

Finding of No Significant Impact

for

Construction and Operation of a Sniper Field Fire Range

Joint Base Lewis-McChord Yakima Training Center, Washington

Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) Yakima Training Center (YTC) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the potential environmental and socioeconomic effects associated with the construction and operation of a Sniper Field Fire range at JBLM YTC, Washington. The EA analyzes effects from the construction and operation of this range.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide year-round, comprehensive and realistic training and range facilities for sniper teams. The SFF range provides these sniper teams with necessary infrastructure to build marksmanship skills in weapons use, and to detect, identify, engage, and defeat stationary and moving infantry targets in a tactical array. This range design satisfies the training and qualification requirements of the M24 sniper rifle equipped teams. The range could be expanded to support Heavy sniper systems in the future. The SFF range provides sniper teams the capability to meet all live training tasks as outlined in Standards in Training Commission (STRAC) live-fire tasks for Army sniper teams. The range would be used to train sniper teams to meet mission-essential live-fire training tasks (METL) while simultaneously providing the best possible training for current threats the Army encounters during combat operations in the contemporary operating environment.

The Army has responded to recent changes in land combat operations, information and technology, and contemporary operating environments by restructuring the U.S. Armed Forces as part of Army Transformation. The restructuring of Army Forces has dramatically increased the number of snipers by forming sniper teams within each unit that trains at JBLM YTC. An automated SFF range has individual Soldiers engaging a series of targets in a tactical array. This training enhances a Soldier's ability to identify and to engage targets, working in a realistic training environment. Moving and stationary infantry targets with natural vegetation in the target area provide a realistic training environment. This range's targets and the range operating system provides immediate performance feedback to the using participants. Currently, JBLM and JBLM YTC do not have a SFF range that meets current Army Training Circular (TC) 25-8 standards to support sniper teams.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to construct, operate, and maintain a SFF range designed to train sniper teams in the basic live-fire training tasks they require to sustain combat proficiency. Primary features of this range include 40 stationary infantry targets, eight moving infantry targets (MITs) and four firing positions and lanes. In addition, the range will include a combined instruction/operations building, latrine, bleacher enclosure, ammunition breakdown building, covered mess, and control tower. Two target maintenance roads will tier from an existing access road near the center of the range. Existing firebreaks and access roads from adjacent ranges will be utilized for access and to keep wildfires from adjacent ranges from encroaching on the SFF range.

Two weapon systems will be fired on the SFF range. The M24 and M110 sniper rifles fire 7.62 mm, 30 caliber, or 300 Winchester Magnum (Win Mag) ammunition. Soldiers firing these weapons systems would fire from fixed positions, accurately firing single shots at stationary and moving targets. Tracer rounds are not anticipated to be fired on the SFF range.

Alternatives Considered

The Army considered two alternatives, the No-Action alternative, and the Preferred alternative. Under the No-Action alternative, a SFF range would not be constructed. The preferred alternative is to construct a SFF range that meets the requirements of Training Circular (TC) 25-8. Three additional sites were considered but eliminated from analysis because they did not meet the screening criteria. Screening criteria included the ability to meet training standards and to provide a realistic training environment year-round, SDZ conflicts, access to power and communication utilities, and economic feasibility.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

The EA analyzed potential impacts of the Preferred Alternative on air quality, noise, soils, water resources, land-use, socioeconomics, human health, infrastructure, solid waste, hazardous materials/waste, cultural resources, wildland fire, and biological resources. Analysis in the EA concludes that there will be no significant environmental impacts resulting from the proposed action and the preferred alternative. This determination for the potential environmental impacts is based on the following:

- a. Soil erosion from construction and operation of a SFF range would be expected. Construction Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans and a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit will require implementation of Best Management Practices to control soil erosion and protect water resources. This will reduce any erosion impacts to less than significant.

- b. There would be no significant impacts to threatened and endangered species. No additional impacts beyond the baseline condition are anticipated to the greater sage-grouse, a federal candidate species. Sagebrush/bunchgrass habitat at the proposed range location is very sparse. The Sage Grouse Management Plan provides management measures to protect the species, its habitat, and associated leks (where male sage-grouse gather during mating season to attract females).
- c. Wildland fire impacts are expected to be slightly reduced as compared to other types of small arms ranges as tracer rounds would not be fired on the proposed range. The greatest threat of wildland fire associated with the proposed SFF range is a fire that originates at an adjacent range. Measures are in place to minimize wildland fire risk and additional resources are prescribed in the Fort Lewis Grow the Army Environmental Impact Statement. Firebreaks, fire suppression water resources, prescribed burning, pre-incident planning, primary and secondary fire containment areas, and increased staffing are all designed to minimize wildland fire risk.

Mitigation Measures

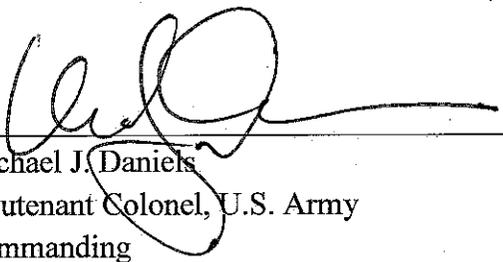
Mitigation measures are used to alleviate potential environmental impacts that may be critical. Mitigation may be something that is required by regulation, such as a permit, or it may be a measure used specifically to address a potential impact. Mitigation measures identified in the EA are as follows:

- a. Develop a Construction Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan to address storm water runoff and soil erosion. Subsequently, a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit will be received prior to commencing construction.
- b. Reestablish disturbed vegetation with native sagebrush/bunchgrass to provide suitable habitat for the greater sage-grouse.
- c. Implement restrictions in Chapter 4.1 Direct Sage Grouse Protection of the Sage Grouse Management Plan. During the sage-grouse breeding season, (February 1 to May 15), all activities are to be restricted within a 1 kilometer radius of a lek between 2400 and 0900 and weapons firing is only allowed on established ranges between 0900 and 2400. Construction, as well as maintenance and repair activities should be accomplished outside the nesting and brood rearing protection period to the greatest extent possible. When such activities must occur during the protection period, all actions are to be reviewed by the JBLM YTC wildlife biologist to ensure disturbance to sage grouse is minimized and habitat protection is maintained.
- d. Perch guards and other predator deterrents will be used on the observation tower, utility poles, and utility lines to eliminate access to predators.

Conclusion

I have considered the results of the analysis in the EA, the comments received during the public comment period, the GTA EIS evaluation of the current baseline conditions and associated cumulative effects. Based on these factors, I have decided to proceed with the preferred alternative, construction and operation of a Sniper Field Fire Range.

Implementation of the proposed alternative, along with specified mitigation measures will not result in an increase of impacts beyond the current conditions; therefore, no significant impacts to the quality of the human or natural environment are attributed to this action. This analysis fulfills the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 as implemented by the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), as well as the requirements of the Environmental Analysis of Army Actions (32 CFR Part 651). Therefore, issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) is warranted and an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.



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22 APR '12
Date