

**DRAFT 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) so armored vehicles can visually detect and engage targets at distances described under current training range requirements from Draft Training Circular 25-8. The LOS clearing will also allow range cameras to evaluate 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 is 80% complete. With its current layout and design, several targets will be completely obscured by vegetation. This situation occurs mainly due to trees located in lowland areas, which includes wetlands and streambanks. 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 complex 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 streambanks 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. 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 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.

Alternatives Analyzed: The attached Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) analyzed the following alternatives:

- Alternative I, No Action. Construction of the DMPRC would continue under the original design of the range. However, the modifications under the proposed action would not be made to achieve LOS. The DMPRC would not receive additional moving infantry, façades and the instrumentation loading dock.
- Alternative II, Vegetation Clearing. Construction of the DMPRC would continue, along with some of the proposed modifications. Additional vegetation removal as stated in the Proposed Action (Section 2.2 of the SEA) would occur in uplands and lowlands to obtain LOS and radio frequency connectivity to maximize range capability and function. The range would allow LOS for target engagement by armored vehicle crews and training evaluation using the range cameras by range control personnel. The additional facades, MITs and loading dock would not occur under this alternative.
- Alternative III, Vegetation Clearing and Range Modifications (Preferred Alternative). Under this alternative, construction of the DMPRC would continue, along with all of the proposed modifications. Vegetation removal as stated in the Proposed Action (Section 2.2 of the SEA) would occur in upland and lowland areas to obtain LOS and radio frequency connectivity to maximize range capability and function. The range would allow LOS for target engagement by armored vehicle crews and training evaluation using the range cameras by range control personnel. Additionally, 11 facades, 5 MITs, utility lines, and an instrumentation loading dock would be added to meet evolving Army training standards and mission requirements.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action: The environmental assessment analyzed each of the alternatives for effects on the following valued environmental components (VECs):

- Soil
- Vegetation
- Surface Water Hydrology
- Streambanks
- Wetlands
- Federally Protected Species
- State Protected Species
- Water Quality
- Unique Ecological Areas
- Migratory Birds

The analysis in the SEA concluded that this is not a major federal action and 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. The action meets 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 with agencies includes 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. However, should any cultural sites be discovered, appropriate actions under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will occur.

The proposed action does 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 proposed action's environmental effects.

- **Soil:** BMPs adopted in the original construction contract and its permits will continue. These measures include revegetation, streambank stabilization, silt fences, etc. All vegetation cutting along streambanks 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 until it again obscures target 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.
- **Streambanks:** BMPs for logging and construction activities will protect the streambanks. All root systems will be left in place. Cut vegetation will be removed and slash will be disposed of. 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 USACE Savannah District regulatory office determined that no permit will be required under the Clean Water Act Section 404 1.b due to these mitigation measures.
- **Federally Protected Species:** Informal consultation with the USFWS has determined that the proposed action.... ***(to be determined. The consultation is currently ongoing with the USFWS and will be finished before the NEPA process is completed)***. The original DMPRC Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and its biological opinion assumed that Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and

their habitat would be taken with the original design. While some residual habitat persisted at the 80% construction phase, that will be cut to achieve LOS. No other ESA listed species occur within the DMPRC.

- **State Protected Species:** The gopher tortoises that occupied the DMPRC were relocated prior to starting construction. A few individuals returned to the construction site and were again relocated. If any tortoises return they will also be relocated.
- **Water Quality:** The BMPs mentioned above in surface water hydrology, soils, streambanks, and wetlands will also protect water quality and keep the stream within Georgia water quality standards.
- **Unique Ecological Areas (UEA):** Vegetation cutting will allow the regrowth of most vegetation in the Pine Knot sub-watershed. Leaving the cut vegetation in the stream side areas will allow its recycling into the environment while it also stabilizes the landform and soil. The function of the UEA in Pine Knot Creek will continue functioning as a representative of a class of streams.
- **Migratory Birds:** Vegetation treatment will cause shifts in habitat type and limited habitat fragmentation will occur.

Conclusion: On the basis of the findings from the attached SEA (which incorporates the 2004 DMPRC EIS and its Record of Decision and adopts its analysis) that was prepared in accordance with 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 conclude that the implementation of the proposed action, with its accompanying mitigation measures and regulatory requirements, will not result in a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. I also affirm that Fort Benning is committed to implementing the mitigation measures described herein for the proposed action. Therefore, issuance of a FNSI is warranted, and an EIS is not required.

Public Availability: The SEA has undergone an appropriate 30 day public comment period. This was in accordance with the requirements specified in 32 CFR 651.

Colonel, U.S. Army
Garrison Commander
Fort Benning, Georgia

Date