

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FNSI)
FOR THE DIGITAL MULTI-PURPOSE RANGE COMPLEX
VEGETATION REMOVAL AND RANGE MODIFICATIONS
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA**

Proposed Action: Fort Benning, GA proposes to cut and/or remove vegetation on the Digital Multi-Purpose Range Complex (DMPRC) to achieve line of sight (LOS) to allow armored vehicles to visually detect and engage targets at distances described under current training range requirements from Draft Training Circular 25-8, *Appendix D, Training Ranges*. The LOS clearing will also allow range cameras to monitor Soldier training. Additional targets are proposed to implement lessons learned in the Iraq and Afghanistan combat zones and to meet evolving Army training standards and mission requirements.

The proposed action is located in the northeastern portion of Fort Benning. Construction of the DMPRC is 80% complete. With its current layout and design, several targets will be completely obscured by vegetation, which are trees mainly located in lowland areas and includes wetlands and streambuffers. Some upland pine forest also blocks the targets. DMPRC operations require training controllers to track armored vehicles as they proceed through the range. Current analysis shows trees also obscure camera coverage of range roads. Effective training evaluation requires video playback of crew actions on the course.

Under the proposed action, 221 acres of upland pine and oak trees will be cut and removed. The limbs and leaves from these trees will be burned in an air curtain destructor on site or chipped and hauled off site. The commercial size trees will be hauled to a wood processing facility. Selective cutting will occur in 54 acres of hardwood vegetation along streambuffers and 244 acres of wetlands to achieve LOS. Tree cutting will vary from 0'-100' in height, however, in some cases where vegetation still interferes with LOS, it will be removed to 0'. Some of the shorter trees and shrubs will be left uncut. Trees that regrow to a height that will obscure targets will be cut again as part of range maintenance. Logs in lowlands will be skidded to upland sites where the non-commercial materials will be chipped and hauled away or burned in an air curtain destructor. Commercial logs will be hauled to processing facilities as appropriate. All logging will follow the State of Georgia's best management practices (BMPs) for forestry.

New targetry will include five moving infantry targets (MIT's). These target systems use a human silhouette that moves along a track to simulate a moving enemy Soldier. Eleven building facades are also required and are constructed of materials such as boards and plywood and include human silhouette targets that appear in windows similar to enemy Soldiers encountered in urban environments. Associated utility lines for the MITs and facades are also required. An instrumentation loading dock is needed to enhance operational safety.

The analysis in the SEA concluded that there are no significant environmental impacts to the natural environment. The effects are both beneficial and adverse but are minor or moderate and temporary for all the VECs. The alternatives will meet the requirements of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Clean Water Act, Georgia Erosion Control and Sedimentation Act and the Fort Benning Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan. Appropriate consultation or coordination with agencies included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regulatory branch, and Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

There are no historic, archaeological, or cultural resources impacted by the proposed action or alternatives. However, should any cultural sites be discovered, appropriate actions would occur in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

The proposed action and alternatives do not measurably affect the social or economic environment of adjacent communities or the nearby counties. There are no adverse affects on low-income or minority populations. Similarly, there are no effects on the safety of children.

Mitigation Measures: Mitigation measures identified in the attached SEA will be undertaken to lessen the environmental effects of the action alternatives.

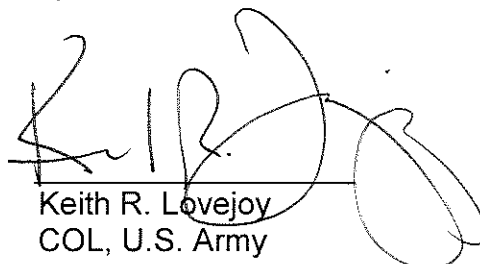
- **Soil:** BMPs, similar to those adopted in the original construction contract and its permits, will be utilized. These measures include revegetation, streambuffer stabilization, silt fences, etc. All vegetation cutting along streambuffers and in wetlands will include leaving some vegetation within the lowlands. All stumps will remain in the ground.
- **Vegetation:** Vegetation in the lowlands will be allowed to regrow unless it again obscures target or camera LOS. Large woody debris (LWD) will supply nutrients to the lowland areas.
- **Surface Water Hydrology:** Stabilization of the watershed surface with natural vegetation supplemented with reseeding as necessary will prevent erosion and diminish surface runoff. The LWD left in lowlands will moderate sediment movement to channels and its release over time from the channels.
- **Streambuffers:** BMPs for logging and construction activities will protect the streambuffers. All root systems will be left in place. Cut vegetation will be removed and slash will be disposed of only after a Notice of Termination (NOT) for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) is achieved. No negative significant impacts will result on floodplains from this action.
- **Wetlands:** All root systems will be left in place. BMPs that include low impact logging will reduce erosion and sediment impacts. The U.S. Army Corps of

prepared in accordance with the NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, Army Regulations, Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 concerning floodplains and wetlands and after careful review of the potential impacts, I have decided to proceed with Alternative II, Vegetation Removal, along with its accompanying mitigation measures and regulatory requirements. This FNSI is contingent on achieving a NOT prior to vegetation removal in the streambuffer, and follow on migratory bird coordination with the USFWS to develop appropriate conservation measures, as needed, to minimize potential impacts to migratory birds in lowland areas subject to vegetation removal.

I have considered the results of the analysis in the SEA and the comments provided during formal comment and review periods. I gave special consideration to the effect of the proposed action on all VECs and also took into account the fact that the No Action Alternative would result in both limited use of the DMPRC and substandard training opportunities for Soldiers. Alternative III (Preferred Alternative) was not selected because the proposed MITs, building facades, instrumentation loading dock and utility lines are not funded; and due to the lack of information available to determine the impacts of the aforementioned proposed range modifications on RCWs.

I also affirm that Fort Benning is committed to implementing the mitigation measures described herein for Alternative II. Selection of Alternative II will not result in a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. Therefore, issuance of a FNSI is warranted, and an EIS is not required.

Public Availability: The SEA and draft FNSI have undergone an appropriate 30 day public comment period. One comment was received from the USFWS, which initiated Fort Benning-USFWS coordination to minimize potential impacts of lowland vegetation removal on migratory birds.



Keith R. Lovejoy
COL, U.S. Army
Garrison Commander
Fort Benning, Georgia