DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DoD)

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

RECORD OF DECISION
FOR THE DIGITAL MULTI-PURPOSE RANGE COMPLEX, FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

AGENCY: Fort Benning, Georgia, Department of the Army, DoD

ACTION: Record of Decision (ROD)

1.0 Background

The current ranges on Fort Benning do no meet modern gunnery standards and are inadequate to support full gunnery training and qualifications, requiring either training to modified standards, or transporting units from Fort Benning to Fort Stewart, a distance of approximately 200 miles. Fort Benning proposes to construct and operate a digital multi-purpose range complex (DMPRC). The purpose of the DMPRC is to provide a state-of-the-art range facility for full advanced gunnery qualifications. The DMPRC is needed to meet the Army's training requirements to conduct gunnery courses in a realistic training environment; soldiers need to train as they fight.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500), and 32 CFR 651 (Army Regulation 200-2, Environmental Analysis of Army Actions), an environmental impact statement was prepared to assess the potential impacts of the proposed action and its alternatives on the natural and human environment. Army approval for the NEPA process was delegated to the U.S. Army Installation Management Agency, Southeast Region, and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.

2.0 Decision

The proposed action to construct, operate, and maintain the DMPRC was evaluated in the "Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Digital Multi-Purpose Range Complex, Fort Benning, Georgia," April 2004. The Army has selected Alternative III and will proceed with the necessary actions to allow the construction, operation, and maintenance of the DMPRC at the D13 area.

3.0 Proposed Action

Fort Benning proposes to construct, operate, and maintain a DMPRC, which would provide a state-of-the-art range facility, meeting the Installation's training needs for conducting effective advanced gunnery exercises in a realistic training environment. The optimal standard DMPRC design, per Training Circular 25-8, would consist of a 2,500-by-8,000-meter (approximately 4,942 acres) range and target firing area. This range would be made up of three lanes each approximately 250 meters wide and would use an ordnance impact area. The optimal standard DMPRC would contain up to 140 stationary armor targets, 45 hostile fire simulators, 39 infantry moving targets, four obstacle breach sites, two defense trenches, 12 two-man foxholes, and 39 defilade positions (hiding places behind berms or earthen works). A calibration point (area used for sighting weapons) would also be needed at the DMPRC or elsewhere. The optimal standard DMPRC design would include as many as 22 water crossings (average dimensions: 350 feet long by 29 feet wide each), in varying locations and as determined by terrain, which would be utilized by Tanks/BFVs during training.

Support facilities associated with the optimal standard design for the DMPRC would be located on an adjacent area and consist of a Control Building, an After Action Review (AAR) building, latrines, bivouac pads, two general instruction buildings, an operations and storage building, a central maintenance building (for target maintenance only), an ammunition breakdown building with ammo dock, a bleacher enclosure, a covered mess (dining area), vehicle holding and maintenance areas, a well-house and water distribution/collection/treatment system, and a secondary power and data distribution system. In addition, a helipad would be needed for emergency evacuation purposes. The DMPRC would include a Surface Danger Zone (SDZ) that is inaccessible during operation of the range. Other actions connected to the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed DMPRC include a contractor staging area for the storage of equipment and materials need for construction of the DMPRC, acquisition of borrow or "fill" materials, construction haul routes, and utility service and connections.

For the Fort Benning DMPRC, the optimal standard design was reduced in size to take into consideration site limitations, environmental concerns, and other factors at the site of the two action alternatives. The optimal standard design would consist of approximately 4,900 acres; this was reduced to approximately 1,800 acres for the two action alternatives. During the process to develop and review siting alternatives, efforts were made to avoid potential environmental impacts due to tree/vegetation removal. Although the portions of the range complex marked for construction of support facilities, roads, trails, targets, and berms would be cleared of vegetation and debris, tree and vegetation removal outside the construction boundaries were minimized. For Line of Sight (LOS) areas that require vegetation removal so that Soldiers can see the targets from the firing points, only selective tree removal would occur in wetland areas and adjoining stream buffers (approximately 25 feet on each side of the stream) wherever possible.

