

## **APPENDIX D**

# **TRANSFORMATION / BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE ACCESS PLAN**

## **Transformation/BRAC Access Plan**

A strategy for maintaining mandated levels of land management and endangered species monitoring while meeting training mission requirements

1. **PURPOSE.** This plan outlines protocols for obtaining and scheduling access to ranges, training facilities and training areas on Ft. Benning for training, forestry management, endangered species monitoring and all other activities. This plan is designed to facilitate and deconflict access among users especially resulting from increased training needs due to Transformation/ BRAC actions. Specifically, this document satisfies the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requirement for a 'Transformation/BRAC Access Plan' as discussed in the 20 August Biological Opinion (BO). This plan and its implementation meet the non-discretionary requirements presented in 'Terms and Conditions' paragraph 4 associated with 'Reasonable and Prudent Measures' paragraph 4 of said document.

2. **GENERAL.** The use of ranges, training facilities and training areas and associated airspace on the reservation for any purpose requires the approval of range control, Director of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security (DPTM). All requests to schedule ranges, training facilities, training areas, target systems support and appropriate airspace will be submitted to range control using the automated Range Facility Management Support System (RFMSS). Emergency access requirements, such as for Threatened and Endangered Species (TES) evaluation resulting from a down-range fire in a cluster area will continue to occur as defined in USAIC Regulation 210-4, Paragraph 5-21 (Control of Forest Fires).

3. **SCHEDULING PRIORITIES.** Power Projection Platform Missions, such as the CONUS Replacement Center (CRC) and deploying units have preemptive scheduling priority over all other activities. Where sharing is possible, units or activities executing these missions should attempt to share only that portion of the range or training facility scheduled for use by another unit or activity absolutely necessary to accomplish the required training. To facilitate allocation of all training support resources, priorities for scheduling ranges, training facilities and training areas are shown below.

- a. U.S. Army Infantry School / U.S. Army Armor School Program of Instruction training (Includes BCTB and OSUT)
- b. Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC)
- c. 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment
- d. All other units, FORSCOM, USAIC Tenant and non-tenant units.
- e. Externally evaluated battalion Army Training and Evaluation Programs (ARTEPs) and annual Tank and Bradley gunnery (two periods per year) have preemptive scheduling priorities if these events are clearly stated in the unit's annual training plan and previously coordinated with operations and Training Division, DOT and activities listed above. These priorities are valid until 13 weeks prior to the event in the scheduling process. After that time, no priorities exist and remaining unscheduled ranges, training facilities and training area are scheduled on a first come first served basis. After the 13 weeks, units desiring to schedule training areas scheduled by Ft. Benning Conservation Branch (FBCB) and Ft. Benning Land Management Branch

(FBLMB) will be required to get a collocation with FBCB/FBLMB before the unit can be scheduled in the training area(s). **Under no circumstances will a unit be scheduled over FBCB/FBLMB without a collocation or agreement with FBCB/FBLMB.**

4. SCHEDULING REQUIREMENTS. **Units should schedule ranges based on the actual caliber of weapon that will be employed for that day's training event and the actual projected timeframe of use.** This will minimize access limitations due to Surface Danger Zones (SDZ) and alleviate some conflict with other users on a daily basis.

5. PARTIAL ACCESS. In the case that an SDZ covers only a small portion of a training compartment, **Range Control may grant 'partial access' to a specified area for purposes of endangered species monitoring and forestry management** where activities do not pose a safety hazard.

#### 6. FBCB/FBLMB REQUIREMENTS

- a. The 20 August Biological Opinion (BO) requires that FBCB monitor 100% of Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) clusters directly impacted by projects (i.e. experiencing habitat removal and/or cavity tree loss) as well as all clusters indirectly impacted (i.e. clusters within 0.5 miles of range projects or 200 feet of road projects). This mandate results in the addition of approximately 40 clusters to FBCB's demographic monitoring requirement. Ft. Benning is also required to monitor numerous clusters as a routine element of demographic monitoring that will experience access limitations resulting from new and current SDZs.

(1). Monitoring involves frequent visits to each cluster to confirm activity status, perform nest and fledgling checks, band nestlings and to identify band combinations of individuals. Management practices involve herbicide application, cavity installation and maintenance, as examples. In addition, habitat monitoring must be conducted at regular intervals to assess impacts from training operations.

