decision is scheduled to be announced in December.

Basing five squadrons in Beaufort County will lead to an additional \$300 million investment in infrastructure at the Beaufort Air Station and ensure the security of the base through future base closure reviews. Also, several hundred civilian jobs potentially can be created as a result of this Joint Strike Fighter scenario outlined in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

In addition to the Marine Corps Air Station-Beaufort's exceptional training areas offshore and the Townsend Bombing Range in Georgia, the region has a highly qualified workforce made up of former military personnel and others from the aviation and tech industries who have relocated to our county.

The arrival of the F35 will help our county's Lowcountry Economic Network & Alliance recruit new industry to our region while bolstering our existing businesses that focus on technology, aeronautics and defense. Already one of those companies, XRDi, has a contract to help the Department of Defense with its unmanned aerial drones.

There are 11 operational F35-B squadrons designated for the East Coast, plus two training squadrons. The F35-B will replace the F/A-18 Hornet probably starting in 2014. Landing these Joint Strike Fighter squadrons in Beaufort will protect the Air Station and the local economy against future base closings.

The US Department of Defense is accepting comments through July 12. To share your support, visit <http://www.usmcjsfeast.com/Comments.aspx>. Or, you can write and mail your support by July 12 to: USMC F-35B East Coast Basing EIS, P.O. Box 56488, Jacksonville, FL 32241-6488. It will help the local economy – both north and south of the Broad River.

For more information, visit www.f35beaufort.com. Help bring the F35-B jets – and the jobs – to Beaufort County.