

RECORD OF DECISION
FOR THE JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER &
FORT POLK LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM
(including purchase and lease)

AT

FORT POLK, LOUISIANA

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JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER & FORT POLK
GARRISON COMMAND
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RECORD OF DECISION FOR THE JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER & FORT POLK LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM (including purchase and lease)

As the Executive Director of the U.S. Army Installation Management Command (IMCOM), I have reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the implementation of the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) & Fort Polk Land Acquisition Program (including purchase and lease). The FEIS adequately addresses the potential environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts of the Army's proposed acquisition of up to 100,000 acres of training land adjacent to Fort Polk's Main Post and Peason Ridge Training Area. The FEIS, published on March 19, 2010, is incorporated by reference in this Record of Decision (ROD). This ROD explains that the Army will proceed with its Preferred Alternative, which is Alternative 3 to acquire (including purchase and lease) up to 100,000 acres of training land within Vernon and Rapides Parish; including the consideration of two corridor options within Vernon Parish to connect Peason Ridge and Fort Polk.

1.0 BACKGROUND

The JRTC and Fort Polk play a pivotal role in supporting the Army's overarching mission to "fight and win our nation's wars" by providing a critical venue to train Soldiers and leaders to adapt and solve complex problems that will arise when operationally deployed. Currently the Army has access to approximately 198,000 acres of land that is a combination of Army-owned land (approximately 100,000 acres) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS)-owned land (approximately 98,000 acres), which the Army uses under a permit from USFS. Within the 198,000 acres, many land uses conflict or compete with one another, and do not allow the installation to meet its goals of simultaneously supporting the JRTC and training of its resident units.

As stated within Section 1.3 of the FEIS, Fort Polk does not have adequate land to simultaneously support both the JRTC and home-station training requirements. The shortfall of available training land at Fort Polk causes the installation to implement various training management procedures that lead to a degradation in overall quality and realism of training. Over time, this inability to support training of the JRTC and home-station units could result in decreased Soldier and unit readiness. The ongoing challenge has been to maximize Fort Polk and rotational unit training capacity in something less than the "ideal doctrinal training box." This situation creates an intensive competition for limited training resources between Fort Polk and rotational units.

Acquisition of additional maneuver space will make training more realistic for Soldiers training at Fort Polk, improving their readiness, reducing the need for training work-arounds, and accommodating simultaneous live-fire and maneuver training activities of the JRTC and home-station units. In addition, beyond supporting current training requirements, additional training land will also provide Fort Polk with an increased ability to manage training requirements in the future as new systems are fielded, and will provide the installation with more flexibility to rotate and sustain training lands.

2.0 PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action is to acquire up to 100,000 acres of training land to meet the current and future training needs of the JRTC and Fort Polk. The Proposed Action has four stages which include, Stage 1: Army Acquisition (including purchase and lease) and Transfer of Land Ownership; Stage 2: Construction

and Upgrade of Training Infrastructure; Stage 3: Army Training; and, Stage 4: Land Management. These stages are discussed further in Section 5.0.

3.0 ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

3.1 Alternative 1

Alternative 1 includes Army acquisition, conversion/preparation, training, and management of up to 100,000 acres of land to the south and southeast of Peason Ridge and to the north and east of Fort Polk's Main Post. Alternative 1 does not include acquisition of land to provide units with a maneuver corridor to connect Peason Ridge and Fort Polk's Main Post. Units would continue to convoy to Peason Ridge using existing procedures and protocols for travelling on land leased by Fort Polk. This existing route between Peason Ridge and Fort Polk's Main Post is referred to as the Yellow Brick Road.

3.2 Alternative 2

Alternative 2 includes Army acquisition, conversion/preparation, training on, and management of up to 100,000 acres of land in the same geographic area as Alternative 1. In addition, Alternative 2 includes the option to acquire land to connect Peason Ridge and Fort Polk's Main Post, and thereby develop a maneuver corridor. Under this alternative, at least one corridor would be established. The potential corridors include a corridor encompassing the Yellow Brick Road, and a corridor in land located to the east of Yellow Brick Road.

3.3 Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative)

During the public scoping meetings, public comment requested that the Army include an additional area in Rapides Parish for consideration for land acquisition. Alternative 3 was added to the EIS after the Army determined it met the purpose and need of the Proposed Action. This alternative includes Army acquisition, conversion/preparation, training on, and management of up to 100,000 acres of land in the same geographic area as Alternatives 1 and 2. In addition, this alternative includes the potential to acquire approximately 26,000 acres of land within Rapides Parish as an additional option to help meet the maximum 100,000 acres. This alternative was identified as the Preferred Alternative within the FEIS because it best allows the JRTC and Fort Polk to acquire adequate maneuver land to conduct realistic training of its resident units and those units training at the JRTC. This alternative also provides the Army with increased ability to use its existing training land to meet maneuver training land shortfalls and it provides additional opportunities to acquire large contiguous parcels of currently undeveloped land ideal for Army maneuver training. In addition, this alternative provides two potential corridors (similar to Alternative 2) to connect Fort Polk's Main Post with Peason Ridge.

3.4 No Action Alternative

As required by Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, the No Action Alternative was also evaluated in the EIS. Under the No Action Alternative, the acquisition and use of additional land to support the JRTC and Fort Polk training requirements would not occur. Adoption of the No Action Alternative would result in no change to the current size of the installation at Fort Polk and no acquisition to increase Fort Polk training land holdings. As such, this alternative calls for home-stationed and visiting rotational units at Fort Polk to train within existing land inventories. This would continue to place Fort Polk and rotational units at risk of mission/readiness shortfalls due to maneuver training land deficiencies that result in constrained and unrealistic training.

