

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

Questions and Answers:

Q1: Why is the Army taking this action to move the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (2ACR) to Fort Lewis and station a Brigade Combat Team/Unit of Action (BCT/UA) here at Fort Polk?

A1: At a press conference on 13 August 2004, Acting Secretary of the Army Les Brownlee pointed out that Fort Lewis, as home of the first two Stryker Brigades, is well suited to support the 2ACR, which will transform to a Stryker Brigade Combat Team. Additionally, the stationing of modular BCT/UAs is operationally imperative now to ensure the Army is properly postured to fully support its strategic commitments and to transform to a campaign-quality force with joint and expeditionary capabilities that meet the demands of the Combatant Commanders. The locations for BCT/UA were selected based on existing capacities, available training space, and current locations of similar units. The Army will address permanent stationing through the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) 2005 analysis.

Q2: What details can you give me regarding these new BCT/UAs?

A2: Under Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker's "modularity" focus area, the 33 maneuver brigades in today's active-component Army will be reset into 43 to 48 Brigade Units of Action. The Army will be temporarily "plussed up" by 30,000 troops to fill the added brigades, officials said. The brigades will be smaller but more lethal, officials said, including artillery and reconnaissance assets previously at the division level. Some corps assets will also move down to the brigades.

Q3: How do you feel about losing the 2ACR?

A3: No one likes to bid farewell to a unit that has made Fort Polk its home station for so many years. But the 2ACR will continue to serve our country well regardless of their location.

Q4: Does the loss of the Stryker Brigade mean that Fort Polk will be less relevant or could be more vulnerable for the next round of BRAC actions?

A4: All installations will be reviewed as part of the BRAC process and no one can predict the outcome of the next BRAC round. That said -- This decision indicates that Fort Polk will continue to be relevant to the needs of the Army as home of the 4th Brigade of the 10th Mountain Division (4/10th MTN). These new units of action are highly deployable and part of the Army's current effort to transform to meet the challenges of the current operational environment as an Army at war. In fact this decision was made before BRAC because the Army must transform now.

Q5: Will this cause a reduction in military personnel at Fort Polk?

A5: At this point, no reductions have been associated with this re-stationing action.

Q6: What will happen to all of the transformation projects that were planned to support the transformation of 2ACR?

A6: While no changes have been identified regarding planned construction, officials are reviewing the requirements of a BCT/UA.

Q7: Why are you doing an Environmental Assessment (EA) instead of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

A7: In March 2004, the Army completed a Final EIS (FEIS) entitled *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment Transformation and Installation Mission Support, Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and Fort Polk, Louisiana and Long-Term Military Training Use of Kisatchie National Forest Lands*. The EIS considered the environmental consequences of transformation of 2ACR, installation mission support enhancements, and long-term use of portions of the Kisatchie National Forest for military training. 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. The EA prepared to address environmental impacts associated with stationing of the 4/10th MTN will be tiered to the FEIS. The EA will focus on specific activities and environmental impacts associated with the 4/10th MTN that were not already addressed in the EIS. The 4/10th is a light infantry unit, and therefore, the Army anticipates that the environmental impacts of 4/10th training operations should be within the scope of impacts predicted in the FEIS for transformation of 2ACR. Furthermore, the set of mitigation measures proposed in the FEIS and specified in both the Army and Forest Service's Records of Decision will be carried forward in the EA. The Army will make a final determination on the need to prepare a supplemental EIS will be made at the conclusion of the EA.

Q8: What impact will this new stationing action have on the recent FEIS and Records of Decision (RODs) completed by Fort Polk and the US Forest Service?

A8: The FEIS and RODs are still valid documents. The findings of the FEIS apply to Joint Readiness Training Center operations and military construction activities that are still integral to the installation's mission. The FEIS findings also apply to long-term military use of the Kisatchie National Forest, which is necessary to fulfill the installation's real property needs for maneuver and gunnery ranges.

Q9: What impact will this new stationing action have on the Special Use Permit and Operating plan between Fort Polk and the US Forest Service?

A9: The Army and Forest Service anticipate that the Special Use Permit and Operating Plan will remain in effect without amendment. This evaluation is based on the Army and Forest Service commitment to full implementation of the mitigation and monitoring measures agreed upon by both agencies. A final determination regarding potential effects on the Special Use Permit and Operating Plan will be made following completion of the EA.

Q10: What about the commitment to mitigation and monitoring efforts agreed to by the Army and US Forest Service in the recent RODs for both agencies?

A10: As noted above, the set of mitigation measures proposed in the FEIS and specified in both the Army and Forest Service's RODs will be carried forward in the EA. Both Fort Polk and the US Forest Service are fully committed to these mitigation and monitoring measures. They are still relevant to offset the adverse impacts of military training and to sustain both Army and Forest Service land for military and non-military uses. The measures focus on five functional areas: training area maintenance; training land resource allocation (i.e., scheduling of training and non-training activities); facilities design and construction process oversight; soldier sustainable range awareness training; and environmental monitoring and resource protection. The mitigation and monitoring measures augment existing environmental stewardship and best management practices, and with full implementation on an annual basis, they are expected to reduce adverse environmental impacts predicted in the FEIS to a level below significance.

Q11: What is the projected timeline for the EA?

A11: The Army plans to complete the EA and issue a decision in late 2004.

Q12: Will there be opportunities for public involvement/comment in regard to this EA?

A12: Yes. The Army encourages public input on the proposed action and issues of concern. A 15-day public scoping period will be held during September 2004 to solicit comments and concerns from interested members of the public, organizations, and state, federal and local agencies. The public will also be provided an opportunity to comment on the EA prior to making a final decision.