

Record of Decision
Final Environmental Impact Statement
For
2d 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

USDA Forest Service
Kisatchie National Forest
Vernon and Natchitoches Parishes, Louisiana

Introduction

The Department of the Army, the USDA Forest Service, and the USDOT Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) prepared the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) to address proposed actions affecting the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) and Fort Polk, Louisiana, portions of the Kisatchie National Forest (KNF) in west-central Louisiana, and England Industrial Airpark at Alexandria, Louisiana. The Department of the Army is the lead federal agency for the proposed actions. The Forest Service and the FAA are cooperating agencies. Each agency will issue a separate Record of Decision (ROD) in accordance with the respective agency's procedures. This ROD applies only to proposed actions on National Forest lands in the KNF.

Background

Military use of the KNF began in January of 1941 when the Secretary of Agriculture signed a letter to the Secretary of War authorizing the Army to use portions of the Vernon Ranger District (now the Vernon Unit of the Calcasieu Ranger District) to establish Camp Polk. During World War II, the Army was authorized to use many other areas of the Forest, for activities ranging from water supply to gravel pits. The primary use, however, was military training. Camp Polk, now known as Fort Polk, through a series of agreements has historically utilized the Forest for military training exercises. Army activities on the Forest are governed by a *Master Agreement Between Department of Defense and Department of Agriculture Concerning the Use of National Forest System Lands for Military Activities* (September 30, 1988) and a special use permit (SUP) issued to the Army that identifies location-specific permitted uses on 98,125 acres of National Forest lands.

The JRTC and Fort Polk is located in Vernon Parish, in west-central Louisiana. The Main Post of Fort Polk consists of 66,998 acres of Army land in the northern portion and 40,026 acres of National Forest land in the southern portion. The southern portion is referred to as the Intensive Use Area (IUA). The IUA is National Forest land, but it is used primarily by the military under the SUP. The SUP also allows the Army to use an additional 44,799 acres of National Forest

land for less intensive military training to the south of the IUA, referred to as the Limited Use Area (LUA). The IUA and LUA constitute the Vernon Unit of the Calcasieu Ranger District.

About 15 miles to the northwest of the Main Post of Fort Polk is the Peason Ridge training area located in Vernon, Sabine and Natchitoches Parishes. Peason Ridge is used for intensive military training and it consists of 33,011 acres of Army land and 480 acres of National Forest land on the Kisatchie Ranger District. The SUP also includes an additional 12,820 acres of the Kisatchie Ranger District north of Peason Ridge referred to as the Special Limited Use Area (SLUA), or “Horse’s Head”, that are used for limited military training. Table 2-1 and Figure 2-1 of the FEIS (see FEIS, pages 2-4 and 2-5) display the lands under permit to the Army and their location.

The JRTC was established at Fort Polk in 1993. It is one of four Combat Training Centers in the world. The primary mission of Fort Polk is to support the JRTC’s advanced-level joint training for Army, Air Force, Army National Guard, Navy, and Marine units under conditions that simulate low- and mid-intensity conflicts. Training at the JRTC is focused on Army light, airborne, and air assault forces. Fort Polk serves as an Army power projection platform from which forces deploy by air, rail, and sea to areas of operation around the world. The JRTC and Fort Polk is also home to the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment (2d ACR) and several other combat, combat service, and combat service support units.

The Army and Forest Service proposed the followed actions affecting the JRTC and Fort Polk, and National Forest lands:

- **Transformation of the 2d ACR.** The Army proposes to transform the 2d ACR and to have it become part of the Army’s Interim Force. Upon conversion, the unit would be known as the 2d Cavalry Regiment (2CR). As part of the Interim Force, the 2CR would represent a key component of the bridge between the Army’s Cold War Legacy Force of the past and Future Force. Transformed Interim and Legacy Forces would train on National Forest lands permitted for such use within the IUA, LUA, and SLUA.
- **Installation Mission Support.** The Army proposes to provide installation mission support to home-stationed and rotational units to meet their training needs for current and future missions. This support would involve the modernization and improvement of maneuver areas and ranges, construction of numerous facilities, and other actions at the JRTC and Fort Polk, and portions of National Forest lands.
- **Long-Term Use of Portions of the KNF.** The Army proposes to continue its long-term collaborative use and joint stewardship of portions of the KNF and to renew its land use authorization for military training use of those lands to fulfill real property needs for maneuver ranges and gunnery training. The Forest Service proposes to thin approximately 21,540 acres of upland pine stands, over a ten year period, to improve and enhance habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) in the IUA. The Forest Service also proposes to develop a list of RCW clusters that have been inactive for the past 5 years and recommend that their classification be changed from inactive to abandoned. The list of clusters and their criteria for selection would be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for concurrence under informal consultation. If approved for classification as abandoned by the USFWS, those RCW clusters would then be removed from further management and monitoring.

The purpose of the Army's proposed actions is to allow the JRTC and Fort Polk to assist in bringing the Army's Interim Force to operational capability (proposed to occur by May 2006); to provide realistic, advanced field training, modernized weapons training, and performance evaluation opportunities for Stryker Brigade Combat Teams (SBCTs) and other Army brigades; and to provide sustainable training lands and supporting facilities for forces training at the JRTC and Fort Polk. The need for the proposed action is to provide the JRTC and Fort Polk with the capabilities to support national defense requirements, as well as to sustain training lands, facilities, and natural resources for continued use and benefit.

The purpose of the Forest Service's proposal to thin approximately 21,540 acres of upland pine stands are (1) to improve potential, but currently unsuitable, overstocked RCW foraging habitat and cluster sites in accordance with the Kisatchie's Revised Forest Plan and the best available data on RCW management practices; and (2) to meet the desired future condition for Management Area 9 (Military Intensive Use), as established by the Revised Forest Plan. The proposed action is necessary for the Forest to meet the short- and long-term goals for RCW recovery that have been established by the Revised Forest Plan for the Vernon Unit and to improve the conditions of the land being used for military training. The purpose of the Forest Service's proposal to classify inactive RCW clusters as abandoned is to allow redirection of limited management resources away from cluster sites that offer limited potential to contribute to recovery and instead focus resources on cluster sites that offer the greatest potential of being used.

A range of 8 alternatives was considered with two of them carried through detailed analysis.

Decision

Based upon my review of the alternatives and analysis of environmental effects, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action. The Forest Service portion of the Proposed Action is discussed below under the following categories:

- Construction Projects on National Forest lands
- Land Use Authorization
- RCW Habitat Improvement Thinning
- Abandoned RCW Cluster Reclassification
- Mitigation Measures and Monitoring Provisions

Construction Projects on National Forest lands

The Army proposed 20 construction projects at or in the vicinity of the installation, on National Forest lands, and at England Industrial Airpark. Four of those construction projects will occur on National Forest land. My decision includes only those four construction projects.