3.5 Alternatives Considered But Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The following is a list of alternatives eliminated in Section 2.4 of the FEIS, along with a brief explanation of their failure to meet the screening criteria outlined in Section 2.3.2 of the FEIS:

- ***Transporting Fort Polk-based Units and Their Equipment to Geographically-Separated Installations (e.g., Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; Camp Shelby, Mississippi; Camp Claiborne, Louisiana; and Camp Minden, Louisiana).*** Available training sites (e.g., Fort Chaffee, Camp Shelby, Camp Claiborne, and Camp Minden) suffer similar limitations to those of Fort Polk and also have scheduling conflicts and/or restrictions on the type of maneuver training permitted due to heavily scheduled training areas. These other installations are not readily available to support the training activities of Fort Polk's units. In addition to the lack of available training space, transport of units would decrease the available time for unit training. Units would be required to spend several days uploading, transporting, and downloading equipment into a separate geographical location resulting in lost training time. In short, there is no existing training area in the continental U.S. (CONUS) that is available and accessible that can provide the doctrinally-required maneuver space at the frequency needed for combat proficiency of Fort Polk-based and rotational units.
- ***Transport Reserve Component Units Training at Fort Polk to Other Locations.*** Displacing the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) and other Reserve Component units would not open up sufficient amounts of training land for use by active component units; reserve units are responsible for less than 5 percent of the total maneuver activities that occur on Fort Polk training land. In addition, shifting training would incur considerable cost and loss of critical annual training time while deploying to other locations.
- ***Conduct Clearance of Impact Areas to Provide Additional Maneuver Space.*** The considerable cost and minimal benefit of a few thousand acres limits the viability of this alternative. In addition, conversion of an impact area to a maneuver area would be counter-productive as impact areas are critical training resources that enable artillery, aviation, and other units to rehearse wartime tasks.
- ***Utilize Existing Land and Increase Virtual and Constructive Simulations Training (i.e., computer/other simulation) to Meet Training Requirements.*** Increased use of simulation-based training would meet the Army's training requirements for Soldiers training at Fort Polk and would not alleviate shortfalls in training land needed to conduct live training. Simulations training does not by itself prepare Soldiers for operational deployment and would result in decreased training readiness. Training simulations do not currently offer a solution that can meet the Army's requirements.
- ***Divert JRTC Rotations to NTC.*** This would not be practical because the National Training Center is already conducting as many training rotations as possible, and these rotations are already fully scheduled for Army units.
- ***Utilize U.S. Forest Service Land for Additional Maneuver Space.*** The JRTC and Fort Polk have previously looked at additional training capabilities on adjacent USFS properties. The Army determined this alternative was not practical because the Army is already utilizing adjacent USFS lands to the maximum extent possible under a Special Use Permit. Furthermore, additional USFS lands not being utilized by the Army to the north and east of Fort Polk are not adjacent and are highly fragmented with private inholdings.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The Proposed Action is expected to result in direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to the newly acquired land. Impacts will occur as a result of change of ownership from private to Army ownership, construction of infrastructure, training, and as a result of Army resource management. The FEIS analysis has ensured that an informed decision has been made in consideration of the potential environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action. The following sections present a summary of impacts that are predicted to occur as a result of implementing the Proposed Action and discuss the impacts of the No Action Alternative as a baseline comparison.

4.1 Land Use Plans and Policies

Significant, long-term adverse impacts will occur from the implementation of the Proposed Action. The primary adverse impact to land use will result from conversion of land designated as prime farmland to Army ownership and training land use. There will be minor, short-term adverse impacts to land use from construction and training infrastructure upgrades. The Fort Polk Real Property Master Plan (RPMP) will be updated to reflect the acquisition of additional land and will guide the siting of facilities and management procedures to reduce any conflicts on the adjacent land uses from Army training. In addition, land formerly managed for commercial timber production will be managed for ecological sustainment to encourage new native growth where construction activities are not planned.

Under the No Action Alternative retaining the current land use on Army property would result in the continuation of scheduling and operational conflicts between the Fort Polk resident units and the JRTC. In addition, simultaneous live-fire and maneuver training events would continue to be restricted because of the proximity of their training areas to each other. Negligible impacts to land use would be anticipated for land within the study area; however, intensity of training and scheduling conflicts would continue to occur at Fort Polk.

Future development of private land adjacent to newly acquired land could be impacted from future Army training; however, little change in land use and development, outside of the Proposed Action, is anticipated within Vernon and Rapides Parishes.

4.2 Airspace

No modifications to airspace are proposed as part of the Proposed Action. The Army will work with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to determine the feasibility of conducting airspace operations as required to support future training needs as they arise. Additional supplemental National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis may be conducted at that time. Impacts resulting from implementation of Army training under the Proposed Action are negligible.

Under the No Action Alternative, minor impacts to airspace use would be anticipated. Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) training would continue to be conducted within designated areas of the R-3803A and R-3804A with little impact from the No Action Alternative. Without the potential increase of Army land holdings, the distance between the training ranges remains considerable, thereby exposing a large segment of public and privately held land during UAS operations in authorized overhead airspace.

4.3 Air Quality

Minor adverse impacts to air quality will occur from construction and training activities under the Proposed Action. During the construction and upgrade stage, construction vehicles will generate exhaust and fugitive dust emissions, causing temporary and minor local increases in airborne pollutants. In addition, increases in localized air emissions will occur on newly acquired and adjacent properties due to shifting a portion of current JRTC and Fort Polk troop training activities to the new land. Elevated air-

pollutant concentrations resulting from training activities will be short term, localized, and will not result in any long-term impacts to regional air quality. Air quality emissions levels due to vehicular use may increase slightly due to increased travel to the expanded training areas. Training on new land will increase the risk of starting unintentional wildfires, which will increase regional smoke thereby decreasing air quality. Army management of this land will also produce increased levels of smoke through prescribed burning activities. Adverse impacts from increased airborne particulate matter generated by smoke will be minor and temporary.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no increase in criteria or hazardous air pollutant levels at either the existing training sites or the study area. There would be no effect on the existing air quality "attainment" status at the JRTC and Fort Polk or the study area. The timber industry would most likely continue to harvest standing timber on its properties using practices such as the clear-cut method. This method causes vast depletion of vegetation, which in turn causes soil erosion and increases in fugitive dust emissions and, therefore, long-term minor adverse impacts to air quality would occur under the No Action Alternative.

