

Environmental Assessment for the Temporary Stationing of a Modular Brigade Combat Team Unit of Action at Fort Polk, Louisiana

Background Information

The Army announced Friday, July 23 (2004) that a Brigade Combat Team Unit of Action (BCT/UA) will be located at Fort Polk. This unit, the 4th Brigade of the 10th Mountain Division (4/10th MTN), is a new light infantry unit that will be formed here in 2005. The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (2ACR) will move from Fort Polk to Fort Lewis, Washington.

In May of 2004, the Army signed a Record of Decision related to transformation of the 2ACR to a Stryker Brigade Combat Team. The US Forest Service also signed a Record of Decision in February 2004 to allow certain military activities within portions of the Kisatchie National Forest. The decisions were the result of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on transformation activities, installation mission support enhancements and long-term use of the Kisatchie National Forest for military training. The FEIS was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended. The FEIS also considered a number of environmental stewardship measures needed to offset adverse impacts associated with military training and to sustain the Army and Forest Service land for long-term military and non-military uses. These include forest thinning in the Intensive Use Area of the Kisatchie National Forest and a series of 15 mitigation and monitoring measures applicable to both Army and Forest Service lands. Based on their respective agency decisions, Fort Polk and the Forest Service signed a 20-year Special Use Permit and Operating Plan for use of over 98,000 acres of the Kisatchie National Forest, contingent on implementation of the mitigation and monitoring measures.

The stationing of the 4/10th MTN at Fort Polk is also subject to NEPA. In order to comply with NEPA and other applicable environmental regulations, the Army is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the environmental and socioeconomic effects on Fort Polk and surrounding communities of stationing the 4/10th MTN at the installation. Additionally, Fort Polk will evaluate environmental stewardship activities needed to ensure the sustainability of installation training lands and natural resources. The set of EIS mitigation and monitoring measures adopted by the Army and Forest Service will be carried forward in the EA and considered in the analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with stationing of the 4/10th MTN.

The EA will be tiered to the FEIS. The term tiered denotes a narrower, more focused EA that refers back to a broader EIS and incorporates information from the EIS by reference. The tiered EA will focus on specific activities and potential environmental impacts associated with stationing of 4/10th MTN that are not within the scope of impacts addressed in the FEIS.

The Army encourages public input on this action. As part of the EA process, a fifteen-day public scoping period will begin on September 9, 2004. Fort Polk is soliciting input from interested agencies, organizations, and individuals for assistance in determining the appropriate

scope of the EA and to identify issues of concern to be considered and analyzed. The public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the EA prior to final agency decisions.

Key Points

From a Fort Polk perspective, this is a great decision. As home of the Army's premier training facility for light infantry forces, Fort Polk is exceptionally well suited to support one of the Army's new infantry BCT/UAs. The infantry BCT/UA is a highly deployable unit and is an important part of the current efforts to transform the Army.

The 2ACR has performed admirably in peace and war and will be missed from the post, but it will remain a relevant and lethal force wherever it is stationed. The Army remains committed to taking care of its soldiers during this transition. This decision supports Army efforts to transform now to meet current and future challenges in the War on Terror.

There has been some speculation about the impact of this announcement on construction projects planned at Fort Polk. At this time, we are aware of no changes in funding for planned construction projects. Obviously, there will have to be an analysis of all of the requirements of a BCT/UA but, for the most part, the projects we have planned will be needed by the new unit being stationed here.

We will comply with NEPA and begin an EA on this stationing action. Furthermore, Fort Polk and the US Forest Service are committed to maintaining the mitigation and monitoring measures developed as part of the recent EIS to offset adverse environmental impacts of military training and to sustain both Army and Forest Service lands for military and non-military uses.