



Match Game

States, Army work to find compatible neighbors for installations

The Army wants to ensure soldiers are able to train as they fight. Development, environmental laws, endangered species and dust and noise issues can create “encroachment” problems. States have worked with the Army and other branches of the military to resolve encroachment problems—those things that reduce training capacity at an installation—and at the same time address environmental concerns.

By Mary Branham Dusenberry

“**Buffers** are great for so many of us. We like open space next to our tank trails and firing ranges; livestock like open grazing land; endangered species like natural habitat; crops need open farmland; the public likes open space for recreation and hunting; and communities like compatible land uses and smart planning.”

—Lt. Col. Joe Knott,
Army Training Lands Support officer

The military plays an important role in North Carolina's economy.

About 18 percent of the state's revenue is derived from military activities, according to Chris Russo, a special assistant in the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources. But that's just one reason the state has worked hand-in-hand with the military to make sure their installations in North Carolina can be used to the fullest extent.

“We have a responsibility to support national defense,” Russo said. “That goes along with supporting the military in our state. Their ability to eliminate encroachment so that they can do their training, so they can perform their mission, is as vital to us as it is to them.”

The Army defines encroachment as anything that reduces training capacity at an installation—from physical construction of houses on the borders to federal environmental laws to endangered species to dust and noise issues. Those encroachment issues require the Army, and other branches of the military, to develop “work arounds,” creating an artificial training environment, according to Lt. Col. Joe Knott, assigned as the Army Training Lands Support officer in the office of the director of environmental programs for the Army. He has worked with Army Compatible Use Buffer, or ACUB, program for the past three years.

“If they can't perform the mission, they're going to close (installations),” said Russo. “If they can't perform the mission, we're going to lose revenue. If you can't train, you can't do your mission.”

Fort Bragg, N.C., in fact, is the model for the Army's program. The Army partnered in the mid-1990s with The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Environmental Center to develop an innovative approach called the Private Lands Initiative, whose primary purpose was to recover the population of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, thereby reducing restrictions on Army training.

Congress endorsed the approach, and in the 2003 Defense Authorization Act provided the military clear legislative authority to partner with government or private organizations to establish buffer areas in the vicinity of active training and testing areas. From that authorization, ACUB was born. Other branches of the military have similar programs.

The buffer program has been successful in achieving the goals of several groups in different parts of the country. The

Fort Bragg project—which was actually pre-ACUB—is a prime example of how such collaborative efforts can benefit the different groups involved.

The Army announced in June that the project had reached a recovery milestone for the red-cockaded woodpecker population five years earlier than expected. The recovery also means a reduction in training restrictions on Fort Bragg.

“This recovery validates the success of the Army's ongoing sustainability efforts, demonstrates our commitment to preserve precious natural resources, such as the long leaf pine ecosystem of the Sandhills, and amplifies what we can achieve by working together with community partners,” Addison D. Davis IV, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for Environment, Safety and Occupational Health, said in a June press release. “Equally important, this accomplishment allows the young men and women of our great Army to conduct tough, realistic training.”

‘Train Like They Fight’

Many military installations were originally established in rural areas through condemnation and eminent domain, according to Knott. But the military bases attract development, which can create problems. In addition, there are environmental pressures—like those at Fort Bragg—which need to be addressed. “We've got to be able to train our soldiers like they fight in war,” he said. “How we mitigate those buffers can affect that. Anything that interrupts a training event compromises training realism and battlefield conditions.”

For instance, soldiers at Fort Campbell, Ky., fly more than 100 different helicopter missions each evening to test night vision goggles, according to Knott. But development around the base that straddles the Kentucky-Tennessee border has added to the amount of light in the flight routes. “They have to adjust,” Knott said. “We can't fly those routes anymore.”

Fort Carson, Colo., had similar problems. “One of the major advantages our soldiers have over many armies of the world is the ability to fight at night,” said Gary Belew, program leader of the cooperative conservation team at Fort Carson. “We use night vision apparatus. Any light on our boundaries washes out this night vision apparatus, making it very hard for our soldiers to train with this type of equipment.”

Light isn't the only problem created when development backs up to Army installations. Fort Carson, for instance, was forced