The Proposed Action will not result in adverse long-term significant cumulative effects.

4.4 Noise

Construction activities will cause temporary minor adverse impacts to the surrounding residences, churches, and schools in the vicinity due to construction noise and heavy machinery traffic. Proposed use of the study area for military training could result in significant, long-term adverse effects. Sensitive receptors within the entire Alternative 3 study area include approximately 2,085 residences and 18 churches. The potential for significant impacts will likely be greatest if training were to occur within the portion of the study area located to the southeast of Peason Ridge (referred to as *Peason Southeast* in the FEIS) and the portion of the study area located in Rapides Parish (referred to as *Fullerton Southeast* in the FEIS) as these locations currently experience minimal noise associated with military activity. Significant levels of increased noise could also occur directly south of Peason Ridge and north of Fort Polk if live-fire were to be conducted within these areas. Live-fire activities will not occur within newly acquired land associated with Rapides Parish due to existing highway networks and due to the distance of this land to existing impact areas, reducing the potential for significant adverse impact. Overall Army management of noise will mitigate long-term adverse impacts due to Army training. Newly acquired land will be managed in accordance with the Installation Operational Noise Management Plan (IONMP).

Under the No Action Alternative, existing noise conditions within the study area would remain unchanged.

The Proposed Action will result in significant cumulative adverse noise impacts within the study area. Both historically and currently, logging, highway noise, and sporadic military activity have been the primary contributors to the noise environment within and surrounding the study area. More recent military activities, such as off-road and other training in the Limited Use Area and the additions to the Digital Multi-Purpose Battle Area Course, have contributed to an increase of noise in the environment. Other on-going regional actions such as the expansion of the Alexandria International Airport and construction associated with the widening of Louisiana (LA) Highway 28 have also contributed to increased levels of noise. Despite these activities, the region remains relatively rural and undeveloped; therefore, the amount of sensitive noise receptors within the region is unlikely to increase within the near future. The Proposed Action will add a cumulative significant adverse increase of regional noise from the introduction of military vehicles, the use of weapons systems, and concentrated human activities within a largely undeveloped area. Both wildlife and humans will potentially be affected by noise resulting from increased training activities within the study area.

4.5 Soils

Short-term moderate adverse impacts to soils resulting will occur from upgrading existing road and trail networks, and constructing additional networks and combat trails. These activities will be expected to increase runoff and soil erosion potential during construction. Long-term adverse effects to soils will include grading and compaction on expanded portions of existing trails and within areas for new trails and roads. Adverse effects on soils will be reduced by the use of appropriate best management practices (BMPs) for controlling runoff and erosion during and following construction. Overall moderate, long-term adverse impacts to soils will result from training activities. Adverse impacts of maneuver training will be associated with the temporary, but long-term disturbance and exposure of soils from the off-road and unimproved trail use of wheeled and tracked vehicles. Significant impacts will be mitigated through improvements of capital investments (i.e., road upgrades and development of water crossings) and the continued implementation of the Integrated Training Area Management Program and maneuver damage inspection and monitoring. The short- and long-term effects of Army management of the natural resources within the study area will in general be beneficial to the soils. The study area contains a majority of either potentially or highly erodible soils, which will greatly benefit from being converted from traditional clear-cut timber production to ecological-based managed forest land.

Under the No Action Alternative minor to moderate short- and long-term impacts to soils would be anticipated from existing logging practices and would depend on factors such as the scale and frequency of the harvesting, the type of yarding techniques used, and location and number of logging roads. Short-term effects would include disturbance and erosion of soils during timber harvest, and long-term effects include rill and gully erosion caused by exposed soils before a new tree canopy and forest litter layer develops.

Overall cumulative impacts to soils from the Proposed Action will be minor. Little other change in land use and development is anticipated within Vernon and Rapides Parishes. In addition, logging activities within the region will continue to produce adverse impacts to regional soil resources. Army management of acquired land will benefit soil resources, reducing cumulative effects from regional actions.

4.6 Water Resources

Training land preparation, including upgrading road and trail networks, establishing water crossings, site hardening at specific locations, and tree thinning, will result in minor adverse impacts to surface water resources, or cause temporary indirect impacts such as sedimentation from adjacent construction sites. Moderate adverse impacts to wetlands will occur from construction activities (unavoidable impacts during facility siting/construction), or cause temporary indirect impacts such as sedimentation from adjacent construction sites. These impacts will be reduced by the use of BMPs such as development of stormwater pollution prevention plans, use of sediment erosion control devices, adhering to stream buffers, and through Section 404 permitting requirements. The degree of impact to surface water resources from Army training will likely be moderate but will depend on the location, frequency, and extent of training and off-road vehicle use. Vehicles and troop maneuvers within or along the banks have the potential to cause moderate changes in streambed and bank morphologies, as well as associated decreases of surface water quality from sedimentation from streambank erosion. Adverse impacts, however, would be avoided through the use of designated water crossings, permitted under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The degree of impact to wetlands will likely be minor. Off-road vehicle movements could also occur through/near wetland areas causing minor direct impacts from soil compaction and sedimentation, which can alter wetland hydrology. These adverse impacts to surface water and wetland resources, however, will be reduced as field operations will utilize water crossings and will be sited to avoid sensitive areas (e.g., areas susceptible to severe water erosion and wetland areas). The Alternative 3 study area contains 75 water wells within Vernon Parish and 55 water wells within Rapides Parish. Live-fire training exercises conducted within the newly acquired land will also have the potential to impact water resources.

Indirect, long-term, and minor adverse effects could occur to water resources adjacent to newly established live-fire areas from the transport of sediments contaminated by munitions by-products and heavy metals. The short- and long-term effects of Army management of the natural resources within the study area will in general be a net beneficial impact to water resources; being converted from traditional clear-cut timber production to managed forest land.