Changes in training on other existing ranges (Carmouche and Hastings) to incorporate the new DMPRC into the training regime are also proposed. When the DMPRC becomes operational, the basic and intermediate Tank and BFV training would move to Carmouche Range. Hastings Range would be dedicated to the training of vehicular mounted weapons systems and dismounted training scenarios utilizing BFVs and developing future technologies, such as the Stryker vehicle; training with Tanks would cease on Hastings Range under normal circumstances.

4.0 Alternatives

Alternative I: "No Action / Status-Quo" (Environmentally Preferred Alternative): Under this alternative, a DMPRC would not be constructed at Fort Benning; however, units would continue to conduct gunnery training on existing ranges. Basic and intermediate Tank and BFV training would be fired on Caramouche Range and all advanced tables would be fired on Hastings Range; some units may opt to transport to Fort Stewart for full advanced gunnery, though this seldom occurs. These exercises would be conducted in either day or night phases. Support facilities are located on Hastings Range. Hastings Range also has an existing SDZ that is off limits during operation of the range. This alternative does not support digitized training, since Hastings Range can only support modified advanced gunnery training due to deficiencies in the facilities; therefore, it does not meet the purpose and need of the proposed action. This alternative was evaluated as required by CEQ regulations and to provide a baseline for comparison of the environmental impacts of the alternatives.

Alternative II: "Compartment K-21" (Alternate Site): An approximately 1,800 acre DMPRC would be constructed on Fort Benning at the K21 area and would utilize an existing dudded impact area, K15. This alternative utilizes a range footprint dimension similar to that of Alternative III, although a specific design has not been developed, and could vary from the 1,800 acre footprint used for Alternative III. The support facilities locations and specific target and firing positions also are not currently identified, but would include those mentioned in the Proposed Action. A generic SDZ is used for planning purposes because a more specific SDZ cannot be generated without specific target

and firing positions. If this alternative had been selected as the Preferred Alternative during the NEPA process, a design would have been developed and additional NEPA evaluations of the specific design would have been undertaken. Although a specific design has not been prepared for this alternative, it provides a sufficiently detailed range complex size and component location to adequately assess the potential environmental effects.

Alternative III: "Compartment D-13" (Army Preferred Alternative): An approximately 1,800 acre DMPRC would be constructed on Fort Benning at the D13 area and would utilize an existing dudded impact area, K15. As of the 30 April 2004 design, the DMPRC would contain 35 stationary infantry targets (SIT), 11 evasive moving armor targets, 55 stationary armor targets two defense trenches with two-man foxholes, and 19 defilade positions (Tank and BFV hiding places). The design modifications reduced the optimal number of water crossings by using four tank trails, rather than six, for a portion of the range; therefore, Tanks and BFVs will use four low-water crossings (150-350 feet long by 29 feet wide) along Bonham Creek and four low-water crossings (same dimensions) across Sally Branch, for a total of eight crossings. One lane was also shortened to avoid additional crossings of Pine Knot Creek. A helipad will also be constructed, for use as an emergency evacuation site. The support facilities would be located to the southwest of the range and target firing area and just off of Hourglass Road. Support facilities would be located on approximately 20-acres and consist of the facilities detailed in the Proposed Action. The DMPRC would also include an SDZ that is off limits during operation of the range.

Alternatives Considered but Not Evaluated in Detail:

Initial internal planning for the DMPRC began in 1997 with an identification of potential locations for a DMPRC on Fort Benning, which were then scrutinized against initial criteria to determine which sites were the most reasonable alternative locations on which to build the range complex. The five screening criteria for range siting were earth-moving requirements, noise levels, cultural resources sites, the Federally Endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) (RCW), and conflicts with other training missions or ranges on the Installation. This screening process initially identified six possible alternatives including "No Action". As a result of further internal evaluation, three action alternatives were eliminated from further review due to probable excessive environmental impacts and the failure to meet the purpose and need for the project. Two of the action alternatives met the purpose and need for the project, had the lowest impact scores on the decision matrix, and were selected for further review and analysis. These two alternatives were presented and discussed in the FEIS for the DMPRC as Alternatives II and III. The potential use of existing ranges at Fort Stewart, GA, was also considered, but was eliminated from further detailed review after preliminary analysis deemed it unfeasible due to economic factors and mission requirements.

