



U. S. ARMY GARRISONS FORT WAINWRIGHT AND FORT RICHARDSON QUARTERLY UPDATE FOR ALASKA NATIVE TRIBES

October 2009, Issue 18

This is a quarterly update on USAG Fort Wainwright and Fort Richardson activities and issues of interest to federally recognized tribes in Alaska.

Reverend Trimble Gilbert Participates in Soldier/Family Housing Groundbreaking

Reverend Trimble Gilbert of Arctic Village provided a blessing at the groundbreaking of Fort Wainwright’s first family housing construction project under its partnership with Actus Lend Lease. Actus is the corporate partner that is building and managing housing under the new arrangement to privatize Soldier and family accommodations at Fort Wainwright and other military installations.

While the ceremony ushered in a new era of business partnership for USAG Fort Wainwright, it also served to reinforce an established partnership. USAG Fort Wainwright has enjoyed a growing relationship with the Alaska Native community and Reverend Gilbert’s participation in the groundbreaking only furthered the involvement between the Athabascan and military communities. This continued partnership was acknowledged by Colonel Timothy Jones, USAG Fort Wainwright garrison commander, in his opening remarks.

During the ceremony, Reverend Gilbert provided a blessing for the Soldiers serving here and overseas and for their families who will live in the new housing while serving their country.

Trimble Gilbert is the Traditional Chief of Arctic Village, the Second Traditional Chief of the TCC Region, and a renowned fiddler. He is also a retiree of the Army National Guard.



Colonel Timothy Jones with Reverend Trimble and Mrs. Mary Gilbert

Tribal Representatives Visit the BAX SDZ

On August 4, 2009, tribal representatives participated in the third and final trip to the Battle Area Complex (BAX) training facility at Donnelly Training Area near Delta Junction. This area has been under development for several years and the final phase of the work— the creation of the surrounding Surface Danger Zone (SDZ)— is now complete. The facility is being live-fire tested this fall.



Participants view a site above Banjo Lake

As part of the Section 106 undertaking during the building of this training area, the USAG cultural resources management team performed extensive archaeological surveys and excavations across the BAX SDZ. Three trips for tribal representatives to observe the land and the archaeological work were planned. The first two — in the summers of 2006 and 2007 — allowed participants to see the land before work had begun and during the archaeological dig process. The final trip in August provided visitors with a view of the completed BAX SDZ and a visit to some of the last archaeological work being done at the site.

Additionally, visitors were treated to a drive across the training area and a brief tour of the training area’s various features. An explanation of how the training area will be used was provided by Donnelly Training Area archaeologist, Aaron Robertson.



Meet the New Fort Richardson Garrison Commander

On July 17, Colonel Timothy R. Prior assumed command of the Fort Richardson garrison.

Colonel Prior has served his country in Korea, Panama, Turkey, Kosovo, and Germany. In his last assignment, he served as the J4, Director of Logistics, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

In an introductory letter to tribes south of the Alaska Range, Colonel Prior stated that “the government-to-government relationships that USAG FRA has developed and enjoyed with its neighboring federally recognized tribes will continue to be enhanced” under his leadership. He looks forward to USAG FRA’s continued development as a good steward of the land with input from Alaska’s Native population.

Colonel Prior and his wife, Martina, have four children.



Eagle River Flats Impact Area Tribal Site Visit

Representatives from tribes around upper Cook Inlet participated in a site visit to Eagle River Flats Impact Area at Fort Richardson on August 28. A briefing was provided by range control officers explaining the ways in which Army personnel must be cleared before using the impact area and the ways in which training lands are designed. Afterward, participants boarded a bus and visited the Upper Cole Point observation point. Subject matter experts from the areas of range control, conservation, and natural resources were available to answer questions tribal representatives might have about the area, its current use, its past issues, and potential changes in future use.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is currently being drafted that will analyze the impacts of potential year-round firing at Eagle River Flats or another location on Fort Richardson’s South Post.



USAG FWA and UTIC Hold Meeting

Representatives of USAG FWA and the Upper Tanana Inter-tribal Coalition met for their 10th quarterly meeting in Tanacross on July 23. AK Fish and Game and US Army Corps of Engineers personnel also participated. Topics of discussion included this fall’s moose telemetry project, Tok Terminal mitigation, and Haines-Fairbanks Pipeline issues.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Notices

This block is provided as an easy-reference, quarter-to-quarter update of significant NEPA activity being managed by the USAG FWA and FRA NEPA staff.