Under the No Action Alternative, surface water quality would remain *status quo*. Much of the land under consideration for acquisition (including purchase and lease) is currently managed for timber harvesting, which, although it is vegetated, timber harvesting would have the potential to degrade surface water and wetland resources through increased potential for sedimentation and erosion, causing moderate adverse impacts.

Overall cumulative impacts to water resources will be negligible. Long-term minor adverse effects on water quality will result from training activities, timber harvesting, and recreational activities within the three watersheds. All of these activities will contribute to soil erosion and increased sedimentation and siltation to nearby surface water resources. Minor adverse cumulative effects to groundwater withdrawals could occur in the region over the next decade due to nonmilitary growth resulting in an increased use of groundwater resources; however, as limited development and growth is foreseen within the region, the potential to impact groundwater resources will be low. Continuing Fort Polk training operations and regional commercial forestry operations could cause the degradation of wetland resources primarily through sedimentation; however, Army land ecosystem management activities will likely have a long-term beneficial impact of conserving and enhancing existing wetland habitats.

4.7 Biological Resources

Construction and upgrades of training infrastructure will result in localized and minor adverse impacts primarily due to vegetation loss and conversion/disruption of terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Off-road vehicle use during training will be expected to cause moderate, long-term adverse impacts to vegetation. Vegetation disturbance from training could also increase opportunities for the introduction or spread of invasive plant species. Interruptions of nesting and breeding locations (including migratory bird species), interruptions to migration/wildlife corridors, and startling behaviors will be minor to moderate as elevated noise sources and human activity are common within the study area due to logging practices and existing military training on adjacent land. Vehicle maneuvers during training will result in minor impacts from increased potential of direct mortality of individuals from collisions, particularly with less mobile species. Off-road vehicle maneuvers will also cause habitat loss and degradation. Adverse impacts to Red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs), Louisiana pine snakes, and other sensitive species will be unlikely during construction or training due to the lack of high-quality habitat within the study area. Alternative 3 has the potential to contain the Federally-threatened Louisiana pearlshell mussel within areas of Rapides Parish containing clear, moderately swift-flowing, perennial streams with stable mineral substrate. The short- and long-term effects of Army management of the natural resources within the study area will in general be a net beneficial impact to biological resources. The Army would conduct surveys to determine the presence of wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, to ensure it is known where these species exist and where additional management is required if these species were determined to be present.

Under the No Action Alternative, land in the study area would continue to experience adverse impacts from commercial logging practices. Adverse impacts to vegetation caused by current logging activities would continue without the benefit of Army management. Degraded ecosystems within the study area would not be restored. Current logging practices halt natural forest succession and prevent the ability of RCW habitat to mature.

Overall beneficial cumulative impacts to biological resources will be anticipated from the Proposed Action. Logging activities have been a major past and current action impacting the biological resources within the region. Despite minor adverse impacts to biological resources arising from increased human

activity in the study area, Army management of newly acquired land will offset these impacts and promote long-term restoration of degraded ecosystems within the study area.

4.8 Cultural Resources

The region of influence for cultural resources is referred to as the “Area of Potential Effect” (APE), consistent with National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 review. The APE within Vernon Parish contains two National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-eligible archaeological resources and one NRHP-eligible architectural resource. In addition, three identified architectural resources and all 14 cemeteries identified within the Vernon Parish APE have not been evaluated for listing on the NRHP. The additional Rapides Parish APE associated with Alternative 3 contains one architectural resource and four cemeteries. Resources that have not been evaluated for listing on the NRHP will be treated as eligible by the Army if they occur within the newly acquired land. Any unavoidable direct adverse impacts to National Register-eligible historic structures will be mitigated through measures negotiated during the applicable NHPA Section 106 process. Adherence to the existing cultural resources laws, regulations, and Army requirements, as well as the installation’s cultural resource management program for resources located within the APE, is anticipated to create beneficial impacts to cultural resources that may not otherwise be maintained under existing private ownership and commercial logging operations. As discussed in the Final EIS, an Initial Predictive Cultural Resources Inventory has contributed to the early identification of historic properties within Alternative 3 and will also yield data useful for identifying potential areas for subsequent survey work (post-ROD) within Alternative 3. Fort Polk Master Planning will delineate the footprint (direct APE) of specific training areas within tracts of acquired parcels prior to any construction or training activities.

Under the No Action Alternative, the potential for significant adverse impacts would be anticipated, as cultural resources within the APE are currently not being managed. Due to the lack of mandated stewardship of resources within these areas, the current extent of logging and associated ground-disturbing activities may lead to the degradation of integrity of these archaeological, architectural, and cemetery resources.

Cumulative beneficial impacts are anticipated to occur to cultural resources from implementation of the Proposed Action. Future regional growth is anticipated to be low, reducing the potential of adverse impacts to cultural resources on private land. In addition, the large amount of land holdings by the USFS will also help preserve regional cultural resources through Federal management and Section 106 compliance. Overall cumulative impacts to cultural resources, however, are anticipated to be beneficial because of military stewardship.

Section 7.0 discusses commitments within this ROD to protect and minimize impacts to Section 106 resources. Additional information regarding the Section 106 process is located in Appendix A of this ROD.

4.9 Socioeconomic Resources

As a result of transfer of land to Army ownership from private ownership, the population of Vernon Parish and Rapides Parish may decrease slightly, depending on pattern and distribution of properties acquired by the Army. The hunters currently utilizing hunting club land could experience individually significant, long-term adverse impacts to their hunting activities from loss or displacement of hunting opportunities. These impacts, however, are projected to be minor when considering the total area available for hunting within the region. Fort Polk will continue to issue hunting permits and provide access for recreational hunting on existing and newly acquired lands. The estimated timber production tax revenue lost for Vernon Parish (\$235,925) and for the State (\$95,423) under the Proposed Action will have a moderate, long-term adverse impact on these local economies. The total estimated timber revenue loss for Rapides Parish (\$50,343) under Alternative 3 will have the potential for a minor impact on

Rapides Parish. The corresponding reduction in mining, gas, and oil revenues from extraction will have a minor, long-term adverse impact on the economy within the affected parishes. During construction and during training operations, areas currently publicly accessible and available for recreational use will be inaccessible to the public, or subject to availability as determined by the military mission. Accessibility to and use of acquired land for mining and mineral extraction activities may be restricted by Army construction and operation activities. Regional economic activity will temporarily increase as construction firms are hired for future projects, providing temporary moderate benefits. Army management of newly acquired land within the study area will include update of the Outdoor Recreation Management Plan. The net impact from Army management will be negligible.