5.0 Potential Environmental Impacts

Alternative I, "No Action/Status Quo," would have minimal to no adverse effect on the natural and human environment at Fort Benning, with the exception of Noise impacts, which would continue to be significant and adverse. Cumulatively, Alternative I would not result in any incremental adverse effects on most of the natural and cultural resources; however, significant cumulative adverse effects as a result of noise are predicted. This alternative does not meet the purpose and need for advanced gunnery training and does not currently support the digital component, so it will not be discussed in detail below. Potential impacts on the natural and human environment as a result of implementing either Alternatives II or III are detailed below, generally addressing first construction and then operation and maintenance of the DMPRC. Some resources (such as soils, vegetation, and water quality) have been combined into one overall category, due to similarity in potential impacts. Analysis in the FEIS also determined that there would be minor impacts only (either adverse or positive) on some resources, such as Migratory Birds, Socioeconomics, Utilities, and Air Quality; therefore, these are not discussed; refer to the FEIS for full details on these media. However, due to comments

received from the public and regulatory agencies, some of the resources determined to have only minor or no effect have been discussed in detail below, to include Cultural Resources. No effect, either adverse of positive, is predicted for Public Health and Safety, Hazardous Materials and Waste, and Transportation and these also are not discussed.

Soil Erosion, Vegetation, Water Quality, and Unique Ecological Areas:

Alternative II "Compartment K21 (Alternate Site)": Construction of the DMPRC at this site would result in the displacement of approximately 1.5 million cubic yards of soil as a part of earth-moving and cut-and-fill operation for both the construction of the range itself (to include grubbing for roads and trails) and the trenching for the underground utility lines to support it. Construction would also include the clearing of up to approximately 1,800 acres of trees, brush and shrubs, although trees would only be selectively removed with a low impact method in some wetland and streambank areas to establish LOS. If this alternative were chosen, efforts would be made during the design process to reduce the number of targets and the maneuver lane area, which would result in fewer water crossings and less earth moving and vegetative removal. In addition, efforts would be made to leave as many trees and other vegetation as possible, especially in wetland and stream areas, while still achieving LOS requirements for the range. Fort Benning would also consider minor adjustments to the footprint of the range, if possible, but not so that other ranges and operations are adversely impacted. This alternative could also result in minor adverse effect on water quality, primarily due to potential sedimentation of adjacent streams from tree clearing, grading, and construction activities. With respect to impaired streams, this alternative may also result in increased sedimentation of adjacent streams if appropriate mitigation is not followed. Construction at the K21 site would potentially impact the Little Pine Knot Creek portion of the Pine Knot Creek Blackwaters Unique Ecological Area (UEA), which consists of two coastal plain streams: Pine Knot Creek and Little Pine Knot Creek. Most of the 230 acres of the UEA over-story trees growing within the footprint of the Range would be removed, resulting in an increase in water temperature and evaporation rates. Overall, this alternative could result in potential moderate adverse effects to approximately 15% of this UEA.

There is a potential for moderate adverse effects to soils due to training at the DMPRC and due to transport on roads leading into and onto the DMPRC; however, Tank and BFV travel is restricted to existing roads and trails leading to the range and to existing lanes on the range, thereby minimizing the potential for impacts. Overall, this alternative would result in potential moderate adverse impacts to vegetation from ongoing operation, training, and maintenance. Training could result in potential minor adverse effects to water quality, due to ground disturbance by mechanized and maintenance vehicles along paved and unpaved roads leading to the new range and from trails and maintenance roads on the new range. The standard design of the complex indicates that up to 22 stream crossings will be needed to move vehicles in and around the complex; however, if this alternative were chosen attempts would have been made during the design process to reduce the number of stream crossings required. Some of the support facilities for the DMPRC, such as the latrines and their associated septic systems and drainage (tile) fields, may also result in the indirect deposition of contaminants into the groundwater and possibly even the adjacent streams if the latrines are not operating properly; however, compliance with regulatory requirements would minimize any potential impacts from the latrines. Compliance with the Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure (SPCC) requirements will also alleviate or minimize the potential for spills into soil and water resources. Operation and maintenance may also result in potential moderate adverse effects to the UEA due to soil erosion.