Approximately 174 acres of National Forest lands will be impacted by the construction of road corridors and training facilities in the IUA; and, 20 locations in the LUA would be impacted by 20 hardened low-water crossings and approaches. See FEIS, Figures 2-3 and 2-4 on pages 2-49

and 2-51 for project locations, and pages 2-55 to 2-58 for more detailed project descriptions. The four construction projects are summarized below:

- **Aviation Maintenance Hangar (Polk Army Airfield and IUA, 2004).** This project will provide adequate hangar space for climate-sensitive indoor maintenance on 2CR aircraft. Indoor maintenance is needed to protect sensitive electronics and other aircraft equipment from the elements. Approximately 5.5 acres of National Forest land will be impacted by the hangar facility; and approximately 16.4 acres of National Forest land will be impacted by the borrow pit for the hangar project. A Section 404 Clean Water Act permit will be required for this project.
- **Sniper Range (IUA, 2009).** This project will provide a suitable sniper training and testing facility that meets the requirements of Army sniper qualification. The project is needed to provide adequate training of personnel in the methods and maneuvers of precision marksmanship and combating terrorism. Work will include construction of mock-up multistory buildings, an observation/control tower with central command of all target mechanisms, various obstacles, targets, a walled area, fences, and wood or concrete platforms. Supporting facilities will include a utility building, an aid station, and electrical service. The range will extend over approximately 86.1 acres. The sniper range will be located within the footprint of the existing Range 9 to minimize removal of tree vegetation. A Section 404 Clean Water Act permit may be required. A permanent firebreak will be established around the range.
- **Intensive Use Area Road Construction and Improvements (IUA, Long Range).** This project will improve the training value of lands used by the JRTC and Fort Polk by allowing the reorientation of certain exercises (east-west rather than north-south). The project will involve a combination of improvements to existing primitive roads and trails and construction of new roads and stream crossings in the IUA. Approximately 13.2 miles of roads affecting 66 acres in the Zion Hills, Big Creek, and Six Mile Creek Training Areas within the IUA will be improved or constructed to provide for greater east-west mobility and more realistic, varied training scenarios for JRTC exercises and home-stationed unit training. The project will lessen the potential for damage and erosion to stream banks and roadways. The JRTC and Fort Polk have obtained a Section 404 Clean Water Act permit for this proposal; however, an amendment to the permit will be sought for design improvements to selected stream crossings intended to reduce potential effects to stream hydrology and aquatic life.
- **Limited Use Area Stream Crossing and Approaches (LUA, Long Range).** This project will enhance the utility of lands used by the JRTC and Fort Polk for training by constructing hardened low-water crossings and approaches at appropriate locations throughout the LUA. Cross-country maneuvers occasionally require military vehicles to cross streams and wetlands. Steep slopes and wet soils near water are easily damaged and can become chronic sources of sedimentation in streams. This project is needed to balance training realism with the protection of water quality. Hardened stream bottom crossings will consist of layers of sand and gravel paved with concrete or interlocking brick. Hardened bottoms will be installed in shallow, first-order streams below grade to avoid the erosive force of normal stream flow. Box culverts will be installed on most second-order streams. Box culverts will consist of appropriately sized culverts reinforced

with concrete to sustain vehicles' being driven over them. Low-water crossings will be 24 feet wide; lengths will vary according to the width of the stream. Bridge spans will be required for three crossings at streams that have been designated pursuant to the Louisiana Natural and Scenic River Program. The improvements will be made at 20 sites. A Section 404 Clean Water Act permit will be required at each location, and a Scenic River Permit will be required at 3 locations.

Land Use Authorization

I am approving the land use authorization for the Army. This authorization will include use of the IUA, LUA, and SLUA for military training for a 20-year period (2004-2024). Preparation of a mutually agreed-upon operating plan for each area will be prepared. Increased maneuver training in the LUA and SLUA will be allowed; however, live-fire exercises will not be authorized. In addition, the existing requirement to obtain a supplemental SUP to use the SLUA on a case-by-case basis will be eliminated.

The following will apply to the respective areas:

- **IUA.** The IUA will continue to be used in a manner similar to current designated uses. Approved land uses in the IUA will be essentially unchanged from the previous permit. See FEIS, Table 2-2, pages 2-7 to 2-10 for a complete listing of authorized activities for the IUA. Use of the Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (TUAV) and the Stryker Interim Armored Vehicle (IAV) and Mobile Gun System (MGS) will be newly allowed activities.
- **LUA.** The terms and conditions for use of the LUA will be consistent with authorizations granted by the Forest Service as a result of prior environmental analysis and September 2000 Decision Notice. That decision added the use of pyrotechnics and artillery simulators, limited digging (2-person positions), off-road vehicle movement, blackout driving on approved roads, use of obstacles (simulated mines and concertina wire), and establishment of support areas and hospitals. See FEIS, Table 2-2, pages 2-7 to 2-10 for a complete listing of authorized activities for the LUA. Use of the Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (TUAV) within restricted airspace over the northern portion of the Rustville training area and non-live-fire maneuver of the Stryker Interim Armored Vehicle (IAV) and Mobile Gun System (MGS) will be newly allowed activities.
- **SLUA (Horse's Head).** This area will be subdivided into smaller training areas and brought into the Resource Allocation Conference scheduling system. The Army will be allowed to schedule 15 historically approved low-intensity training events. See FEIS, Table 2-2, pages 2-7 to 2-10 for a complete listing of authorized activities for the SLUA. Forest Service multiple-use management activities, as well as continued public access, will have priority over military training activities in the SLUA. In addition to the historically approved training activities, two helicopter landing zones and two bivouac sites will be designated in the SLUA (see FEIS, Figure 2-6, page 2-67 for their locations). Non-live-fire road maneuver of the Stryker Interim Armored Vehicle (IAV) and Mobile Gun System (MGS) will be a newly allowed activity.

RCW Habitat Improvement Thinning

Approximately 21,540 acres of upland pine stands will be thinned, over a ten year period, to improve and enhance habitat for the endangered RCW in the IUA. This proposal will provide for long-term RCW recovery, as well as enhance mounted and dismounted maneuver training in high-density forested areas. Figure 2-8 on page 2-89 of the FEIS displays the area to be thinned. The list of stands to be thinned can be found in Appendix I of the FEIS.