Under the No Action Alternative, negligible impacts to social and economic conditions would be anticipated. No change in population or demographics would occur and existing trends in population would not be affected. Growth in area population would be incremental, based on normal growth factors. Therefore, there would be negligible impacts to the area's population characteristics. In addition, because no change in population would occur, the demand for housing would not increase; therefore, negligible impacts to housing would occur. In addition, no Army land acquisition or future projects within this land would occur that would impact minority and low-income populations or children, recreational opportunities, public access, public services, economic development, employment, taxes, revenue, or timber and mining activities.

No current or future development projects within the region have been identified that will cause a cumulative adverse or beneficial impacts. The Proposed Action, therefore, is not anticipated to contribute to a cumulative increase of population and housing in the area. As numerous public and private land exists within the region for recreational opportunities, the Proposed Action is expected to add only minor cumulative impacts to public recreation in the area. Newly acquired land will be managed for hunting and public recreation in accordance with the Sikes Act and the Outdoor Recreation Management Plan, subject to availability as determined by the military mission. Moderate cumulative impacts to timber severance revenue will occur from future loss of timber production within acquired land under the Proposed Action.

4.10 Traffic and Transportation

Traffic impacts will be localized, temporary, and infrequent during construction. Construction impacts would include temporary road closures for equipment access and construction activities, and temporary increase in construction vehicles to and from construction sites. Some segments of parish roads may be closed as part of the Proposed Action if those segments are within areas acquired by the Army and do not serve as the sole access to private property, however, current public roads providing access to private property will remain open as public roads. During operations, the increased frequency of military vehicles will represent new traffic volumes on Highway LA 463. Increased frequency of use on the roadways and convoy operations will result in increased congestion/delays (i.e., a decrease in level of service [LOS]), safety risks to motorists, and maintenance needs. It is expected that existing roadways will be able to handle the potential increased use of roadways by military vehicles and temporary delays without exceeding roadway capacity as current annual average daily traffic volumes indicate relatively low traffic volumes in the study area and LOSs are currently at acceptable levels (LOS of C or higher). Access Control Points (ACP) 4, ACP 7, and ACP 8 may experience increased frequency of use under the Proposed Action and this is anticipated to result in minor adverse impacts to the gates as the current capacities will be able to handle the increased usage. Roadways intersecting the proposed eastern and western corridor areas could experience greater impacts from the higher frequency of crossing with military vehicles, potentially resulting in minor and temporary adverse impacts to traffic during use of any future constructed connecting corridor. Military vehicles will be limited to the established Army-owned north-south connecting corridor(s), thereby reducing the number of military vehicles on public roadways. Army management will result in negligible beneficial impacts on roadways from maintenance and

rehabilitation of heavily used roads, improving the overall road network and reducing the need for off-road vehicle use around degraded road segments. Smoke from prescribed burning in newly acquired land could cause a decrease in visibility on surrounding roads, causing temporary and minor traffic impacts.

Under the No Action Alternative, negligible impacts to transportation resources would occur as there would not be any increase in traffic on the roadways within the study area.

Cumulative minor adverse impacts could occur to traffic and transportation. In the long-term, the widening of LA 28 (which has occurred within the study area and is planned to occur in segments east of the study area) is expected to improve the highway's LOS and general traffic conditions in the region (road capacity and motorist safety).

4.11 Hazardous and Toxic Substances

Hazardous and other regulated waste generation could increase temporarily during construction-related activities. Such increases, however, will be minor and will not significantly affect hazardous waste disposal capacity in the region. During Army training, hazardous waste could be generated from fuel spill cleanups and the removal of spent munitions constituents from live-fire ranges. Moderate, long-term adverse impacts would be associated with Army training on land acquired under the Proposed Action. Some of the live-fire training occurring at Fort Polk would be transferred to newly acquired land; therefore, this land would likely become contaminated with metals and other munitions constituents associated with live-fire training within newly established range areas.

Under the No Action Alternative, overall, minor adverse impacts would be expected to occur to hazardous materials, and the generation of hazardous and other regulated wastes within the study area from existing logging operations. The use of hazardous materials and the generation of regulated wastes would continue at baseline levels within existing Fort Polk owned and leased land. Potential cleanup sites that exist in the study area would not be brought under Army management and remediated; therefore, existing environmental impacts at these sites would not be mitigated. Such sites could include land historically used for treating timber, managing cattle pests, and storing petroleum products. Since the land under consideration for acquisition by the Army is not owned or managed by the USFS or other Federal, State, or local government agencies, it is assumed that no remediation plans or projects have been developed for a majority of these sites. It is possible, however, that some private property owners may have already identified such sites, and planned and/or implemented measures to remediate historical environmental impacts.

Cumulative moderate adverse impacts could occur in regard to hazardous and toxic substances.