Alternative III "Compartment D13 (Preferred Alternative)": Construction of the DMPRC at the D13 location would result in the displacement of approximately 800,000 cubic yards of soil and the clearing and/or removal of up to 1,500 acres of trees, brush and shrubs. The Alternative III design utilizes fewer targets, has less maneuver lane area, has fewer water crossings, and took earthmoving and vegetation removal into consideration when placing targets, lanes, and crossings. Potential impacts from construction to soils and vegetation were reduced by mitigation through the design

process; therefore, up to 300 acres of trees and shrubs will remain in the range footprint. Potential effects will also be minimized through adherence to the DMPRC Erosion, Sedimentation, and Pollution Control Plan (ESPCP) and compliance with Georgia Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP). Effects to water quality would also be similar in nature and scope to those detailed under Alternative II; however, fewer stream crossings and acres of soil disturbance would mean overall that this alternative would likely result in potential temporary minor adverse effects to water quality. Some of the support facilities for the DMPRC, such as the latrines and their associated septic systems and drainage (tile) fields, may also result in the indirect deposition of contaminants into the groundwater and possibly even the adjacent streams if the latrines are not operating properly; however, compliance with regulatory requirements would minimize any potential impacts from the latrines. Compliance with the SPCC requirements will also alleviate or minimize the potential for spills into soil and water resources. With respect to impaired streams, increased sedimentation of adjacent streams will be minimized via mitigation (see Section 6). This alternative will result in moderate adverse effects to soils and significant adverse impacts to vegetation.

Construction of the DMPRC and its associated support facilities at the D13 site would result in potential adverse impacts to the Pine Knot Creek Blackwaters UEA, because the range and target firing area would encompass 109 acres of the Pine Knot Creek portion of the UEA. Some of the UEA overstory trees that are in the footprint of the range will be selectively cut; however, there will not be any roads through the UEA. Erosion from adjacent upland target sites and access trails may increase sedimentation in the UEA, lower the water quality, and adversely impact habitat. Trees that are felled and left in place may become an obstruction and impede water flow in portions of the UEA. Both of these effects will have an impact on the hydrology of the area and may degrade habitat, increase water temperature, and change and/or reduce aquatic populations. Operation and maintenance may result in additional potential effects to the UEA due to soil erosion. This would result in potential minor adverse effects to approximately seven percent of the UEA.

Wetlands and Streambanks:

Alternative II: Construction of the DMPRC at the K21 site may result in direct impacts to approximately 20-30 acres of the 230 acres of wetlands and streams. These activities would include removing tree stumps and grubbing in some wetlands and filling some wetland areas to construct low water crossings and other structures. LOS areas would not be grubbed and the trees would be cut to ground level only, with the stump and roots remaining. Streambank buffer zones will be marked along Little Pine Knot Creek and its tributaries to protect water quality. Some aquatic wildlife species such as fish, salamanders, frogs, and turtles may be directly impacted during construction, as streams are temporarily diverted during emplacement of culverts for maintenance roads and construction of low-water stream crossings. Also tree removal along streambanks may have an indirect impact to aquatic species due to increase in stream temperature from the loss of tree canopy. There would also be a potential loss of feeding and nesting areas for migrating waterfowl and wading birds, in addition to a reduction in spawning, feeding and nursery habitat for fish and other aquatic species and a temporary fragmentation of their habitat during construction of low water crossings. Construction activities would result in potential moderate adverse effects to wetlands and potential significant adverse effects to streambanks without further mitigation.

Operation and maintenance of the newly constructed DMPRC may indirectly affect wetlands; for example, there is a possibility for sedimentation/contamination of streams at crossings over time. Recreational areas and opportunities for hunters and fishermen may also decrease in the immediate area of the DMPRC or may be altered by operation of the proposed DMPRC to make them less desirable by fish and waterfowl. Through stormwater runoff or other means, the streambanks may be impacted by petroleum-oil-lubricants (POLs) or other materials if proper SPCC requirements and responses are not followed. Another potential adverse impact might be the loss of storage areas for floodwaters and the positive filtering action by wetlands (removal of environmental pollutants such as

chemicals, pesticides and heavy metals from water moving through the system), resulting in these contaminants moving into adjacent streams rather than staying primarily within the wetlands areas. Overall, this alternative would result in potential moderate adverse effects to wetlands and potential significant adverse effects to streambanks.