- b. According to the RCW Recovery Plan, nest checks must be performed on a 7 to 10 day basis until a nest is found and the age of the nestlings determined. Nestlings must be banded 7-8 days after hatching. These activities average 30 minutes to 1 hour per event. Fledgling checks should be conducted at approximately 26 days after hatching and no later than 40 days after hatching. This event can take from 1 to 3 hours. If the timing of a survey, nest check, banding event, or fledgling check becomes critical, FBCB should be allowed access into areas for the purpose of completing the activity. A check fire or firing time extension will be granted by Range Control for said event, as described in paragraph 8 below.
- c. The BO requires that 90,000 acres of current and potential RCW habitat be prescribed burned on a return interval of three years (a minimum of 90,000 acres in any three consecutive years).
- d. Wildfire Suppression: FBLMB personnel must have access to assess and manage wildfires that may occur to protect RCW trees, other sensitive habitats, personnel, assets, or for smoke management.
- e. According to the BO, pine stands will be thinned (harvested) in such a way as to achieve sufficient habitat for RCWs. This is achieved by a commercial timber harvest and can require considerable amount of time to complete.

(1). Before timber harvesting FBLMB personnel must have access to complete a forest inventory for the RCW habitat matrix and to mark the timber for harvest.

(2). Areas harvested for regeneration will require chemical herbicide application and will need to be burned for site preparation. Following site preparation, longleaf pine trees will be planted.

## 7. FBCB/FBLMB LIMITATIONS RESULTING FROM INCREASED TRAINING

- a. Area availability is anticipated to become a functional limitation for RCW monitoring. SDZs resulting from other ranges (i.e. Transformation/BRAC associated ranges such as the Stationary Tank Ranges, Multi-purpose Machine Gun Ranges, Multi-purpose Training Range and Qualification Training Range) will increase current access constraints by prohibiting entry into the area of FBCB/FBLMB personnel. In addition to numerous clusters already monitored, the majority of the BRAC/Transformation impacted clusters will experience access limitations as a result of new SDZs and other restrictions. Examples are the 8-11 clusters under new Oscar Range SDZs, 15-20 clusters under new Alpha area SDZs, and ~20 clusters covered by SDZs in the northeastern Kilo areas. Lack of access to critical areas will impede the ability of FBCB to carry out all required RCW monitoring and management activities within the available hours afforded by training operations.
- b. As a result of timber harvest needed to facilitate the construction of BRAC/Transformation projects, the workload of FBLMB will increase considerably. In addition, FBLMB will need to implement more intensive habitat management in more areas of the installation in order to meet RCW recovery requirements. These areas will conflict with SDZs resulting from increased number of training ranges.

## 8. FIRING TIMES.

- a. **The Malone/Oscar Range complexes will not be allowed to open prior to 0900 from 1 October to 30 April and prior to 0800 from 1 May to 30 September. During this time, FBCB/FBLMB personnel will have clearance to enter the Malone/Oscar range complexes to conduct RCW monitoring after receiving clearance from range control radio room.** Personnel must clear the area prior to times listed above. Personnel must notify range control radio room when they have cleared the area.
- b. **During the breeding season (1 April-July 31) for the RCW, if it becomes critical (day and time) FBCB/FBLMB may request an extension of the opening time for the ranges in order for FBCB/FBLMB to complete the survey.** FBCB/FBLMB must report to the radio room how much more time is needed in order for them to complete the survey. In those cases where the requirement is known in advance FBCB/FBLMB will notify Range Control 48 hours prior so units may be notified of the time extension.
- c. The period 1200-1300 daily is normally used to change out targets and perform other down range activities. However, these activities must be confirmed daily with range control radio room prior to 1100 to allow affected ranges to be placed on check fire. **During the breeding season (1 April-July 31) for the RCW if it becomes critical (day and time) FBCB/FBLMB may request through range control radio room ranges be placed on check fire from 1200-1300 to allow access to the area to complete required activities.** Personnel must notify range control radio room when they have cleared the area so the

check fire can be lifted and units may resume training. Same procedures apply here as in paragraph 8a above.

- c. For all other ranges including those for which SDZs cover the Alpha and Kilo compartments, a check fire or request for a later opening time for these ranges may be coordinated with the using units at the weekly range and terrain coordination meeting. This meeting is conducted every Thursday at 1330 at building 5510, Range operations Center. **If day and time becomes critical, FBCB/FBLMB personnel may request a check fire or later opening time through range control radio room to allow time for completion of the required activities.** In cases where more time is required to complete activities, same procedures apply here as in paragraph 8a above.
- d. Access to clusters covered by the SDZ resulting from the Digital Multi-purpose Range Complex (DMPRC) was discussed in the 22 July 2004 Biological Opinion and associated Access Plan.
- e. In other training facilities or training areas not affected by SDZs, FBCB/FBLMB personnel may coordinate collocations with the scheduled training unit at the weekly range and terrain coordination meeting discussed in paragraph 8c above or through the RFMSS system.
- e. **In the case that RCW and/or forest management actions are not being completed as required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) BO, priority may be given to FBCB/FBLMB for scheduling operations.** If approved by the Installation G-3, FBCB/FBLMB mandated activities will be given priority over unit training, except deploying unit training, to the point that minimal requirements of the BO can be met within designated time frames. The FBCB/FBLMB Chiefs will track progress for meeting compliance with the BO. When a potential shortfall is anticipated because of scheduling problems, a meeting between Chiefs of Range Division, Land Management Branch and Conservation Branch and the USFWS West Georgia Sub-Office Supervisor will occur to schedule needed RCW management activities or to develop and present the issues and recommendations to the Installation G-3 and DPTM for approval of necessary priority over training missions. *The Service should be notified within 24 hours if a BRAC BO requirement cannot be accomplished due to a training conflict. If the issue is not resolved under the conflict structure as described, the Service will submit a letter to the Army to reinitiate Formal Consultation.*