The IUA is designated as Management Area 9 (Military Intensive Use), sub-management area 9DL, in the Revised Forest Plan, which calls for an open canopy with variable tree densities having an average pine basal area of 70 square feet per acre. Current pine stocking in these stands ranges from 80 to 200 square feet of basal area per acre. The thinning proposal will be implemented over a 10-year period, with priority given to those stands determined to be of greatest benefit to RCW recovery efforts.

The proposed thinning of overstocked stands on the IUA will be conducted in accordance with the standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan. Forest wide Guideline FW-716 on page 2-61 of the Forest Plan provides, “Maintain clusters, replacement and recruitment stands in an open park-like condition with a basal area ranging from 60 to 80 square feet per acre. Minimum tree spacing of 20 to 25 feet to reduce Southern pine beetle risk is more important than actual basal area, especially in non-longleaf forest types.”

Additionally, FW-819, on page 2-69 of the Forest Plan, further provides, “Thinning of stands considered unsuitable as foraging habitat (average diameter at breast height [DBH] of less than ten inches 10 inches), is encouraged and may take place at any time. Standard silvicultural guidelines apply.”

In potentially suitable RCW stands (average DBH > 10 inches), FW-820 on pages 2-69 of the Forest Plan provides:

- Maintain pine basal area of 70–110 square feet/acre.
- Do not remove more than 30 square feet/acre of basal area in the dominate or co dominate crown class in any single thinning operation.

Pine trees to be retained will be selected as follows:

- Relict trees
- Other potential cavity trees
- Trees greater than 10 inches DBH that are not potential cavity trees
- Trees less than 10 inches DBH

Recent scientific findings (see Walters et al. 2002 for a review) and USFWS guidance (USFWS 2000) have refined what constitutes suitable RCW foraging habitat. These findings are incorporated into this thinning proposal as post-thinning stocking goals, as follows:

- Retain the oldest and largest pine trees.
- Have little to no hardwood midstory.
- Ensure that canopy hardwoods equal less than 10 percent of canopy trees
- Maintain total post-thinning pine basal area of foraging stands of 70 square feet/acre basal area, distributed as follows:

- Greater than or equal to 20 square feet/acre basal area of pines 14 inches DBH and larger
- Greater than or equal to 40 square feet/acre basal area of pines 10 inches DBH and larger
- Less than 10 square feet/acre basal area of pines smaller than 10 inches DBH.

Ideally, stands managed for RCWs should be open; contain intermediate densities of large, old pines; and have little hardwood or pine midstory (USFWS 2000, Walters et al. 2002). For management of RCWs in longleaf systems, recent studies recommend pine densities between 40 and 60 square feet/acre basal area (USFWS 2000 Walters et al. 2000).

To improve nesting habitat on the IUA, consistent with this guidance, all stands containing active, inactive, and recruitment RCW clusters, except where clusters are identified as “deleted”, will be thinned to an average pine basal area of 60 square feet/acre. The above guidelines will be implemented to achieve the goal of 60 square feet/acre pine basal area within stands containing clusters, except that all potential cavity trees (pines > 60 years of age) within cluster stands will be retained unless pine basal area is above 80 square feet/acre and all trees are above 60 years of age.

Abandoned RCW Cluster Reclassification

Existing guidance provides for the removal of abandoned clusters from management if they have been inactive for an extended period and the likelihood of them becoming active in the near future is remote. The number of years that a cluster must be inactive before qualifying for removal from management depends on the population's Management Intensity Level (MIL), which is based on the number of active clusters in the population. The Vernon Unit is currently at MIL 3. For populations at MIL 3, 10 years of documented inactivity data are required.

This proposal will allow removal of clusters from management if they have been inactive in 1999–2003 (i.e., 5 years). Field examinations of clusters identified as candidates for abandonment will be conducted to determine the number of cavity trees and the number of suitable and unsuitable cavities and starts, and to document cluster habitat conditions.

In addition, spatial analysis using a geographic information system will be conducted to gather additional habitat quality data and determine the number of active clusters in the vicinity of the candidate cluster. These data will be analyzed and the results of the analysis, as well as a list of clusters recommended for classification as abandoned and the criteria for their selection, will be submitted to the USFWS for concurrence under informal consultation.

The Forest Service will present the following documentation for each proposed abandoned cluster:

- Five consecutive years of breeding season activity status.
- Stand conditions, including site index, forest type, stand age, date last cruised, pine stocking (as basal area of pines > 14, > 10, and less than 10 inches DBH).
- Spatial relationships of abandoned clusters to important features, including distance to nearest stream, and number of active and inactive clusters within < ¼ mile, ¼ to 1 mile, and 1 to 2 miles.

- Conditions within the cluster, including the number of suitable cavities, percentage of canopy in hardwoods, percentage of ground cover in fire tolerant/dependent grass/forbs, and midstory condition.

Classification of a cluster as abandoned will remove the cluster from ongoing RCW management and monitoring, and will not result in any immediate alteration of cluster resources other than removal of painted markings and signs identifying cavity trees and cluster buffers.

Mitigation Measures and Monitoring Provisions

The JRTC and Fort Polk and the KNF have developed a mitigation and monitoring plan as a part of the FEIS for proposed actions relating to force transformation, installation mission support, and long-term use of adjacent National Forest lands (See FEIS, Appendix V). A set of 15 mitigation and monitoring measures from the mitigation and monitoring plan will be adopted as part of this decision to address potential adverse effects to the human environment identified in the FEIS.

In addition, this decision is made with the benefit of extensive consultation with the USFWS. Formal consultation was completed with the biological opinion of December 17, 2003 (See FEIS, Appendix R). The USFWS determined that the proposed action will result in the take of three RCW groups (clusters 240-04, 251-04, and 16-A). In the biological opinion, the USFWS also determined that the level of anticipated take is not likely to result in jeopardy to the RCW or destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat.

The USFWS identified three reasonable and prudent measures to minimize the impacts of incidental take of RCWs:

1. Continue to move RCW nesting and foraging habitat toward the recovery standard identified in the RCW Recovery Plan.
2. Continue to monitor the Vernon/Fort Polk RCW population to ensure that potential long-term habitat degradation associated with the proposed Army transformation is not adversely affecting that population.
3. Ensure that the amount of clearing for the proposed construction projects does not exceed the project description and that those construction activities do not additionally impact RCW clusters; thereby ensuring that the level of take is not exceeded.

The USFWS further determined that in order to be exempt from prohibitions of section 9 of the Act, the Army must comply with 10 terms and conditions, which implement the reasonable and prudent measures described above and outline required reporting/monitoring requirements. These terms and conditions are non-discretionary.

