



**JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER
AND FORT POLK
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE
*Press Release***



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MEMORANDUM FOR CORRESPONDENTS

Fort Polk, La.—In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and Army regulations, the Department of the Army announces its Record of Decision (ROD) for 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment (2d ACR) 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. On March 19, 2004, the Army published a Notice of Availability (NOA) of its Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that considered the environmental consequences of the proposed actions and alternatives. Based on the EIS and other relevant factors, the Army has decided to implement the proposed actions considered in the EIS. This decision allows the Army to proceed with transformation of the 2d ACR at the JRTC and Fort Polk, Louisiana, and to undertake additional actions to support the installation's current and future missions. The decision includes fielding of the Army's new Stryker vehicle and equipment; construction and improvement of firing ranges, roads, stream crossings, and training support facilities; land use agreements and leases; creation and expansion of helicopter training areas; training and deployment of Army troops; and continued environmental stewardship. The decision also affirms the Army's commitment to implementing a series of mitigation and monitoring measures to offset potential adverse environmental impacts associated with the proposed actions, as identified in the Final EIS.

The Department of the Army was the lead agency for preparation of the EIS, and the US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and US Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) were cooperating agencies. The EIS was prepared to address proposed actions affecting the JRTC and Fort Polk, portions of the Kisatchie National Forest in west-central Louisiana; and England Industrial Airpark at Alexandria, Louisiana. The EIS identified the relevant environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the proposed actions and alternatives on the biological, physical, and cultural environment.

A NOA of the Draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on August 1, 2003, and was followed by a 45-day public review period. Based on the results of public review of the Draft EIS, effects of the proposed actions were not controversial. The NOA for the Final EIS was published in the Federal Register on March 19, 2004, followed by a 30-day public review period. No comments on the Final EIS were received during this period.

The Army's decision to implement the proposed actions at the JRTC and Fort Polk was made with full consideration of the analysis of effects in the EIS, assessment of the alternatives in relationship to the issues of concern, comments received during formal public review periods, and Army-wide transformation, national security and mission requirements. This decision, and the proposed actions evaluated in the EIS, best meet the Army's underlying purpose and need for action and balance mission imperatives and goals for protection of the environment.

The EIS also considered in detail a "no action" alternative. Although it would involve lesser impacts to the environment relative to the proposed actions, the Army did not select the no action alternative for implementation, because it would not meet the Army's overall objectives for transformation or the future mission requirements of the JRTC and Fort Polk.

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The Army has designated the 2d ACR to transform to a unit design that will employ the Army's new Stryker vehicle. Following its transformation, the 2d ACR will become the 2d Cavalry Regiment (2d CR), which will be a unique unit within the Army due to its mission and organization. In addition to allowing for transformation of the 2d ACR, the Army's decision provides for the necessary training and support facilities and lands to enhance the installation's mission capabilities. As a Combat Training Center, the JRTC and Fort Polk hosts realistic, advanced field training exercises for brigade level units from other installations, including other transformed Stryker Brigade Combat Team units. Fort Polk also serves as a power projection platform to train and deploy forces by air, rail and sea to areas of operation around the world. Additional facilities will be constructed at England Industrial Airpark to support rapid deployment of 2d CR following its transformation. The airpark currently serves as a port of embarkation for deploying troops and as the Army's Intermediate Staging Base for rotational units coming to JRTC and Fort Polk to train.

The Army's ROD was signed by Mr. Hugh M. Exton, Jr., on April 27, 2004, and by Major General Julian H. Burns on May 12, 2004, in their respective roles as the Director, U.S. Army Installation Management Agency, Southwest Region Office, and Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, U.S. Army Forces Command. The ROD applies only to the proposed actions and decisions under the authority and jurisdiction of the Army.

The Forest Service published a legal notice of its ROD for the EIS on March 16, 2004, in accordance with its procedures under NEPA. Based on the EIS, the Forest Service decided to authorize certain Army activities and land uses on portions of the Kisatchie National Forest over a 20-year period. The Forest Service decision also provided for thinning (over a 10 year period) of approximately 21,500 acres of upland pine stands within the Vernon Unit to improve habitat conditions for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, as well as to improve the suitability of the land for military training. In accordance with the Forest Service decision, the Army will conduct ongoing and proposed training activities and land uses within the Kisatchie National Forest. The Army's use of national forest lands will be subject to the terms and conditions of a Special Use Permit and Operating Plan.

The FAA will also make decisions with respect to the Alexandria International Airport Layout Plan as influenced by proposed Army projects and activities at England Industrial Airpark.

The Army's ROD specifies 15 mitigation and monitoring measures that will be implemented to rectify, reduce, or eliminate adverse effects to land cover, soils, water quality, and biological resources on both Army and Forest Service lands. The Army's ROD also includes a Sustainability and Environmental Monitoring Plan developed in cooperation with the Forest Service to evaluate the effectiveness of the mitigation measures. Results of monitoring will be made available to the public and stakeholders on an annual basis and used to inform future management and decision-making by both agencies.

The ROD is available online at <http://notes.tetrattech-ffx.com/PolkEIS.nsf>. Requests for copies of the document can be sent to:

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