Aviation Stationing EIS: The *Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Stationing and Training of Increased Aviation Assets within U.S. Army Alaska* was approved and made available to the public on September 11, 2009. The Army identified Alternative 2 – permanently station and train an Aviation Task Force at Fort Wainwright – as its preferred course of action. The Army’s decision-maker, Mr. John B. Nerger, Executive Director of the Installation Management Command (IMCOM), will make his final decision in mid-October 2009. The decision will be based on the results of the analysis described in the Final EIS, supporting studies, and comments provided during the Draft EIS comment period, marking the conclusion of the Aviation Stationing NEPA process. Thanks again to all tribal members for their valuable input.

Eagle River Flats EIS: The Army will soon publish a Draft EIS analyzing the restoration of year-round indirect live-fire opportunities at Fort Richardson. The Army has spent the previous two years engaged in study and analysis of two potential action alternatives: 1) utilization of the existing Eagle River Flats Impact Area and 2) the construction of an entirely new Impact Area at Fort Richardson. The Army anticipates releasing the Draft EIS in **November 2009** followed by a comment period. Interested tribes will be provided with an opportunity to review the EIS and submit comments at a meeting likely to be held in **late 2009/early 2010**. USAG FWA and FRA’s Native Liaison will provide specific details to tribes as they become available. The tribes of Eklutna, Knik, Chickaloon, and Tyonek were invited to the initial EIS scoping meetings in August 2007. Comments collected included concerns over potentially harmful runoff from Eagle River Flats entering Cook Inlet; the possibility of locating targets away from areas that are too difficult to clean during remediation efforts; and potential impacts to the salmon restoration project on Moose Creek (i.e., potential impacts to salmon using Eagle Bay and the estuary area). Additionally, the EIS will focus on issues related to white phosphorous, waterfowl, beluga whales, salmon, water quality and noise.

Osprey Monitoring on Fort Wainwright

contributed by FWA biologist Amal Ajmi

The USAG Fort Wainwright (FWA) natural resource staff is enjoying the fourth year of documented osprey breeding on the FWA cantonment. Ospreys are not common to the Interior, and very little information exists regarding this raptor and its breeding biology in Alaska. A preponderance of that information—annual nesting territory occupancy and productivity data—has been collected by Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge (Tetlin NWR) since 1991.



Staff was alerted to a breeding pair of osprey on FWA during spring 2006. The pair had built a nest on a large power pole located downstream from the rail-crossing along the Chena River, just northwest of the Ladd Army Airfield Runway. Natural resource staff took this opportunity to observe and document osprey behavior. The purpose of this work has evolved through time and aims to: 1) document breeding behavior of osprey, 2) document disturbance (if any) by aircraft, boat, and pedestrian activities, 3) document and calculate detailed individual time activity budgets during the entire breeding season, and 4) develop educational opportunities for the FWA and Fairbanks communities.

Ospreys, also known as Fish Eagles, are a highly specialized species of raptor that prey upon fish. They are distinctive when seen in flight, recognizable by long, slightly bent wings soaring overhead. Wings are dark brown above while the undersides and the body is white. The tail is also dark brown with barring. A dark brown cheek patch and sharply curved black bill contrast with the white head. Adults' yellow eyes are keen and alert. Females are slightly larger than males and can be distinguished occasionally by a more pronounced "necklace" of dark brown feathers on their upper breast.

Ospreys are migratory and return to Alaska in late April. A breeding pair may mate for life, and usually return to the same area each year to nest and raise young. Osprey as old as 25 years have been documented in literature. Documentation at FWA indicates that the osprey have constructed most of their nest and begun incubating on average by May 16; average fledging date is August 20, and osprey units leave the natal area on average by September 21. Four chicks have successfully fledged between 2006 and 2008.

2009 was an exceptional year as two pairs arrived to nest on FWA along the Chena River. FWA was previously host to one known osprey breeding pair.