Therefore, mitigation measures for this decision are described within the following categories:

- 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
- Environmental Monitoring and Resource Protection
- Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation Requirements

The following mitigation measures to be included in the operating plan for the special use agreement will be followed:

Training Area Maintenance

1. **Maneuver Damage Inspection and Monitoring.** The JRTC and Fort Polk’s maneuver damage inspection and repair program will be expanded to include identification, repair, and monitoring for damages from routine home station training events and to track compliance with applicable environmental protocols and restrictions on Army and National Forest lands. All training lands will be inspected for maneuver damage to soils, vegetation, streams and wetlands, and sensitive environmental resources following each training exercise, and corrective actions will be conducted as required. A point of contact within each unit, such as the unit Environmental Compliance Officer (ECO), will be designated to ensure that repairs conducted by the unit were completed appropriately. In addition, a written agreement between the garrison and mission commanders will establish responsibilities and funding mechanisms for maneuver damage repairs. Corrective actions such as grading, seeding and fertilizing to reestablish vegetative cover will be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness.
2. **Development and Implementation of Watershed Management Plans.** Watershed management plans will be updated or developed for all subwatersheds on Fort Polk main post, IUA, LUA and Peason Ridge where ground disturbing military activities are permitted. Management plans will be reviewed annually and updated on a rotating basis at 3-5 year intervals according to watershed conditions, priorities for land rehabilitation, and availability of funds. Watersheds in the northeastern portion of Peason Ridge containing tributaries to Kisatchie Bayou will receive first priority for update of management plans and land rehabilitation measures. Within other watersheds, sites requiring rehabilitation or maintenance will be prioritized by identification of severity of erosion problem areas. Implementation of the plans will involve design and installation of Best Management Procedures (BMPs) such as a sediment basin network or individual sediment basins in specific watersheds, silt fences, check dams, riprap in drainage pathways, erosion mats, reseeding, gabions, or enhancement/ preservation of wider vegetated buffers adjacent to streams.
3. **Annual Maintenance of Sediment Basins.** All sediment basins will be inspected to insure that they are functioning properly. Basin maintenance will be prioritized based on need. Excess sediment will be removed from basins, applied to upland areas and stabilized.
4. **Temporary Closure of Sites.** Maneuver damage inspectors will identify sites on Army and National Forest land needing protection to facilitate recovery from maneuver damage to soils, vegetation, streams and wetlands, and sensitive environmental resources. Sites will be marked as temporarily off-limits to digging/driving, and recovery will be

monitored. Closed areas will be added on a quarterly or as needed basis to the “No Dig/No Drive” map used to help military trainers for planning purposes.

Training Land Resource Allocation

5. **Integration of Maneuver Damage Inspection and Repair into Annual Training Calendar.** Sufficient time on the Annual Training Calendar will be scheduled for maneuver damage inspection and repair following all training events. Updated protocols for scheduling of maneuver damage inspections, repairs and other resource management needs on Army and National Forest lands will be incorporated into JRTC and Fort Polk Regulation 350-10. These protocols will provide enhanced opportunities for damage inspection, corrective actions, and monitoring.
6. **Scheduling of Non-Training Activities During Green Period (IUA).** Non-training activities such as land rehabilitation and maintenance, prescribed burning, forest thinning, and other forest management activities, and maneuver damage repair will be scheduled at the monthly Resource Allocation Conferences (RAC) rather than the subsequent Non-Training Allocation Conferences (NTAC). This will ensure that damage repair and forest management will receive top priority during the Green Period, and that restoration and maintenance activities occur according to schedule. Changes to the existing installation protocols for scheduling of non-training activities will be incorporated into JRTC and Fort Polk Regulation 350-10.
7. **Scheduling of Non-Training Activities Outside Green Period (IUA).** Non-training activities such as land rehabilitation and maintenance, prescribed burning and other forest management activities, and maneuver damage repair that will occur outside the Green Period will also be scheduled at the RAC. This will ensure that scheduling for damage repair and forest management activities will be coordinated with scheduling for training activities, and opportunities for resource management, including thinning of upland pine stands on the IUA, will be maximized. Changes to the existing installation protocols for scheduling of non-training activities will be incorporated into JRTC and Fort Polk Regulation 350-10.

Design and Construction Process Oversight

8. **Environmental Screening/Alternatives Analysis for Construction Projects.** The installation Master Planner will provide project footprint and alternative sites to the Environmental and Natural Resources Management Division (ENRMD) before the plans are presented to the Real Property Planning Board (RPPB) for development of a screening analysis of effects and identification of environmentally preferred siting and design options. The environmentally preferred options will be presented to RPPB, along with other options under consideration, to ensure that environmental factors and concerns are integrated early in the planning process.

9. **Construction Process Oversight.** Procedures to ensure that environmental compliance requirements and measures to reduce adverse effects to environmentally sensitive resources are included in contract specifications for military construction projects. Contracting Office Representative (COR) will ensure compliance with specified limits of construction, construction sequencing, Section 404 permit conditions, storm water pollution prevention plans (SWPPPs), and other environmental considerations during construction, as specified in construction specifications, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and permit documents. The COR will review environmental requirements before construction, coordinate with the ENRMD NEPA document point-of-contact to ensure compliance, and have authority to halt construction if work is not performed in accordance with environmental requirements.

10. **Design Adjustments to Proposed IUA Roads.** Selected pipe culverts as originally proposed will be replaced with arched spans on the proposed IUA east-west roads where the alignments cross larger perennial (third order) streams. In addition, portions of proposed road segments designated as SMC1 and ZH3 will be realigned to minimize effects to RCW clusters located near the alignments.

Soldier Sustainable Range Awareness Training

11. **Initiation of Sustainable Range Awareness Training Program.** Modules and instructional aids will be developed to train soldiers to promote responsible environmental stewardship during field activities. Examples of topics include Louisiana pine snake identification and discourse on its protection status, and other subjects ranging from forest and water quality management to waste minimization. The training program will also educate soldiers involved in the operation of Stryker vehicles on the importance of lower tire inflation settings while driving off-road. Training modules will be available both in a classroom and on-line format, and will be provided to all military units training at Fort Polk down to the squad level unit of organization. Certificates will be disbursed upon completion.