4.12 Facilities

The primary minor adverse impacts to facilities under the Proposed Action include potential damage to utilities during construction and training; periodic interruptions to access to oil/gas fields during training; and increased rehabilitation and maintenance needs on roadways resulting from military vehicles. Under the Proposed Action, water wells and waterlines will need to be located and assessed to determine if reinforcement is needed prior to any construction or training activities. In general, the waterlines and wells are expected to remain undisturbed as these are mainly located along roadway right of ways. Under Alternative 3, the Rapides Parish land area includes water wells and waterlines that will need to be located and assessed prior to any construction or training activities, though it is assumed that these utilities primarily exist along the roadways (LA 113 and LA 114) and will generally remain undisturbed. Prior to construction activities, existing underground utility pipelines will be located and avoided. There may be long-term minor impacts to existing oil and gas wells from Army activities on newly acquired land, though the Army will seek to avoid acquisition (including purchase and lease) of properties with these features if possible to do so and meet the Army's training needs. If necessary, the Army will acquire

land and may lease these fields and infrastructure back to the oil and gas companies, allowing them access rights and use of these facilities. Access, however, could be periodically interrupted by training missions and will require coordination with Fort Polk, causing a minor adverse impact.

Under the No Action Alternative, negligible impacts to existing conditions of facilities within the study area would occur.

Overall, cumulative minor adverse impacts will occur to utilities and roadways from continued Army training, which will have the potential to damage underground utilities and increase road maintenance from military vehicular traffic on local roadways. Both Vernon and Rapides Parishes have quality of life initiatives, which involve long-term strategies for improvements to regional infrastructure and transportation.

5.0 STAGES OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Implementation of the four stages of the Proposed Action is further discussed in this section. Because the area sought to be purchased is substantial, it is anticipated that the entire Proposed Action will be staged over a ten- to fifteen-year period. Each parcel of land acquired under the Proposed Action will go through the stages discussed in Sections 5.1 through 5.4.

5.1 Stage 1 – Army Acquisition (including purchase and lease) and Transfer of Land Ownership

The first stage of the Army's Proposed Action is to acquire up to 100,000 acres of additional commercial and/or private land adjacent to Fort Polk or Peason Ridge. Once the Army makes a decision on the parcels it wants to acquire within the Selected Alternative study area, the land acquisition process will begin. As part of this action, the United States Army Corps of Engineers Fort Worth District will proceed with acquisition, which will involve notifying property owners, obtaining rights of entry, conducting surveys and appraisals, and working with the land owners to complete the transactions. As the potential acquisition area of up to 100,000 acres involves numerous property owners, the acquisition process will occur over a number of years. The average anticipated timeframe from notification to closing for an individual property owner will be approximately one year.

5.2 Stage 2 – Construction and Upgrade of Training Infrastructure

The second stage of the Proposed Action includes conversion/preparation of acquired land to Army training land that will be capable of supporting maneuver training and live-fire (unrestricted where possible). Preparation of the land for training will include, but is not limited to, the upgrade of existing road and trail networks, establishment of water crossings, site hardening at specific locations required to support training, silviculture techniques including prescribed burning and forest thinning where necessary to improve the ability to support current and future military training, use of erosion control measures, and reforestation.

During this stage, Fort Polk will conduct necessary surveys (Table 1) to determine the quantity and quality of natural and cultural resources present on newly acquired land, and mark and map the locations of all sensitive resources. These surveys will be conducted prior to construction and training. Prior to development of training areas within the newly acquired land, follow-on NEPA analyses tiered off the Final EIS will be conducted to evaluate the environmental impacts of specific training area development proposals.

Table 1. Resource Surveys

Survey or Action	Description
Level I Survey	Phase I archeological survey work on new property.
Endangered Species Survey	Endangered species survey on new property.
Natural Resource Survey	Survey for natural resources information to allow for Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) management.
Forest Inventory	Forest inventory.
Well Survey	Survey for location of groundwater wells.
Solid Waste Management Unit Sites - Preliminary Assessment	Surveys for identification of solid waste.

5.3 Stage 3 – Army Training

During this stage of the Proposed Action, the Army will begin to conduct training on new land. Training will primarily include unrestricted dismounted and vehicular training conducted by units at the JRTC or by units stationed at Fort Polk. Primarily this includes the training of IBCTs, Stryker brigade combat teams, combat support, and combat service support units. Periodically, heavy brigade combat teams also train at Fort Polk. Newly acquired properties may need to be used by the Army to support live-fire training. This land will allow safe firing of indirect live-fire into existing impact areas. Munitions will include artillery simulators, blank rounds, simulation demolitions, short-range training ammunition, illumination, training and smoke grenades, and smoke/obscurants. Firing points may be established for mortars and artillery training as part of the Proposed Action, at locations compliant with safety standards and that allow units to fire into designated impact areas. No new impact areas will be created as part of the Proposed Action.

5.4 Stage 4 – Land Management

As part of the Proposed Action, the Army will implement its current land management and natural and cultural resource programs on newly acquired land. Some of the plans and programs will be initiated prior to conversion/preparation of land for training, while others will be implemented following that preparation. The following is a list of plans and programs that will be implemented on newly acquired land as part of the Proposed Action:

- Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan
- Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan
- Integrated Pest Management Plan
- Endangered Species Management Component
- Forest Management Plan
- Integrated Training Area Management Program
- Maneuver Damage Inspection and Monitoring

- Sustainability and Environmental Monitoring Plan
- Development and Implementation of Watershed Management Plans
- Annual Maintenance of Sediment Basins
- Temporary Closure of Sites
- Integration of Maneuver Damage Inspection and Repair into Annual Training Calendar
- Environmental Screening/Alternatives Analysis for Construction Projects
- Construction Process Oversight
- Sustainable Range Awareness Training Program
- Bog Mapping and Monitoring
- Louisiana Pine Snake Conservation
- Fort Polk Compliance Programs

Fort Polk environmental staff will implement plans to the fullest extent to attain the maximum benefit as resources allow.

