

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:**

### **Float Bridge Training and Amphibious River Training Exercises at Yakima Training Center, Washington**

River crossing and amphibious training operations are an integral part of land warfare. An army's ability to cross significant water obstacles is often a critical component of warfare. The lethality of modern weapons and the capabilities of larger enemy formations have mandated that U.S. Army forces adopt an Air-Land Battle Doctrine that relies heavily upon the ability to maneuver quickly over large areas. The ability of the U.S. Army to cross rivers quickly and efficiently and to conduct successful amphibious operations is critical to the success of the Air-Land Battle Doctrine. Military units that engage in these type activities must conduct realistic training to ensure personnel maintain readiness to deploy when called upon. Without this support, river crossing and amphibious forces will not be able to satisfy training requirements.

To evaluate the impact of continuing to conduct river crossing training, and amphibious training at Yakima Training Center (YTC), an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been completed to compare alternatives and consequences of implementing each alternative. The intent of completing this EA was to update environmental documentation completed in 1996, prior to listing of salmonid Evolutionary Significant Unit's (ESU) on the Columbia River. In the case of the proposed river crossing activities, very few changes are proposed. An additional activity, amphibious river training, has been added to this assessment to allow this type of training to occur within the same footprint of the proposed river crossing activities, and within the same timeline each year. The following alternatives have been evaluated.

#### **Alternatives Considered**

**No Action** - Under the No Action Alternative, river crossing training would continue to occur during the two-week Annual Training at the existing training site at Priest Rapids Reservoir on the Columbia River. The No Action Alternative would not provide for an increased frequency of river training exercises to meet preparedness and proficiency requirements for the bridge-crossing unit.

**Alternative One. Float Bridge Training and Amphibious River Training at Yakima Training Center.** This is the Preferred Alternative. It entails no more than six times per year for each type of exercise between July 1 and December 1. This alternative satisfies all the training needs required to maintain a realistic training scenario.

**Alternative Two. Float Bridge Training and Amphibious River Training at Yakima Training Center - West Bank Alternative.** This alternative entails the same type of equipment and activities, and the same frequency and timeline for the training activities described under Alternative One. However, all ingress and egress of military units would occur from the west bank of the Columbia River. This would necessitate bridging units to turn around before reaching the east shore, and return to the west shore. This alternative, while meeting the essential training needs, would compromise overall training objectives, including getting from bank to bank as would occur during war time conditions.

## **Overview of Analysis Conducted**

The EA, which is incorporated by reference into this Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI), examined the potential effects of the proposed action on areas of environmental or socioeconomic concern. The alternatives considered for this action are the same as those considered in 1996, with the exception of adding a capability to conduct amphibious river training, and a review to determine if other potential locations exist within the Tri-State Region of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho where these types of activities could occur.

The objective of completing the updated EA in 2005 is to reevaluate environmental conditions. Specifically, in light of the listing of salmonid ESU's for two species listed as Endangered (Upper Columbia River Spring Run Chinook and Upper Columbia River Steelhead) that are known to occur within the area where river crossing activities occur.

In addition to reviewing continued river crossing activities, the Army has included an additional requirement with this review to conduct amphibious training activities on the Columbia River, in the same area where river crossings occur. These activities would occur within the same footprint and timeline constraints as the river crossing activities. Training activities conducted by amphibious units would include use of zodiac craft, SCUBA divers within the water column, and helicopter insertion and extraction activities of small Special Operation teams.

## **Anticipated Environmental and Socioeconomic Effects**

Impacts associated with the proposed action are very similar for the three alternatives considered. Under the No Action alternative there would be no new impacts. Under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative One) the potential for impacts would be similar to those associated with the No Action alternative, for each resource evaluated. Under Alternative Two, the impacts would also be similar, however there would be no impacts on the east shore landing site and staging area because no training would occur on the east side of the Columbia River.

Analysis in the EA found that low impacts would occur to soil, vegetation, water, wildlife, fish, and noise resources for all three alternatives; and Alternatives One and Two would result in low impacts to air quality. Impacts to soil and vegetation resources would occur due to vehicle movement on roads, staging areas, and launch and recovery operations (e.g., trucks and trailers that back into the river to launch or load boats and rafts). Impacts to water resources would also be attributable to launch and recovery operations, and waves and turbulence caused by movement of boats and rafts. Impacts to wildlife would result from human activity within the RCS. Impacts to fish, including the listed salmonid ESUs, would be attributable to temporarily increased erosion, sedimentation, and turbidity above the normal range. No salmon spawning is present in the project vicinity. Increased noise impacts would be infrequent, and for short durations during training events. Noise impacts would be attributable to wheeled vehicles, boats, and helicopters used during these events. Impacts to air quality would result from vehicle, helicopter, and boat operations at the project site. Decreases in air quality would be localized and of short duration.

## **Facts and Conclusions Leading to the FNSI**

Environmental impacts to the resources discussed above would be low as a result of implementing Alternative One, and the Army would fully satisfy the Purpose for and Need of the Proposed Action. Based on the analysis in this EA, it is our decision to select Alternative One. This alternative includes river crossing and amphibious training activities on the Columbia River, and also the following mitigation measures:

- limiting vehicle movement to existing roads;
- limiting vehicular travel along the shoreline and within the river,

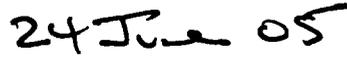
- Rafts will be landed as close to the shore as possible to reduce the distance vehicles must travel through water.
- refueling vehicles away from the river, and
  - A detailed spill response plan will be created, and the equipment necessary to carry out the plan will be put in place during these exercises. All spill response for river crossing training activities would be coordinated through the YTC, Public Works.
- reseeding disturbed upland areas.

We conclude that a FNSI is warranted; therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Fisheries Service, in the form of a combined Biological Assessment/Essential Fish Habitat Assessment, is currently being conducted. The Washington State Historic Preservation Officer has been informally consulted and concurred with a determination of "No affect" for this project. In addition, implementation of the project requires permits from Grant County Public Utility District, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Washington Department of Ecology. This action will not proceed until all consultation requirements are completed and permits are obtained.



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Date