Environmental Monitoring and Resource Protection

12. **Development of Stream Gage Network.** US Geological Survey (USGS) and Fort Polk ENRMD will establish a network of stream gaging stations to monitor stream flow and water quality parameters, for the purpose of assessing stream responses to changes in training intensity or land use. Six gaging stations will be established to collect baseline data on stream characteristics and water quality. The data collected by the gages will help estimate and mitigate sedimentation rates, a water quality issue of concern because of the highly erodible nature of the native soils and the potential for proposed construction and training activities to increase soil erosion and delivery of sediment to streams.

13. **Bog Mapping and Monitoring.** ENRMD will digitally map and monitor bogs on Army land to complement a map already developed for the IUA and LUA. Bogs will be inspected for maneuver damage following training exercises and during annual training

land inspection events, and corrective action to protect wetlands and rare/sensitive plant species will be implemented as appropriate.

14. **Louisiana Pine Snake Conservation.** To avoid or reduce future construction-related effects to the Louisiana pine snake, Fort Polk will conduct surveys for the snake and/or pocket gopher mounds within proposed construction footprints for all new construction projects within the range and maneuver training areas. Pocket gopher mounds will be avoided during construction wherever feasible.
15. **Implementation and Effectiveness Monitoring.** A joint Army-Forest Service committee for implementation and effectiveness monitoring will be established. The purpose of the committee will be to evaluate implementation and effectiveness of proposed mitigations, range sustainability, compliance with SUP/Operating Plan conditions, and installation environmental policies and regulations. The committee will identify and report on performance indicators, evaluate performance, and conduct mid-course correction as needed, in accordance with the installation's Environmental Management System. Examples include testing the effectiveness of BMPs by monitoring downstream water quality for total suspended solids, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, temperature, metals, and total nitrogen during base flow periods and storm events. The committee will also publish an annual Sustainability and Environmental Monitoring Report for review by members of the public, federally recognized tribes, state and federal agencies, and other stakeholder groups.

Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation Requirements

16. Fort Polk and KNF shall identify specific RCW and forest management objectives (i.e., thinning, prescribed burning, etc.) and accomplishments within the Vernon/Fort Polk RCW population for each year in an annual report provided to the USFWS's Louisiana Field Office. That annual report may be included within the Joint Monitoring Plan (see below). If Fort Polk and KNF fail to meet their intended objectives, they should provide written justification for such failure and a plan for corrective action to the USFWS Lafayette Field Office and other interested natural resource agencies.
17. The Army shall continue to provide 14 consecutive days per quarter when prescribed burning and other natural resource management activities take precedence over training (i.e., "Green Periods") within the IUA.
18. The Army shall continue to coordinate with the KNF to implement thinning, prescribed burning, and other management activities outside of those "Green Periods" in areas that would not impact military training within the IUA.
19. The Army shall make all reasonable attempts to provide the KNF adequate time to meet their management objective of thinning 21,540 acres of upland pine stands in the IUA over a 10-year period, or approximately 2,100 acres per year. Thinning activities should be scheduled within 2 years of this signed Record of Decision. If the KNF is unable to conduct those thinning activities within that time frame, the Army and KNF shall cooperatively modify the timeline to allow completion of those thinning activities. Any

timeline modifications should be provided to the USFWS within 30 days of their development.

20. To the maximum extent practicable, thinning activities within one-half mile of clusters 240-04, 240-05, 249-01, and 251-04 shall be conducted prior to or concurrent with construction.
21. Should the number of active clusters within the Vernon/Fort Polk RCW population either decrease by 5 percent from one year to the next, decrease for more than two consecutive years, or not show a net increase over a 5-year period, the Army and KNF shall meet with interested parties (including the USFWS) to determine the cause of that trend and to discuss a plan to expedite population increases.
22. KNF and Fort Polk will continue to cooperatively implement the Joint Monitoring Plan, with approved amendments, to measure potential effects of the proposed action on RCWs for an additional 5 years (i.e., through 2010), at the end of which time the need for further continuation of that plan will be evaluated. If KNF and Fort Polk jointly determine via adaptive management, however, that continuation of the monitoring plan is no longer warranted prior to 2010, further coordination with the USFWS will be necessary.
23. Monitor those construction activities which would impact RCW nesting and/or foraging habitat for clusters 16-A, 240-04, 240-05, 249-01, and 251-04 daily to ensure that the limits of construction are maintained as described in the proposed action. The personnel responsible for on-site monitoring must have the authority to halt construction activities, if necessary, until appropriate corrections can be made.
24. Monitor all construction projects within the RCW HMA weekly to ensure that the limits of construction are maintained as described in the proposed action. The personnel responsible for on-site monitoring must have the authority to halt construction activities, if necessary, until appropriate corrections can be made.
25. Upon locating a dead, injured, or sick individual of an endangered or threatened species, initial notification must be made to the USFWS Law Enforcement Office at Lafayette, Louisiana [(337) 291-3110]. Additional notification must be made to the USFWS Ecological Services Field Office at Lafayette, Louisiana [(337) 291-3132]. Care should be taken in handling sick or injured individuals and in the preservation of specimens in the best possible state for later analysis of cause of death or injury.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

In making my decision, I considered the impacts disclosed in the FEIS, evaluation of the alternatives in relation to the significant issues, the history of military training by the U.S. Army on the KNF over the past 60 years, and the goals and objectives of the Kisatchie's Revised Forest Plan. I chose to approve those construction projects occurring on National Forest land, to approve the land use authorization for use of the IUA, LUA, and SLUA, to implement the thinning proposal for RCW habitat improvement, and to submit an abandoned RCW cluster proposal to the USFWS for the following reasons.

Recent world events demonstrate the need for sustained operational readiness by the nation's military forces. Threats to national security persist, and the nation needs forces at a high state of readiness. In April 2002 the Record of Decision for the Programmatic EIS for Army Transformation was signed. That decision calls for the implementation of a deliberate, phased, and synchronized 30- year program to transform the Army. Transformation activities, to occur during an Initial Phase, an Interim Capability Phase, and Objective Capability Phase, will affect virtually all aspects of the entire Army, to include doctrine, training, leader development, organizations, installations, materiel, and soldiers.

The Army directed transformation and identified the first units to be converted to Interim Force status as the "bridge" to the Future Force. The Department of Defense and Congress have recognized the necessity for transformation and, accordingly, have provided funding and support for the Army's program.

Under the No Action Alternative, the JRTC and Fort Polk would not convert the 2d ACR to an Interim Force unit nor would they undertake the actions to support the missions of home-stationed and rotational units. Failure to transform the 2d ACR to Interim Force status and to provide installation mission support could jeopardize national security interests. Currently, the 2d ACR is not optimally equipped or trained to deal with the types of situations and adversaries the Army is likely to encounter in the future. Failure to provide necessary support to units' missions at the JRTC and Fort Polk risks degradation of the Army's readiness to meet the wide range of military operations to which the Army might be called to respond. Therefore, the No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose of and need for the proposed action.

