

## **Press release 1 – released by the Public Affairs Office May 5, 2014**

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles to be published by Fort Polk's Public Affairs Office to keep the community informed about the Land Acquisition Program at Fort Polk. This article features answers to some of the community's frequently asked questions. Subsequent articles will delve deeper into the land acquisition process. We'll keep our community informed.

An April 8 meeting on Fort Polk has raised controversy among some members of the local communities. The gathering, held at Fort Polk and hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Fort Worth District), outlined details of the Army's Land Acquisition Program. The Corps is the Army's real estate agent. The land in question includes 47,500 acres south and southeast of Peason Ridge. The additional land will be used to increase the training area to support the Fort Polk and the Joint Readiness Training Center mission to prepare Army units to deploy in support of contingency operations outside the United States.

The process for acquiring land is complex, and of utmost importance is ensuring the community understands that process, said Steve Chadwick, Fort Polk's G3 Chief of Training. "The Fort Polk command group wants to keep our community members informed with accurate information. The positive relationships we have with our neighbors are vital to the Soldiers and Families who serve our nation, and that relationship requires back and forth communication," he said.

Q: Doesn't Fort Polk already have land in use for training?

Frequently asked questions:

A: Fort Polk's training area is currently 198,000 acres; 100,000 of which belong to the Army. The other 98,000 acres belong to the U.S. Forest Service. Forest Service land, which Fort Polk is allowed to use, is divided into two areas: Intensive use and the limited use area. The limited use area is Forest Service land that is also open to the public for recreational purposes. The intensive use area is land that Fort Polk uses to support maneuver of large unit formations and live fire operations. Given the land resources available to support the JRTC mission, the Department of the Army conducted a land use requirement study in 2005 followed with a detailed analysis published in 2007. The result of those studies was Fort Polk had a shortfall of training land. The land purchase corrects that shortfall; and helps keep the JRTC and Fort Polk relevant to today's Army.

Q: That seems like a lot of land. Why is more needed?

Much of the Forest Service land, which is important for small unit training, does not support training large formations, and in the case of the Limited Use Area, is closed to the Army for three to four months annually --additional use would not be safe for the public. Much has changed in the Army over the past five years. In the 1990s, our average JRTC rotation included 2,500 Soldiers; by 2006 with the war in Iraq escalating, our rotations reached approximately 5,000 Soldiers. Today, our rotations are increasing to 6,000 Soldiers. That number is expected to rise to 7,000 by September 2014 as the Army completes its reorganizing and the size of Brigade Combat Teams increases. It is vital that the Army train these units over larger areas that allow unrestricted maneuver training and extensive, complex live fires.

Q: How much land is involved in this current land purchase?

A: The Corps of Engineers has acquired about 32,500 acres of the targeted 47,500 acres.

Q: There's been many rumors circulating that the Army is going to "take" the remaining targeted land by use of eminent domain. Is that true?

A: Eminent domain involves the right of the state (or federal government) to acquire land provided it is for public use (for the good of the public, in this case the training of Soldiers); however the U.S. Constitution requires just compensation for that land. None of the 32,500 acres of land already acquired has required the use of eminent domain through the court process. Our goal is always to use willing sellers and that is the first step in land purchase negotiations.

Q: Is it true that former Fort Polk commanders stated in the past that only willing sellers would be involved in land acquisition, and eminent domain would not be used?

A: Again, the goal is always to use willing sellers. Prior Fort Polk commanders have emphasized that goal during past scoping meetings, held in 2009. However, much has changed in the Army over the past five years as it reorganizes and reduces the force. In 2014 it has become vital to keep the JRTC's relevance in a soon-to-be-smaller Army.

Q: How many landowners are being affected by the 47,500 targeted acres?

A: Fifty-four landowners are being impacted; 29 have residences in the area. Landowners have met with the Corps of Engineers, Fort Worth District, and members of the Fort Polk command, to discuss the land-acquisition process, and are being fully informed. Additionally, they have all been provided copies of documents that explain their rights and benefits, such as relocation assistance, payment of closing costs, and more, under the program.