Alternative III: Construction of the DMPRC and its associated support facilities at the D13 site would result in direct impacts to approximately 16 of the 315 acres of jurisdictional wetlands and streambanks due to construction activities at this site. Direct impacts would be slightly less than those predicted under Alternative II, but would be the result of the same type of construction activities as described under Alternative II. In addition, selective clearing of the wetland and streambanks within the range footprint may be necessary for establishment of line of sight.

Impacts related to operations and maintenance would be similar to those detailed for Alternative II. Overall, this alternative would result in similar adverse impacts to fewer wetlands and streambanks than predicted under Alternative II, but would still result in potential moderate adverse effects to wetlands and potentially significant adverse effects to streambanks.

Protected Species (Federal):

Alternative II: The Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) is the only known Federally listed species in the area of either Alternative II or III. Construction of the DMPRC at the K21 site could potentially impact approximately 1,800 acres, of which 921 acres are suitable RCW habitat, consisting of pines and mixed pine-hardwoods. Loss of habitat would be the result of tree removal activities for the range and target firing area and support facilities. There is a potential for the loss of four RCW clusters within the range and target area (clusters K21-01, K21-04/Inactive and K21-02, K22-01/Active) due to construction activities and the potential displacement of four recruitment sites planned in a nearby area; all four planned recruitment sites are less than 0.13 mile from the area of this alternative. In addition, approximately 146 acres of habitat would be removed from cluster K22-01, and an indeterminate amount of habitat would be lost in cluster K21-04 (presently inactive) due to range clearing and support facilities construction. The construction of the DMPRC at this location would result in significant adverse effects to Federally protected species.

Operation and maintenance on the new DMPRC could also result in potential adverse effects to RCW, although to a more minor degree. Depending on final target locations, clusters near the range footprint could be adversely impacted. During the detailed design process, firing points, targets, etc., would be located to minimize impacts to RCW clusters near the footprint of the DMPRC, if possible. If this does not eliminate adverse effects to RCWs, then strategic placement of berms would be required to reduce rounds from impacting RCW clusters and/or habitat to further reduce potential effects. In addition, there is the possibility of cluster abandonment in various RCW clusters in and around the range due to various types of disturbance (firing ordnance and increased noise, etc.). Fort Benning would also need to identify the need for incidental take of RCW clusters and/or trees in a Biological Assessment. Overall, this alternative could result in potential significant adverse effects to Federally protected species.

Alternative III: Construction of the DMPRC at the D13 site would potentially impact approximately 1,500 acres (of which 714 are suitable RCW habitat), as described under Alternative II, above. Within this site, four active RCW clusters will lose valuable habitat: cluster D14-04 will lose 84 acres; cluster D3-02 will lose 55 acres; cluster D13-02 will lose 20 acres; and cluster J6-01 will lose approximately eight acres. In addition, the abandonment of these clusters due to construction activities is possible. To help reduce impacts, the helipad access road was rerouted away from cluster J6-02. The calibration point and the road leading to it were deleted from the design due to costs, environmental considerations, and operational concerns; therefore, effects to cluster D3-02 were reduced. This alternative would result in potential significant adverse effects to RCWs from construction.

Operation and maintenance on the proposed DMPRC could also result in potential adverse effects to RCW, although to a lesser degree. During range design, attempts were made to reduce effects to RCWs and their habitat by the strategic placement of targets, roads, and support facilities. If this does not eliminate adverse effects to RCWs, then strategic placement of berms would be required to reduce rounds from impacting RCW clusters and/or habitat to further reduce potential impacts. In addition, there is the possibility of cluster abandonment in various RCW clusters in and around the range due to various types of disturbance (firing ordnance, damage to foraging habitat, increased noise, etc.). Fort Benning has identified the need for incidental take of RCWs in the DMPRC Biological Assessment (BA) and is therefore engaged in formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The required minimization/mitigation identified in this ROD for this alternative is consistent with the DMPRC BA; however, the minimization/mitigation actions will be implemented as detailed in the non-jeopardy Biological Opinion, which Fort Benning expects to receive from the USFWS. Refer to the DMPRC BA and subsequent correspondence with USFWS for additional details (see www.benning.army.mil/EMD/dmprcLegal&PublicNotices.html). Overall, this alternative could result in potential significant adverse effects.