The Proposed Action best enables the Army to meet current and projected training requirements to sustain readiness. Military training by the Army has occurred in these areas under a series of agreements since the early 1940s and all anticipated impacts are expected to be similar to past impacts associated with training exercises.

The Proposed Action best meets the goals and objectives of the Kisatchie's Revised Forest Plan for coordination and cooperation with the Department of Defense. Management Area 9's goals (Plan, page 3-27) include the following:

- Maintain intensive military use — small arms firing ranges, tank firing ranges, artillery range impact areas, bombing range, maneuver areas, and other related military facilities.
- Accomplish Forest Service management activities in coordination with the military.
- Focus Forest management practices and activities on allowing near-normal operations in coordination with the military.

In evaluating an appropriate renewal period, I considered that the Army's training requirements to sustain military readiness would not likely lessen in the foreseeable future. I considered shorter permit periods; however, a 20-year authorization would best support the Army's long-term requirement to provide training and ensure sustained military readiness. Not renewing the authorization would cause the Army to halt current training or to find an alternative location for training exercises. This would drastically affect the readiness of the Army to perform its mission. A 20-year authorization would also promote stability for neighboring communities with long-standing social and economic ties to JRTC and Fort Polk. Should training requirements change significantly due to technological advancements or other reasons, terms of the permit will

be reviewed and changed, if appropriate. Any significant change in terms of the permit will require additional analysis and public involvement.

The IUA is within Management Area 9, Sub-management Area 9DL. Sub-management Area 9DL's primary goal is to emphasize the management of RCW habitat and to produce the highest quality wildlife habitats within an open, frequently burned landscape (Plan, page 3-28). The analysis for this decision disclosed that the majority of the potential but unsuitable RCW habitat in the IUA is of sufficient age and stocking to immediately become suitable habitat if thinned. Thinning of the overstocked upland longleaf pine stands to basal areas suitable for RCWs is necessary for the RCW population to grow and meet both short- and long-term recovery goals. Thinning those overstocked stands will improve RCW nesting and foraging habitat, and will move that habitat toward the desired structure identified in the recovery standard of the RCW Recovery Plan. Failure to thin overstocked pine stands would further degrade the suitability of habitat for the RCW and the suitability of the permitted lands for military training purposes.

The USFWS encourages the removal of long-term inactive clusters from populations such as the Vernon Unit (Biological Opinion, Appendix R, page 46). Reclassifying inactive RCW cluster as abandoned (or "deleted") will allow the redirection of limited management resources away from cluster sites that offer limited potential to contribute to recovery. Scarce resources will be better used by focusing them on the RCW clusters that offer the greatest potential to reach recovery goals. For these reasons, the Proposed Action best meets the current and future needs of the endangered RCW.

Issues regarding natural resource management identified during the analysis process can best be addressed through a collaborative management approach by Army and Forest Service. The proposed action best facilitates this approach, including continuation of joint stewardship of the Vernon-Fort Polk RCW population. Recent GAO reports highlight the need for increased collaboration among federal agencies for threatened and endangered species management.

Implementation of either the no action alternative or the proposed action would result in some degree of adverse effects on all resource areas except economic conditions, for which long-term, minor, beneficial effects are projected. Beneficial effects are also projected to result from implementation of certain aspects of the proposed action, such as improvement in the longleaf pine ecosystem and RCW habitat, which would result from proposed forest thinning (FEIS, Section 5). Effects of the proposed action were not controversial based on results of scoping and review of the Draft EIS.

Mitigation and Monitoring Provisions are incorporated as part of this decision (see ROD, pages 9 through 13). These measures augment existing and proposed Army and Forest Service environmental stewardship programs and practices, and taken collectively, will mitigate adverse effects through time, in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 40 CFR 1508.20, by avoiding, minimizing, reducing or rectifying adverse effects to soils, vegetative cover, water quality and biological resources. The mitigation and monitoring plan provides for a more comprehensive and unified approach to environmental management on both Army and National Forest lands than is currently in place. Joint oversight of mitigation and monitoring, and adaptive management by Army and Forest Service will allow for adjustments to operating conditions if effects are not as anticipated.

Past experience, evidenced by compliance and effectiveness monitoring for increased military training use of the LUA pursuant to the Decision Notice of 2000, provides a model for implementing and tracking mitigation measures and demonstrates Army and Forest Service commitment to sound environmental stewardship and concern for neighboring communities and residents of the Forest.

Other Alternatives Considered in Detail

In addition to the Proposed Action, I considered the No Action Alternative, which is briefly discussed below. The Proposed Action was the environmentally preferred alternative. A more detailed description of the No Action Alternative can be found in the FEIS on pages 2-2 to 2-27. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the FEIS on pages 2-126 to 2-130.

No Action

Under the no action alternative, the JRTC and Fort Polk would not undertake the proposed action to convert the 2d ACR to an Interim Force unit. The 2d ACR would continue to train and operate, as at present, with the mission to conduct reconnaissance and security operations for an airborne corps. Also, the JRTC and Fort Polk would not undertake specified proposed actions to support the missions of home-stationed and rotational units. Construction projects affecting maneuver areas and ranges and the JRTC and Fort Polk's inventory of facilities, including those on National Forest lands and at England Industrial Airpark, would not proceed. Following the first SBCT's rotation exercise to validate organizational and operational concepts, other rotations of Interim Force units could occur following an appropriate evaluation of environmental effects as required by NEPA. The Forest Service proposal to thin overstocked pine stands would not be carried out at this time, but rather would occur in a piece-meal fashion over an extended time period (>10 years). The Forest Service proposal to classify inactive RCW clusters as abandoned would not be carried out. To maintain the status quo—continuation of the 2d ACR as part of the Legacy Force and operation of the JRTC and Fort Polk as a CTC—the Army would seek to continue its use of National Forest lands through renewal of the existing SUP. No changes to current JRTC and Fort Polk operations and facilities on National Forest lands, or at other sites periodically used during training exercises, or changes to existing permit terms and conditions would be made.

Alternatives Considered but Dropped from Detailed Analysis

The following is a summary of six alternatives considered in the EIS but dropped from detailed analysis and a brief description of the reason for their elimination. A more detailed discussion of these alternatives can be found in the FEIS on pages 2-94 to 2-126.