## 9. FOREST OPERATIONS.

- a. Timber harvest and other forest operations will continue to be scheduled using RFMSS. At 13 weeks, those training compartments not scheduled for training or other operations may be scheduled for timber harvest or other forest operations (i.e. replanting, control burns, etc). **In cases where the training compartment(s) are scheduled for training or other operations, FBCB/FBLMB may coordinate a co-location with the scheduled unit at the Weekly Range and Terrain Coordination Meeting or through the RFMSS system.** If the scheduled unit grants a co-location, forest operations must not interfere with training or pose a safety hazard to the training unit. Forest operations may not be scheduled in those training compartments covered by SDZs when the ranges are firing.

10. IMPACT AREA. Limited access to those areas like the A-20 Dud Impact Area will continue under the rules Ft. Benning has in-place currently. **The limited annual assessment of specific clusters will be permitted with the appropriate escort provided by the Chief of**

**Range Division.** The Safety Patrol personnel will be sufficiently trained and the escort may be augmented with Explosive Ordnance Detachment (EOD) support. The level of EOD support will be determined based on risk assessment made by the Chief of Range Division during the annual coordination for access to those specified cluster areas.

11. FBCB/FBLMB STEPS TO ALLEVIATE ACCESS CONFLICTS. In order to address access issues, FBCB/FBLMB will re-evaluate management practices, increase staff as needed and implement reasonable alternatives that ensure compliance with ESA requirements while responding to increased training needs.

- a. In an effort to increase capabilities, FBLMB has streamlined the timber harvest contract process, which will allow more flexibility in moving loggers in and out of areas as to not interfere with training.
  - b. While implementation cannot be guaranteed, FBCB will consider the following alterations to the current monitoring plan: reduction in total number of recruitment clusters monitored and alteration of spring inspection procedures to coincide with minimum recommendations outlined in the RCW Recovery Plan. For Ft. Benning's current population size of 250-349 Potential Breeding Groups (PBG), 100% of clusters will be monitored for activity status bi-annually (or 50% annually). 33% of clusters will be monitored for PBG (nest checks) annually and recruitment clusters may be monitored for 5 years post activation.
  - c. Although not anticipated, FBLMB will increase staff if needed to complete required management actions. FBCB will expand its staff to facilitate increased monitoring requirements and, in 2007, added one Wildlife Biologist to assess impacts from BRAC/Transformation projects. One full time and, potentially, one seasonal technician will be brought on as early as 2008.
  - d. It is predicted that staff will operate under flexible and variable schedules to correspond with available daylight access. Weekend and holiday scheduling is anticipated to eliminate conflicts with training activities.
12. Proposed sub-division of range compartments (a non-discretionary term and condition of the 20 August BO) to reflect current 'burn units' as described by FBLMB will likely alleviate many access conflicts and increase scheduling flexibility by allowing users to schedule smaller, more specific areas. This will safely and more efficiently segregate training from land management actions and endangered species monitoring.
13. This plan, when implemented, is a living document and will be updated/ changed as required to ensure training can be conducted while simultaneously meeting all requirements of the USFWS BO.

## REFERENCES

1996 Management Guidelines for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker on Army Installations.

Endangered Species Management Plan dated 27 September 2002.

Integrated FBCB/FBLMB Management Plan (INRMP) dated 10 September 2001.

USAIC Regulation 210-4, Range and Terrain Regulation dated 11 May 2005.

US Fish & Wildlife Service. 2003. Recovery Plan for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker: Second Revision. USFWS, Atlanta, GA. 296 pp.

US Fish & Wildlife Service BRAC/Transformation Biological Opinion dated 20 August 2007.

US Fish & Wildlife Service Digital Multi-purpose Range Complex Biological Opinion dated 22 July 2004.