Female (L) and male (R) adult osprey

This year was also especially challenging for the returning osprey. The power poles normally used for nesting were scheduled to be replaced and an attempt was made by Doyon Utilities to deter nesting. One pair was successfully deterred from raising young, but maintained a nest at the location. The second pair has successfully fledged a single chick. The tenacity of these raptors is a testament to their drive to reproduce.

The breeding timeline of the osprey family this year is delayed. Nest building and incubation began on May 29, almost two weeks late. Fledging, estimated to be September 6, is also two weeks later than documented averages. It remains to be seen if there is enough time for the chick to successfully learn to fish on its own and gain enough weight to make the migration south to Mexico or South America. FWA data indicates that chicks, post-fledging, continue to use the nest as the food transfer site. Young ospreys often rely on their parents for food at least 10 – 20 days after fledging. The nest can be critical for food transfer until young have attained adequate fishing skills. If the 2009 timeline continues, the osprey unit would have to remain at the nest until the first week of October. Time of migration is not well known for this species and it may be that the remaining time will not be enough for the chick to learn to fish on its own before the parents leave the area.



Juvenile osprey

The current power poles will be replaced once the ospreys have left the area in October, and will be unavailable for nesting in the future. Natural resource staff, in coordination with the Post Command, has allocated funds to place a nesting platform near the old power pole sites to provide the ospreys an alternative nesting location. Osprey platforms have proven successful elsewhere, and provide a better base upon which to build a nest. Providing a structure for breeding ospreys also opens up possibilities for study and education. Ospreys are not common in the Interior and the opportunity to watch a breeding pair on FWA affords the chance for many to appreciate this magnificent bird of prey.

The natural resource staff hopes to attain future funding for the placement of a camera (still and /or video) near the nest to document breeding timelines. We hope to capture, in greater depth, breeding behaviors and dates of hatching and fledging. Feeding rates would also be documented. We hope to bring the photo series and/or video to classrooms on FWA and throughout Fairbanks so that students have a local topic to investigate throughout the school year.

Section 106 Undertakings

The article is included as a quarter-to-quarter detail of the undertakings being done by the USAG FWA and FRA's Cultural Resource Management team in response to the National Historic Preservation Act's (NHPA) Section 106.

Fort Richardson (FRA) jurisdiction lands:

-- Archaeological surveys were completed for 1) power line installation and observation tower replacement at Baumeister Village and Cole Point; 2) upgrades to the Clunie Lake campground; 3) construction of a vehicle inspection station at the main gate; and 4) installation of a sewer line near the main gate. No archaeological sites were found during any of these surveys.

Fort Wainwright (FWA) jurisdiction lands:

-- Numerous construction projects that require Section 106 consultation are scheduled within the **FWA cantonment**, including: construction of new antennas on Buildings 3005 and 1557; roof replacements for Buildings 2079, 2080, 3004; and an addition to Building 1044.

-- The draft Programmatic Agreement for the **Aviation Stationing** undertaking was signed by Colonel Jones on September 3.

-- USAG FWA staff completed several small **archaeological surveys** within the FWA cantonment in preparation for previously reported construction projects and development of a recreational off-road vehicle course. These efforts resulted in the identification of one prehistoric site on Sage Hill.

-- **Archaeological surveys** in the Yukon Training Area (YTA) were focused on three areas being assessed for development of gravel sources.

-- **Archaeological work** was done in the Tanana Flats Training Area (TFTA) in an initial assessment of the Pacific Area Range Complex (PARC) project. These efforts resulted in the discovery of 20 prehistoric sites-- four near Ann Lake, 11 on sand dunes east of Wood River, and five on the terrace southeast of Pork Chop Lake.

-- Archaeological data recovery occurred at 29 sites within the **Battle Area Complex's Surface Danger Zone**. A total of 815 1m x1m excavation units were completed and more than 15,000 artifacts, 4,000 animal bone fragments, and one hearth feature were recovered. Information gathered will provide baseline data and help guide future cultural resource management decisions. A report detailing the archaeological data recovery will be available once analysis of the material is completed.

Check out <http://www.usarak.army.mil/conservation/index.htm> for DPW Environmental news and documents.

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

We welcome corrected recipient information. Issues are mailed to tribal administrators and tribal leaders.

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Thank you.