- **Transform the 2d ACR at a Different Installation.** Under this alternative, the 2d ACR would be moved to another installation and would undergo transformation at that location to serve as part of the Interim Force. The Army directed transformation and identified the first units to be converted to Interim Force status as the “bridge” to the Future Force. Conversion of the 2d ACR to Interim Force status was directed by Headquarters, Department of the Army. The JRTC and Fort Polk cannot disregard that directive, the overall environmental effects of which have been programmatically evaluated by the Army's headquarters. Additionally, having the 2d ACR move elsewhere to convert to Interim Force status is an action that the JRTC and Fort Polk cannot implement because

of the Army headquarters directive that units convert to Interim Force status “in-place.” Because the alternative could not be implemented by JRTC and Fort Polk and was not reasonable, in light of its likely unaffordable costs, the alternative was not evaluated in detail.

- **Transform a Different Armored Cavalry Regiment or Brigade-Sized Unit.** Under this alternative, an armored cavalry regiment or brigade-sized unit other than the 2d ACR would be converted to Interim Force status as part of the Army’s program of transformation. Based on national security requirements and strategic factors, Army headquarters selected the brigades that would serve in the Interim Force and therefore will be the “bridge” to the Future Force. The selection of the 2d ACR and five other brigades over some 70 other Active Component and Reserve Component units is a matter beyond the purview of the JRTC and Fort Polk. Undertaking the conversion of another brigade-sized unit to Interim Force status at the JRTC and Fort Polk is an alternative that cannot be implemented by the JRTC and Fort Polk. The alternative was not reasonable, and therefore it was not evaluated in detail in this EIS.
- **Transform Without Installation Mission Support Projects.** Under this alternative, the JRTC and Fort Polk would not take the actions proposed to support units’ training for their missions. There would be no new construction of, or modification or improvements to, existing facilities based on rotational units’ needs or new requirements associated with conversion of the 2d ACR to Interim Force status. Training of rotational and home-stationed units would rely solely on existing maneuver and gunnery ranges. Scheduling of maneuver area and firing range use, capacity constraints, and management practices would remain essentially unchanged. The projects proposed for installation mission support are designed to ensure training and operational performance that meets national defense requirements. Not undertaking these projects in conjunction with transformation of the 2d ACR would not meet the need for the JRTC and Fort Polk’s proposed action, it would not enable 2CR to achieve operating capability; and, therefore this alternative was not evaluated in detail in this EIS.
- **Alternative Sites for Construction Projects.** The JRTC and Fort Polk considered alternative sites for each of the 20 proposed projects involving construction. See FEIS, pages 2-101 to 2-123 for the detailed description of the options evaluated. Six factors determined final site location in the Proposed Action Alternative. These factors included the installation’s master plan, existing uses, co-location of functions, terrain conditions, environmental constraints, and site layout. Alternative locations for the airfield maintenance hangar, IUA roads, LUA stream crossings and sniper range were rejected because they would have involved greater adverse environmental impacts without providing greater operational benefits.
- **Modify Uses of and/or Schedule for Use of the LUA.** The 44,799-acre LUA is the southernmost portion of the lands Fort Polk uses for training. Currently approved military training in the LUA is limited to non-live-fire training, and limited-maneuver activities may occur only during specified months of each calendar year in the various portions of the LUA. As an alternative to renewing its SUP to allow continuation of uses as in the past and present, the JRTC and Fort Polk could seek to obtain a permit from the Forest Service to allow expanded uses of the 44,799 acres on a year- round basis. In light of the

Decision Notice issued by the Forest Service in September 2000 (certain aspects of which have not yet been implemented) renewed examination of alternatives for use and scheduling of the LUA would be premature. Accordingly, modification of uses of and/or scheduling the use of the LUA was eliminated from detailed study in this EIS.

- **Use of Private Timber Lands for Training.** Large tracts of privately owned timberlands occur near Fort Polk to the west, north, and east. These areas are referred to, respectively, as the Boise-Vernon Corridor, Peason Corridor, and Alexandria Corridor. As an alternative to renewing its special use permit with the Forest Service to augment the Army-controlled lands of Fort Polk, the JRTC and Fort Polk could seek to lease or purchase portions of these nearby timberlands. These timberlands are managed for industrial timber production. Management practices include short rotation periods and clear-cutting of large stands. These practices result in large tracts of replanted, young plantations that would be off-limits to training and large tracts that would be unsuitable for maneuver training because of the thickness of the stands. Usable stands would be interspersed with off-limits or unusable stands, resulting in maneuver areas that would be unrealistically fragmented and compartmentalized. Many private residential areas are also interspersed throughout these areas. Use of private timber lands in lieu of National Forest lands would require decommissioning of numerous ranges and training facilities that currently exist on the IUA, and construction of replacement facilities on private lands. The cost of these requirements would be in addition to the cost of lease or purchase of the replacement lands. Because of these factors, use of these lands in lieu of continued use of National Forest lands was eliminated from detailed study.

Public Involvement

On March 8, 2002, the Army and Forest Service published in the *Federal Register* a Notice of Intent to prepare the EIS. Formal notices were published in 10 newspapers of general circulation throughout the State of Louisiana. Notices of the initiation of the EIS process, soliciting input and comment, were also provided to 427 organizations and persons who had taken an active interest in environmental affairs at the JRTC and Fort Polk and the KNF in the past. In addition, the Army and Forest Service held scoping meetings at three locations to provide information on the proposed actions and solicit input on issues, concerns and opportunities to be considered through the NEPA process. The Army and Forest Service hosted meetings on March 25, 2002, in Baton Rouge; on March 26, 2002, in Leesville; and on March 28, 2002, in Bossier City. The FAA held a fourth meeting on June 11, 2002 in Alexandria, at which the JRTC and Fort Polk and the Forest Service participated, to receive input on proposed Army actions at England Industrial Airpark.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) was released for public review and comment on August 1, 2003. The comment period closed on September 15, 2003. During the 45-day public comment period, three public meetings were held around the state to answer questions regarding the draft document and to receive public comment. Public meetings on the Draft EIS occurred on August 19, 2003, in Leesville; on August 25, 2003, in Baton Rouge; and on August 26, 2003, in Alexandria.

The public meetings and availability of the Draft EIS was publicized in newspapers of general circulation around the state and on public service announcements broadcast by radio stations in

local markets. Copies of the Draft EIS were also placed in libraries around the state for public review. In addition, a website was established to facilitate public involvement in the NEPA process. The Draft EIS and information on the proposed action and NEPA process was published on the website at <http://notes.tetrattech-ffx.com/PolkEIS.nsf> for public review throughout the 45-day comment period.