Protected Species (State):

Alternative II: The Gopher tortoise is the Georgia listed species of concern in the area of this alternative. Construction of the DMPRC at the K21 site would potentially impact approximately 115 gopher tortoise burrows in the construction and timber harvest/slash removal areas due to the use of heavy equipment and the construction of new structures (targetry, roads, and buildings), resulting in minor adverse effects. Gopher tortoises would be relocated prior to construction. In addition, 1,107 acres of gopher tortoise habitat will be lost due to ground disturbances, target installations, and road construction. Commensal species that are dependent on gopher tortoise burrows for refuge will also be potentially adversely affected due to the loss of burrows. Gopher Tortoise populations may also become isolated from each other due to the construction of impassable structures, thereby fragmenting the ecosystem, reducing the quality and quantity of the appropriate habitat, and resulting in damage or mortality.

Operation and maintenance on the new DMPRC would further limit species management due to restricted access to the area for surveys and other management issues. In addition, the continual use of mechanized vehicles within the range and target firing area will alter the vegetative ground cover, favoring those species that thrive in disturbed areas and potentially altering the habitat for both the Gopher Tortoise and its commensal species. Incidental loss of Gopher Tortoises may also continue to take place as these animals attempt to re-colonize the newly constructed training area. Gopher tortoises exist and even thrive, however, on many of the other ranges and maneuver corridors on Fort Benning, so the habitat change should be minimal outside of the construction areas, in the long term. Overall, this alternative could result in potential minor adverse effects to state protected species.

Alternative III: While the Gopher Tortoise is the primary Georgia listed species in this alternative, one population of Pickering's Morning Glory is located to the northwest of the DMPRC footprint. Mitigation by design has eliminated the potential for adverse effects to this species. Construction of the DMPRC at the D13 site would result in similar effects as described under Alternative II. Although current surveys indicate that there are only approximately 30-40 Gopher tortoises in the Alternative III area, construction may potentially impact approximately 250 Gopher Tortoise burrows. In addition, 1,176 acres of Gopher Tortoise habitat will be lost due to ground disturbances, timber harvest, target installations, and road construction, resulting in potential minor adverse effects to State protected species. Potential effects due to training would also be similar to those described under Alternative II. Overall, this alternative could result in potential minor adverse effects to state protected species.

Land Use

Alternative II: This alternative site would continue to be used for military training and heavy maneuvers, but would now include the DMPRC. The conversion from a mostly undeveloped, forested area to a DMPRC with its associated support facilities, tank trails, and access roads would have potential minor adverse effects to recreation, to include hunting, fishing, hiking, and bird-watching. Although the area near the eastern boundary of the installation is currently used for agricultural and rural residential uses, few zoning and other developmental restrictions are in place that would impede future land use changes and encroachment on the Alternative II area. The requirement to notify the Installation of any future construction would allow an identification and cooperative resolution of any potentially incompatible land uses, although the possibility for encroachment in this area is remote. Overall, there is a potential minor adverse effect on land use as a result of this alternative.

Alternative III: The effects on recreation would be similar to those described under Alternative II. The area for this alternative is further from the eastern boundary of the installation than Alternative II, so there would be less potential for encroachment due to incompatible land uses. The requirement to notify the Installation of any future construction would allow an identification and cooperative resolution of any potentially incompatible land uses, although the possibility for encroachment in this area is remote. Overall, there is a potential minor adverse effect on land use as a result of this alternative.

Cultural Resources

Alternative II: Construction of the DMPRC at the K21 site would potentially impact 20 of the 65 known eligible or potentially eligible cultural resources sites in the area of this alternative. Potential adverse effects resulting from training may include the ground disturbance from rounds fired into new areas outside the range. There is a potential for effect on known cultural resources through maneuver of heavy combat vehicles or impacts of large gun rounds; however, those vehicles are limited to course roads and trails, which would limit the area of potential impacts. Although it is possible that rounds may land outside of the areas considered for effects to eligible sites, the chances are remote and not considered as a potential impact. Overall, this alternative would result in no adverse effects to cultural resources.

Alternative III: Construction of the DMPRC at the D13 site could affect six of the 29 known eligible and potentially eligible cultural resources sites. Through the design process and consultation with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office and the American Indian Tribes with an association with Fort Benning, potential impacts were avoided.

