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## NASA says space vehicle won't be tested in Utah [news]

From: [campbell@ufomind.com](mailto:campbell@ufomind.com) (Glenn Campbell, Las Vegas)  
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Las Vegas Review-Journal, July 21, 1997

"NASA says next space vehicle won't be tested in Utah"

The nation's next space vehicle, the X-33, will be tested at Edwards Air Force Base in California and at other locations in the West but not at the Green River, Utah, complex, according to a project summary.

The summary, prepared by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Marshall Space Flight Center in Alabama, contradicts claims in Popular Mechanics magazine about where testing of the space plane would take place.

But documents presented at a Jan. 13 industry briefing at the center back up some of Jim Wilson's article in the magazine. The briefing by officers from Phillips Laboratory -- an Air Force research facility at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, N.M., said the NASA X-33 will "feed technology" needed for a similar but smaller military space plane.

According to the documents, no Air Force budget exists for a space plane, one that would launch itself from a vertical position and land on a runway after re-entering the atmosphere.

The NASA X-33 will be tested at altitudes of 50 miles and at speeds up to Mach 15 or 11,000 mph, according to Wayne Wilson, an environmental engineer at the Marshall Space Flight Center. He said the plane will have built-in liquid oxygen and hydrogen tanks.

"This is a space plane that NASA and private industry are developing, and it will be used by private industry to get payloads into space," Wayne Wilson said. He said testing is set for 1999.

A NASA document, however, describes another test space plane, the X-34, which is smaller and lighter than the X-33, and would fly up to Mach 8 -- eight times the speed of sound -- but would be launched from another aircraft.

In August, NASA awarded a contract for the X-34 to Orbital Sciences Corp. The government's team in the project includes the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico.

The Green River complex, near Moab, Utah, is a launch site for the White Sands Missile Range, according to Popular Mechanics.

The Popular Mechanics article said activities involving the X-33 at the Air Force's classified base at Groom Lake in the Nellis range, 90 miles north of Las Vegas, would instead be done at the Utah Launch Complex on the Green River.

The Air Force has never confirmed any activities at the classified Groom Lake Base.

Lt. Col. Jess Sponable, program manager for military space plane technology at the Phillips lab, said, "We have no plans to fly out of Utah directly."

Contrary to the Popular Mechanics article, the summary of the X-33's draft environmental impact statement lists only Haystack Butte and Space Port 2000 at the Edwards base, near Lancaster, Calif., as launch sites; and five landing sites: China Lake Air Weapons Station, near Ridgecrest, Calif.; Silurian Lake, near Baker, Calif.; Dugway Proving Ground, near Tooele, Utah; Malstrom Air Force Base near Great Falls, Mont.; and Grant County Airport near Moses Lake, Wash.

A visit to the Green River launch site June 14 by a military observer, Doug Denk, of Moab, Utah, found the site unguarded and open, with abandoned buildings in disrepair.

NASA's X-33 draft impact statement will be open for public comments until Aug. 18.

--Keith Rogers

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