Input received during the scoping process from federally recognized tribes, Federal and State agencies, stakeholder groups, and members of the general public was used to develop the main issues of concern. Appendix D of the FEIS contains the detailed list of issues and sub-issues derived from public scoping; copies of the comment letters and forms received on the proposed actions and on the Draft EIS; and the Army, Forest Service and FAA responses to those comments.

The main issues of concern included the following:

- **Air Quality.** Potential for increased emissions, including emissions of criteria and hazardous air pollutants, and adverse effects on local or regional ambient air quality as a result of the proposed action.
- **Cultural Resources.** Potential for adverse effects on cultural, archeological, and historic resources under the proposed action.
- **Biological/Ecological Considerations.** Potential for adverse effects on wildlife, aquatic life, plants, and their associated habitats under the proposed action.
- **Protected, Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive and Conservation (PETSC) Species.** Potential effects on PETSC and their habitats resulting from the proposed action.
- **Environmental Justice.** Potential for implementation of the proposed action to disproportionately affect low-income or minority populations, particularly with respect to air quality, noise, and water quality.
- **Environmental Stewardship.** Effects of ongoing Environmental Stewardship programs and future initiatives on environmental and natural resources.
- **Land Use.** Potential changes in land use patterns under the proposed action, compatibility with other land uses, and the ability of Army and National Forest lands to sustain more intensive training use.
- **Noise.** Potential for increased noise and associated effects on noise sensitive receptors resulting from the proposed action.
- **Soils and Erosion.** Potential adverse effects of the proposed action on soils, including soil loss and erosion, compaction, rutting, mechanical disturbance, and loss of soil fertility.

- **Waste Management and Pollution Prevention.** Potential effects of the proposed action on generation and management of wastes and hazardous materials, and current and future measures to promote sustainability through waste minimization, pollution prevention, and institutional controls.
- **Transportation and Infrastructure.** Potential effects of the proposed action on existing or future roadways and infrastructure and the associated levels of service.
- **Water Resources.** Potential effects of the proposed action on surface and groundwater resources, including streams, wetlands, floodplains, and aquifers.
- **Health and Safety.** Potential for adverse effects on public health and safety resulting from operation of the new Stryker vehicles and equipment and expanded or more intensive training activities on non-Department of Defense lands.
- **Socioeconomic Conditions.** Potential for effects, both beneficial and adverse, socioeconomic conditions within the Region of Influence for the proposed action.
- **Visual Quality.** Potential effects of the proposed action on the visual quality of areas viewed by the general public or military family members.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

In accordance with Section 7 of the ESA, Fort Polk and KNF prepared a Biological Evaluation/Biological Assessment (BE/BA, Appendix R) to analyze the potential effects from the proposed action on the RCW, the only federally listed threatened or endangered species occurring within the project area. The BE/BA used monitoring data collected by both agencies, a panel of experts approach, and other “best available” data to estimate effects on the RCW. The BE/BA concluded that the proposed action would be “likely to adversely affect” individual RCWs but not likely to result in adverse population-level effects on the species. As the lead agency for preparation of the EIS, Fort Polk presented the BE/BA and the Draft EIS to the USFWS and initiated formal consultation under Section 7 of the ESA via letter dated August 5, 2003 (Appendix R).

Based on its review of the BE/BA, the Draft EIS and other related information, the USFWS issued a Biological Opinion (BO) on December 17, 2003 (Appendix R). In its BO, the USFWS concurred with Fort Polk and KNF on the expected levels of effect on the RCW and determined that the proposed action would not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the species. The USFWS allowed for the incidental “take” of three RCW groups as a result of reductions in foraging habitat caused by construction activities (clusters 240-04, 251-04, and 16-A). In addition, the USFWS listed three reasonable and prudent measures (RPMs) that it believes are necessary and appropriate to minimize the impacts of incidental take of RCWs, along with 10 terms and conditions with which the Army must comply. The 10 terms and conditions have been incorporated into this decision as mitigation measures. See, ROD, pages 9 through 13.

This decision is consistent with other major federal laws, which includes the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. No effects on cultural resources

are expected to result from this decision. Fort Polk has consulted with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to obtain concurrence on a determination of no effect. See FEIS, Appendix N, for the associated correspondence.

This decision is consistent with current allocation and management direction, including Goals, objectives and standards and guidelines, needed to achieve the desired future conditions described in the KNF's Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan) based on the following findings:

1. These actions provide continued cooperation with the Department of Defense by providing a variety of geographic and topographic settings for military training with appropriate restrictions to protect the natural environment (Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Plan, page R-2).
2. These actions contribute towards the achievement of Forest-wide Goal 9 (Promote cooperation and coordination with other Federal and State agencies) and objectives 9-1 and 9-2 (Plan pages 2-2, 2-6 and 2-7).
3. These actions are fully compatible with forest-wide management requirements (Plan, Chapter 2); and they specifically implement the direction in forest-wide guideline FW-023 to "cooperate with the Department of Defense to ensure that the Forest Service and the military may meet their respective missions by coordinating their activities and mitigating any resultant environmental effects"(Plan, page 2-10).
4. These actions take place in Management Areas 3, Native Community Restoration; 5, RCW and Native Community Restoration; 6, RCW and Wildlife Habitats, and 9, Military Intensive Use. The actions of this decision are fully compatible with the management prescription for these management areas (Plan, pages 3-7 through 3-24, and 3-27 through 3-31).
5. The actions being applied to the area comply with the Management Requirements specified in 36 CFR 219.27.

The planned activities are consistent with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA 16 USC 1604(i), NFMA regulations (36 CFR 219) and agency manuals, handbooks, and directives.

The planned activities are also fully consistent with the Master Agreement between the Department of Defense and Department of Agriculture concerning the Use of National Forest System Lands for Military Activity (September 30, 1988).

Implementation

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

The Forest Service's decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date of the legal notice of the decision is published in the *Alexandria Daily Town Talk*. The Appeal shall be sent to USDA, Forest Service, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 1720 Peachtree Rd, N.W., Suite

811N, Atlanta, Georgia 30309-9102, within 45 days of the date of the legal notice. Appeals may be faxed to (404) 347-5401. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

Implementation Date

If no appeal is received, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition. (36 CFR 215.9)

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Cynthia A. Dancak, Kisatchie National Forest, 2500 Shreveport Highway, Pineville, Louisiana 71360; phone (318) 473-7109.



MARGRETT L. BOLEY
Forest Supervisor
Kisatchie National Forest

2/20/2004
[DATE]

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.