Noise

Alternative II: Construction activities would generate noise, both from transport vehicles and other construction equipment. Noise from construction and construction vehicle traffic would be a minor, short-term adverse effect. The construction noise would be slightly more noticeable to off-Post residents than Alternative III because this alternative site is closer to the eastern boundary of the Installation.

Alternative II would move some of the heavy weapons training away from Hastings Range and the northeast boundary to a more interior installation location and reduce noise from existing significant levels (Zone III) to more moderate Zone II levels, resulting in potential minor adverse effects from this alternative. Some residents near the east-central boundary would detect a moderate increase in noise levels resulting from heavy weapons firing, but only Zone II (normally incompatible) and Zone I (compatible) noise contours would affect that area. The residences currently affected by Zone III noise levels at the northeastern portion of the Installation boundary would no longer be affected by Zone III noise, due to the movement of the training to a more interior location. Current

voluntary restrictions on night firing would apply to operations on the range, which should minimize noise impacts at night. Overall, this alternative would result in potential minor adverse noise effects.

Alternative III: Noise from construction and construction vehicle traffic would be a minor short-term adverse effect. The construction noise would be less noticeable to off-post residents because this alternative site is located further from the Installation's eastern boundary than Alternative II.

Alternative III would move the heavy weapons training further away from the northeast boundary than Alternative II and would reduce noise from Zone III levels to Zone II levels. Some residents near the east-central boundary area would detect a slight decrease in noise levels resulting from heavy weapons firing – less noise than would be generated under Alternative II. The residence currently affected by Zone III noise levels at the northeastern portion of the Installation boundary would no longer be affected by Zone III noise, due to the movement of the training to a more interior location. Current voluntary restrictions on night firing would apply to operations on the range, which should minimize noise impacts at night. Overall, this alternative would result in potential minor adverse noise effects.

6.0 Mitigation and Monitoring Summary and Table

The information in the following table is based on the FEIS, the comments on the FEIS, the 30 April 2004 DMPRC Design and its amendments, and updated information from other environmental planning processes.

Resource Issue	Background/Impacts	Mitigation Action	Approx. Size/Area	Timing/Duration	Monitoring
Cultural Resources	Sites potentially eligible for the NRHP: both American Indian sites.	One time cut-to-length Timber Removal within the perimeter of the sites	Approximately 5 acres near helipad	During timber harvest and during construction	SCOE and EMD; Construction Contracting Officer
	Two sites potentially eligible for the NRHP: both Euro-American. Sites.	Construct 2 protective berms	1 each, approximately 100 feet long by 25 feet high	During construction and maintain thereafter	Construction Contracting Officer; DOT
	Protect against damage while also preventing information release that could facilitate looting	Use generic demarcations prior to timber harvest to indicate sensitive area(s)	All eligible sites throughout range footprint	Prior to and during timber harvest and construction	SCOE and EMD; Construction Contracting Officer
Wetlands and Streambanks	Total 315 acres wetlands in the DMPRC footprint; reduced to only about 15.5 acres directly impacted.	Reduce wetlands loss, stabilize streambanks, and restore wetlands in the Clear Creek area	Clear Creek restoration of approximately 50 acres providing approximately 158 wetlands credits and 38,650 stream credits	Concurrent with construction and monitor for up to five years thereafter	EMD and Contracting Officer for restoration effort

	Removed for Line of Sight but selective to reduce impacts and maintain stream buffer zones	Selective tree/vegetation removal in wetlands and streambanks; low-impact method	Approximately 276 acres in wetlands	During timber harvest and construction	SCOE and EMD; Construction Contracting Officer
Soils, Vegetation, Water Quality, and Unique Ecological Areas (UEAs)	Approximately 1500 acres disturbed, via clearing and grubbing for construction (300 acres) and via selective clearing (no grubbing) to achieve Line of Sight (1200 acres)	Obtain and comply with National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES) Permit	Approximately 1500 acres disturbed, via clearing and grubbing for construction (300 acres) and via selective clearing (no grubbing) to achieve Line of Sight (1200 acres)	Prior to construction	SCOE and Construction Contracting Officer
	Minimize soil erosion and sediment caused by range operations	Maintain soil and vegetation stability	DMPRC footprints and buffer areas	Annual review and maintenance as required	DOT
	Use Best Management Practices (BMPs) for staking, stream diversion channels, silt fence, vegetation establishment, etc. to minimize sedimentation in streams	Minimize the impact on Unique Ecological Areas	Approximately 109 acres in Pine Knot Creek Blackwaters UEA	During timber harvest and construction	EMD and SCOE; Construction Contracting Officer
Federally Protected Species – Red-Cockaded Woodpecker	714 acres in DMPRC footprint are suitable RCW habitat; 3 active clusters in the DMPRC footprint	Manage 7 Active Clusters in A20 area, and approximately 35-70 acres of pine trees 60 years or older	UXO Clearance to gain access to area for clusters in A20 Dudded Impact Area	Concurrent with timber harvest and construction	DOT and EMD