6.0 DECISION FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FORT POLK LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM (INCLUDING PURCHASE AND LEASE)

I have considered the result of the analysis in the FEIS, supporting studies, and comments provided during formal comment and review periods. As a result, I have determined that the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 3 (see Figure 1 below) identified in the FEIS, reflects the proper balance of initiatives for the protection of the environmental- and mission-related factors. This alternative was identified as the Preferred Alternative within the FEIS because it best allows the JRTC and Fort Polk to acquire adequate maneuver land to conduct realistic training of its resident units and those units training at the JRTC. This alternative also provides the Army with increased ability to use its existing training land to meet maneuver training land shortfalls and it provides additional opportunities to acquire large contiguous parcels of currently undeveloped land ideal for Army maneuver training. In addition, this alternative provides two potential corridors to connect Fort Polk with Peason Ridge. Selection of this alternative will allow the Army to lessen training "work-arounds" and better allow the Army to conduct both live-fire and maneuver training simultaneously while avoiding future conflicts between resident unit training requirements and the maneuver training requirements of the JRTC. Furthermore, the implementation of this alternative will not require the loss of training time or added cost incurred by longer distance transport of troops and equipment. With regard to sustainability concerns, because this alternative covers more land it has the potential to attenuate adverse environmental impacts over a broader area. The beneficial aspects of the Army's action will also take effect on a greater amount of land. For these reasons, this was also the Environmentally Preferred Alternative within the FEIS and has been chosen as the Selected Alternative in this ROD for implementation of the Proposed Action.

My decision for implementation of Alternative 3 includes implementation of environmental mitigations discussed in Section 7.0 of this document. This decision will support the Army's effort to enable JRTC

and Fort Polk to fulfill the Army's mission to "fight and win our nation's wars" by providing a critical venue to train Soldiers and leaders to adapt and solve complex problems when operationally deployed. In addition, as indicated in the FEIS, the Army has used procedures of 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §800.8(c) utilizing the authorized NEPA and EIS process in lieu of §800.3-§800.6 of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations for the Proposed Action. This ROD, therefore, also represents the Army's conclusion of the Section 106 process. Cultural resources commitments are included in Section 7.0.

7.0 MITIGATION AND MONITORING COMMITMENTS

The Army is committed to sustaining and preserving the environment within its training land and is committed to being a good steward to adjacent neighbors. As part of the decision to implement the Proposed Action, the Army will enact the following environmental mitigations presented in Table 2. These mitigation measures, which were identified as proposed mitigation measures in Sections 3.15 and 3.16 of the FEIS, will be implemented to reduce the severity and extent of potential impacts of this decision.

Table 2. Army Mitigation and Monitoring Commitments

Resource Area	Impact/Situation	Proposed Action Stage	Mitigation and Monitoring Commitment
Proposed Action	Resource Surveys	Stage 2	Fort Polk will conduct necessary surveys to determine the quantity and quality of natural and cultural resources present on newly acquired land.
Proposed Action	NEPA studies	Stages 2 & 3	Appropriate follow-on NEPA analysis will be required to support site-specific construction and new training proposals not covered in this EIS
Proposed Action	Federal Lands	Stage 2	Mark and map the locations of all sensitive resources.
Proposed Action	Management Plans and Programs	Stages 2, 3 & 4	The Army will use current installation programs and, where appropriate, develop additional mitigation measures to minimize the impact on any future inholdings and their residents.
Land Use	Prime Farmland Soils	Stage 1	Fort Polk will coordinate with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to complete the form AD-1006 (Farmland Conversion Impact Rating) for parcels containing prime farmland soil in timbered/agricultural production.
Land Use	Land Use Compatibility	Stage 1	The Army Real Property Master Plan will be updated to reflect the acquisition of land and will guide the siting of facilities and management procedures to reduce any conflicts on the adjacent land uses from Army training.
Airspace	Airspace Use	Stages 2 & 3	The Army will work with the FAA to determine the feasibility of conducting airspace operations in any newly acquired area; supplemental NEPA analysis will be conducted as necessary.
Air Quality	Fugitive Dust	Stages 2 & 3	The Army will apply dust palliative treatments to newly established training areas within the newly acquired land, as required, to limit excessive fugitive dust emissions.

Table 2. Army Mitigation and Monitoring Commitments (continued)

Resource Area	Impact/Situation	Proposed Action Stage	Mitigation and Monitoring Commitment
Air Quality	Biological Integrated Detection System (BIDS) Use	Stage 3	The Army will select site(s) that provide suitable terrain and sufficient area for deployment and operation of the BIDS, with consideration given to simulant release routes, wind speed, and direction to minimize the potential for off-post drift of the simulant spray.
Air Quality	Prescribed Burning	Stage 4	Elements of the INRMP regarding prescribed burning will be implemented on newly acquired land to minimize the impacts from smoke generated during prescribed burns.
Air Quality	Air Quality Management	Stages 2, 3 & 4	The Air Quality Management Plan will be implemented on newly acquired land to maintain air compliance objectives.
Noise	Sensitive Receptors	Stages 2, 3 & 4	Noise modeling will be conducted, where necessary, to determine the impact of future proposed actions on newly acquired land to adjacent sensitive receptors.
Noise	Sensitive Receptors	Stages 2, 3 & 4	Fort Polk will implement noise monitoring, if needed, in live-fire areas to determine effects and continue use of the installation noise hotline as a noise management tool.
Noise	Noise Management	Stage 4	The IONMP will be updated to incorporate newly acquired land.
Noise	Noise Management	Stage 4	Based on the actual land acquired, noise monitoring strategies will be specifically developed for each area of newly acquired land.
Water Resources	Groundwater Wells	Stage 2	Should any undocumented wells become known during infrastructure upgrades, the proper procedures in accordance with Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development will be used to prevent groundwater contamination. This includes closing or buffering the wells to prevent groundwater contamination from construction and training activities according to the Fort Polk Wellhead Protection Plan.
Water Resources	Surface Water	Stage 2	Assembly Areas [100m by 100m, (328 feet by 328 feet)] will be established outside of surface water areas.
Water Resources	Surface Water	Stages 2, 3 & 4	To prevent further impairment of water quality within State-listed impaired segments of streams, Fort Polk will evaluate and monitor stream water quality impacts.
Water Resources	Scenic Rivers	Stage 2	Fort Polk will coordinate with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) regarding any projects or activities occurring within segments of the Calcasieu River or Ten Mile Creek protected under the Louisiana Scenic Rivers Act.

