

**FINAL
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
INTEGRATED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Fort Benning has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to identify and evaluate potential environmental effects from implementing the revised 2014 Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) at Fort Benning, Georgia. The INRMP has specified the land management practices and adaptive management strategies that will conserve ecological integrity, Army training and promote the health of Fort Benning's ecosystems. Fort Benning will strive to promote the long-term ecological sustainability of Fort Benning's lands for mission support and multiple-use opportunities. This EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500-1508, and the Army NEPA Regulation at 32 CFR Part 651 (*Environmental Analysis of Army Actions*).

2.0 PURPOSE AND NEED

Fort Benning's 2001 INRMP is outdated. The revised 2014 INRMP contains updates in natural resource management and requirements and meets the requirements of the Sikes Act (Title 16, United States Code 670a et seq.), which provides the primary legal basis for the Secretary of Defense to carry out a program for the conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources on military installations. INRMPs are prepared in cooperation with the Secretary of the Interior (acting through the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and the state(s) where the military installation concerned is located.

The DoD and U.S. Army policy requires all INRMPs to be reviewed annually by the installation in cooperation with involved parties and revised, as necessary, but no less often than every five years. In the event that an Installation's mission requirements or its natural resources undergo substantial changes, more frequent or immediate revisions may be warranted.

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Fort Benning prepared a 2014 INRMP that meets the Sikes Act requirements. The focus of the INRMP continues to be ecosystem based, rather than management for single-species. To ensure that Fort Benning can meet its mission needs now and into the future, the natural resources that provide the training environment must be managed

such that they are ecologically sustainable. Updating and implementing the INRMP would ensure that natural resource management on Fort Benning is integrated and consistent with applicable Federal and state stewardship requirements. Fundamentally, the INRMP would represent an updated, proactive approach in assuring training over the long-term continues through the sustainability of the natural resources.

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES

Army and NEPA regulations require the development and consideration of the Proposed Action and appropriate alternatives. The following criteria were used to determine whether or not an alternative would be considered reasonable and carried forth for further consideration within the EA.

- Meets the Purpose and Need as described in Section 1.4 of the EA.
- Consistent with applicable Federal and state stewardship requirements such as the Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act, Executive Orders, etc.
- Causes no net loss to military training capabilities that are currently available to accomplish the mission of Fort Benning.

One Alternative was determined to be reasonable:

- **2014 Ecosystem Management Alternative (Preferred Alternative):** The 2014 Ecosystem Management Alternative is the preferred alternative and would result in the full implementation of the 2014 INRMP. This Alternative would meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action and considered reasonable according to the selection criteria. Specific activities to support the attainment of desired future conditions (DFCs) for ecosystem management are described in more detail in Section 4.1.3 of the INRMP. Such activities are long-term goals and continuing from previous INRMPs. Updates to 2014 INRMP include:
 - The additions of the Georgia Rockcress and Shiny-rayed Pocketbook Endangered Species Management Components (ESMC);
 - Reflected changes in command structure, which incorporates training and the establishment of the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) at Fort Benning;
 - Improved Fort Benning notification policy and Environmental Management Division (EMD) access to threatened and endangered species (TES) training areas for management;
 - Revised INRMP format to reduce redundancy and focus on important resources and management actions;
 - A revised Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) ESMC that implements the 2007 Management Guidelines for the RCW on Army installations.

- **No Action Alternative:** Under this Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. Natural resource management actions that would occur under the No Action Alternative are detailed in the 2001 INRMP.

While the No Action Alternative would not satisfy the purpose of or need for the Proposed Action, the No Action Alternative reflects the *status quo* and served as a benchmark against which the Action Alternative was evaluated.

5.0 ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The analysis contained in this EA indicates that for the Action Alternative beneficial impacts would result to Air Quality, Biological Resources, Land Use, Soils, and Water Resources. Additionally, for the Action Alternative, negligible impacts to Cultural Resources, or Noise are expected to result. Thus, no significant adverse impacts to these resources are anticipated either in a long- or short-term basis. Similarly, the No Action Alternative would have the same impacts as the Action Alternative and no significant adverse impacts are anticipated.

A minor error was found in the EA. In the Summary section of the EA, environmental effects for Safety were identified as “Negligible”, whereas in Table ES-1, environmental effects for Safety were identified as “Beneficial” for the Preferred Alternative. Discussion of Safety in section 3.7 of the EA correctly presents the environmental effects of implementation of the Preferred Alternative as “Beneficial”.

6.0 PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

The Final EA and Draft FNSI were made available to the public for a 30-day public comment period from July 3 – August 2, 2014. An announcement that these documents were available for public review was published via a Notice of Availability (NOA) in *The Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, *The Tri-County Journal*, and Fort Benning's *The Bayonet and Saber* in accordance with the Army NEPA Regulation. These documents were also available at several local libraries and are posted on the Fort Benning website at <http://www.benning.army.mil/garrison/DPW/EMD/legal.htm>. The NOA of the Final EA and Draft FNSI were mailed to all agencies/individuals/organizations on the Fort Benning NEPA distribution (mailing) list for the Proposed Action. As part of Fort Benning's on-going, established process and dialogue with the Federally recognized Native American Tribes affiliated with the Fort Benning area, the Army has provided each Tribe with a copy of these documents for consultation via review and comment.

Fort Benning did not receive any comments during the 30-day public comment period. Therefore, there are no apparent issues that would affect the Final EA's analysis or the decision of a FNSI.

Although USFWS, Georgia and Alabama representatives did not comment on this EA, they have a comment opportunity on the draft 2014 INRMP per the Sikes Act requirement. Also, USFWS is conducting formal consultation on the ESMCs that are part of the 2014 INRMP. Fort Benning will review any comments received from the USFWS or States for input to the 2014 INRMP; any resulting revisions that may result in environmental impacts not addressed in this EA and FNSI will undergo appropriate NEPA.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the conclusions presented in the EA, I have concluded that the Preferred Alternative (2014 Ecosystem Management Alternative), implementation of the revised 2014 INRMP, meets the purpose and need for the Proposed Action. Although the impacts to environmental resources are similar to the No Action Alternative, the Preferred Alternative would also have additional beneficial effects upon Biological Resources and Land Use as a result of updated management plans and components. Also, the 2014 INRMP includes updated MCoE information and enhances integration of environmental sustainability and stewardship responsibilities into current training and mission activities.

Pursuant to NEPA, CEQ, and Army NEPA regulations, the implementation of the 2014 Ecosystem Management Alternative for the Proposed Action would not generate significant controversy or have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. As such, a "Finding of No Significant Impact" is warranted for this Proposed Action and does not require the preparation on an Environmental Impact Statement.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY:

20 AUG 2014

Date



MICHAEL S. HUERTER
Colonel, Infantry
Garrison Commander