	Long-term monitoring and management of RCW clusters	Monitoring RCWs and habitat	In A20 and the area surrounding the new DMPRC footprint	Staffing two full time employees with 7 year terms to monitor/manage RCW clusters	EMD
	Access to monitor RCW clusters and habitat in training and dudded impact areas	Fort Benning Internal Access Agreement	In A20 and the area surrounding the new DMPRC footprint	Obtain and implement prior to timber harvest and construction	DOT and EMD
	Avoid or minimize RCW disturbance	Cut timber outside of the April-July RCW breeding season	Approximately 1,500 acres	During timber harvest and construction	SCOE and EMD; Construction Contract Officer
State Protected Species - Gopher Tortoises	Many gopher tortoises previously removed for research project during April-June 2004	All gopher tortoises to be relocated	Loss of approx. 1,176 acres of habitat; all tortoises moved to relocation site	Prior to timber harvest or construction	EMD
Mitigation Monitoring Management	Estimate 30 months: 18 mo for construction and 12 mo. post-construction	Contracting personnel as EMD monitor and liaison with contracting officers, DOT, etc.	DMPRC footprint and associated mitigation areas	Prior to construction	EMD
Noise	Determined to be a topic of concern during public scoping and input	PAO to continue providing advance public notification of training operations that could cause undesirable noise impacts off-post	Community near northeastern training areas of Fort Benning	One week prior to event	DOT and PAO

7.0 Factors Considered in Making the Decision

In making the decision to select the Army Preferred Alternative (Alternative III), the following issues were considered:

- The DMPRC will provide required training for Soldiers to support the national security mission. Soldiers need high quality and realistic training facilities to safely and efficiently carry out their real-world missions, which competes with the Army's requirement for environmental stewardship. The Army Preferred Alternative (Alternative III) maximizes training while minimizing environmental impacts.
- Consultation and coordination with the regulatory community throughout the process of this environmental analysis has helped the Army to identify measures to minimize potential impacts.
- Although the Environmentally Preferred Alternative (Alternative I) generally had fewer environmental impacts than the action alternatives, it had significant adverse impacts from noise. Noise was a major concern based on public and regulator comments. The Army Preferred Alternative substantially reduces adverse noise impacts on the communities near Fort Benning.
- The site selected for the DMPRC is currently utilized by the military for maneuvers and land navigation exercises. This site will use an existing dudded impact area, which avoids the need to create a new impact area on the Installation.
- The cost and the time required for transport and training at another Installation, such as Fort Stewart, is not acceptable when compared to the benefits of the long-term investment of building the DMPRC at Fort Benning.

8.0 Conclusion

In our capacities as decision-makers under the Delegation of Authority, after careful consideration of the FEIS, supporting studies and documentation, and all comments provided though the formal comment and review period for the FEIS, the decision is to proceed with the Army Preferred Alternative (Alternative III), to build DMPRC at D13. The Army Preferred Alternative strikes the proper balance between meeting the Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action (advanced gunnery training to full standards) and the installation responsibility for environmental stewardship. In addition, it has been determined that Fort Benning has identified and utilized all practicable means to avoid and minimize environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the Army Preferred Alternative, and that all required mitigation and monitoring will occur, as identified in the FEIS, the DMPRC Mitigation and Monitoring Plan, the DMPRC Biological Opinion, and the DMPRC Wetlands Regulatory Permit.

7/20/04
Date

JOSEPH H. PLUNKETT
Director, Southeast Region
U.S. Army Installation Management Agency

14 Jul 04
Date

ROBERT E. SEGER
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