Table 2. Army Mitigation and Monitoring Commitments (continued)

Resource Area	Resource Area	Resource Area	Resource Area
Water Resources	Wetland Mitigation	Stage 2	Per Section 404 permitting, compensatory mitigation will be required for both temporary and permanent impacts to all wetland habitats that will be affected by construction activities.
Biological Resources	Native and Invasive Species Management	Stages 2, 3 & 4	As outlined in the INRMP and its associated Standard Operating Procedures, Fort Polk will plant native species to the extent practical in disturbed areas and implement management of invasive species (i.e., manual pulling, mowing, and herbicides).
Biological Resources	Surface Water Crossings and Aquatic Habitat	Stage 2	Fort Polk will consider future construction of any culverted or bridged systems over surface waters, which could affect streams and aquatic habitat will require NEPA review and Section 404 permitting, potentially reducing adverse impacts to aquatic life (i.e., streambed loss, fish barriers, etc.).
Biological Resources	Migratory Birds	Stage 2	Fort Polk will consider the protection of migratory birds when planning and executing non-military readiness activities on newly acquired land; follow-on NEPA analysis will be initiated for specific construction and development projects following land acquisition.
Biological Resources	Louisiana Pine Snake	Stage 2	Fort Polk will conduct surveys for the Louisiana pine snake and/or pocket gopher mounds within construction footprints for all new construction projects within the range and maneuver areas.
Biological Resources	Louisiana Pine Snake	Stages 2 and 3	Activities anticipated to affect the Louisiana pine snake negatively will be coordinated through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).
Biological Resources	Louisiana Pine Snake	Stage 4	Fort Polk will seek to extend the Candidate Conservation Agreement to cover Louisiana pine snakes present on any newly acquired land.
Biological Resources	Red Cockaded Woodpecker	Stages 2, 3 and 4	Within the appropriate potential nesting habitat, RCW cavity surveys and RCW presence/absence surveys will be conducted by a qualified biologist to determine baseline number of RCW groups present on newly acquired training land following land acquisition. These surveys will be performed in accordance with the Endangered Species Management Component (ESMC) for the RCW. Copies of the survey report containing distribution maps of RCW groups on newly acquired land and latitude/longitude coordinates for these clusters will be provided to the USFWS's Louisiana Ecological Services Office.

Table 2. Army Mitigation and Monitoring Commitments (continued)

Resource Area	Resource Area	Resource Area	Resource Area
Biological Resources	Red Cockaded Woodpecker	Stage 4	Regardless of whether RCW groups are found present within the newly acquired land, the ESMC and INRMP will be updated to reflect the Army's Proposed Action and new information discovered as part of its implementation. RCW groups acquired through the land acquisition process, if any, will be managed similarly to those currently managed on existing Army training land at Fort Polk, in accordance with Fort Polk's ESMC of the INRMP. Endangered Species Act consultation for the RCW will occur on a project-by-project basis for proposed construction activities and new training proposals that were not addressed in the FEIS.
Biological Resources	Louisiana Pearlshell Mussel	Stages 2, 3 and 4	Fort Polk will coordinate with LDWF and USFWS to determine appropriate measures required to protect the Louisiana pearlshell mussel.
Cultural Resources	Historic Structures	Stages 2 & 4	The Army will consult with the State Historic Preservation Office under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
Cultural Resources	Predictive Modeling	Stage 4	Fort Polk will apply a GIS-based predictive model of all newly acquired parcels, utilizing the site distribution attributes, as well as mapping of historic roads and railroads, to identify locations with site potential.
Cultural Resources	Cultural Surveys	Stages 2 & 4	Qualified personnel will conduct archaeological and architectural survey and evaluation to identify areas of potential impact associated with land-clearing activities. After land acquisition, subsequent stages of this Federal action may include more refined and quantitative site and resource evaluation for the construction and operation of specific training areas and transportation corridors within newly acquired land.
Cultural Resources	Curation of Artifacts	Stages 2 & 4	Eligible artifacts identified during surveys and their associated records will be stored in an appropriate Curation Facility in accordance with 36 CFR 79.
Cultural Resources	Cultural Site Management	Stages 2, 3 & 4	Sensitive sites, including those containing cultural resources will be demarcated with orange posts made of carsonite (a flexible yet durable plastic) around the perimeter of each site.
Traffic and Transportation	Public Roads	Stage 1	Acquisition of State-owned through-roads will not be part of the Proposed Action – consideration of Army road ownership may occur only if a State highway dead-ends into Fort Polk property and the Army acquired all properties along that particular stretch of the highway (ownership will be considered only for that particular stretch).
Traffic and Transportation	Access Roads	Stage 1	Current public roads providing access to remaining private property will remain open as public roads.

Table 2. Army Mitigation and Monitoring Commitments (continued)

Resource Area	Resource Area	Resource Area	Resource Area
Traffic and Transportation / Facilities	Utility Lines	Stages 2 & 3	Transportation routes with underground pipelines will be avoided or reinforced, if necessary, to prevent utility line damage from Army training.
Hazardous and Toxic Substances	Contaminated Sites	Stages 1 & 4	Any contaminated sites that exist in the study area will be avoided, or if necessary investigated with appropriate follow-on action being taken.
Hazardous and Toxic Substances	Contaminated Sites	Stages 1 & 4	A Contingency Plan will be funded and implemented that will outline the Army's approach to addressing any contamination and remediation issues identified within any newly acquired parcels. This plan will be developed in coordination with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

I have considered the results of the analysis described in the FEIS, supporting studies, and comments provided during formal comment and review periods. I have determined that Alternative 3 and the mitigation commitments listed in this ROD strike the proper balance between the necessary protection of the environment and acquisition, development, and management of additional training land needed to support the Army's mission requirements at Fort Polk. I have determined that the Army has identified and adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize harm to the environment.



Mr. John B. Neger
Installation Management Command
Executive Director

23 April 2010

Date