

Record of Decision

This is the Record of Decision based on the *Fort Bliss, Texas and New Mexico Mission and Master Plan Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement* (SEIS), which is incorporated by reference as part of this decision. The SEIS was filed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and made available to the public on March 16, 2007, and a Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on March 23, 2007. Alternative 4 is identified as the Army's preferred alternative. This selection is based on national security and mission requirements and environmental impact considerations, as described below. The SEIS and this Record of Decision (ROD) comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Part 1500), and 32 CFR Part 651, "Environmental Effects of Army Actions." The U.S. Army Installation Command has decided to implement Alternative 4—Proposed Action, as described in the SEIS.

Background

In September 2001, the Army executed a Record of Decision (ROD) selecting Alternative 3 as described in the *Fort Bliss, Texas and New Mexico Mission and Master Plan Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement* (PEIS) dated December 2000. This ROD implemented land use plans and designations for the Main Cantonment Area and Fort Bliss Training Complex to support the mission and units of the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery Center and Fort Bliss (USAADACENFB). Subsequently, the Army has implemented the Army Transformation, as described in the Final PEIS for Army Transformation (February 2002), and in 2005, the Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) Commission selected Fort Bliss to receive an Armored Division with four Heavy Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs), a Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), an Artillery (Fires) Brigade, and other supporting units.

These actions are increasing the units and personnel stationed at Fort Bliss and changing the training requirements that the installation will be supporting. As a result, Fort Bliss has a need to modify the land use designations adopted by the ROD on the 2000 Mission and Master Plan PEIS to provide the facilities, infrastructure, and training capabilities required by Army Transformation, the related Global Defense Posture Realignment (GDPR), and BRAC.

The decision of the present ROD is to implement modifications to land use at Fort Bliss to support evolving mission requirements. The SEIS also analyzes the impacts associated with the BRAC stationing decisions concerning Fort Bliss, although those decisions have already become law. Because the BRAC decisions are partially exempt from NEPA, this ROD does not revisit the stationing of units or an increase of approximately 20,000 military and 3,800 civilian personnel at Fort Bliss, with associated dependents and resulting population increase in the El Paso region.

Alternatives Considered

The SEIS analyzed the environmental and socioeconomic effects of five land use alternatives as described below.

No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would continue the current land uses as adopted in the ROD for the 2000 Fort Bliss Mission and Master Plan PEIS and analyzed in

documents tiering from that PEIS. Although this alternative would not change land use, facilities are being constructed in the Main Cantonment Area to support stationing of one Heavy BCT, in accordance with a completed Record of Environmental Consideration (REC). In addition, a REC has been completed for constructing or upgrading live-fire ranges within current land use designations and/or on existing range footprints to support the BCT. Additional mission support facilities will be constructed in areas currently designated for such facilities.

Authorized training activities will continue in the Fort Bliss Training Complex under this alternative. Off-road vehicle maneuver training will continue on approximately 335,000 acres (1,356 km²) of the South Training Areas, North Training Areas, and Training Area (TA) 8 on McGregor Range. No off-road vehicle maneuver or live-fire would occur in McGregor Range training areas beyond what is currently approved and analyzed in the PEIS and subsequent NEPA documentation. The No Action Alternative does not provide sufficient area for off-road vehicle maneuver to accommodate the units identified to be stationed at Fort Bliss and continue to support other users of the Fort Bliss Training Complex. This alternative would result in degraded training that does not meet Army doctrinal standards.

Alternative 1. Alternative 1 would include all development incorporated in the No Action Alternative and also involve land use changes in the Main Cantonment Area and the Fort Bliss Training Complex to accommodate personnel, facilities, and training activities associated with locating an Armor Division, a total of four Heavy BCTs, and other units as part of Army Transformation and BRAC. The Main Cantonment Area of Fort Bliss would be expanded to the north and east, additional mission support facilities would be constructed in the Fort Bliss Training Complex, additional firing ranges and training facilities would be constructed on Doña Ana and McGregor Ranges, and approximately 216,000 additional acres (875 km²) of training land, above the existing capacity, in the Tularosa Basin portion of McGregor Range south of New Mexico Highway 506 would be opened to off-road vehicle maneuver training. Alternative 1 minimally meets the maneuver requirements of the units relocating to Fort Bliss, but may not be able to continue to support missile firings at the historical level of use.

Alternative 2. Alternative 2 would include all changes described in the No Action Alternative and Alternative 1 and considers the personnel and equipment, facilities development, operations, and training associated with stationing a second CAB at Fort Bliss. This alternative would also add off-road vehicle maneuver capability in training areas within the Tularosa Basin portion of McGregor Range north of Highway 506, providing approximately 280,000 acres (1,135 km²) of off-road vehicle maneuver area above the existing capability. In addition to increasing the capacity of the installation to support off-road vehicle maneuvers, this alternative would provide the ability to conduct battalion-on-battalion and movement-to-contact exercises.

Alternative 3. Alternative 3 would include all changes described in the No Action Alternative and Alternative 1 and incorporate a second CAB like Alternative 2. It would not extend off-road vehicle maneuver training north of Highway 506; instead, it would add that capability to three training areas in the southeast portion of McGregor Range below Otero Mesa, providing approximately 287,000 acres (1,163 km²) of off-road vehicle maneuver capability above the existing capability. In addition to increasing the capacity for off-road vehicle maneuvers, this alternative would offer more varied terrain and a training environment that is different from the other training areas available for that use.

Alternative 4—Proposed Action. Alternative 4 would include all changes described in Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, providing approximately 352,000 acres (1,424 km²) of off-road vehicle maneuver training area in the Tularosa Basin portion of McGregor Range above the existing capability. This alternative was selected as the Proposed Action because it would provide all the training benefits of the other alternatives, including battalion-level movement-to-contact exercise capability and a variety of terrain environments, and offer the most capacity and flexibility to accommodate future mission changes and training requirements. These changes would provide the capacity to support up to six BCTs.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative.

Selection of the environmentally preferable alternative is not a straight-forward matter. One alternative might affect some resources more and others less than another alternative, so there is some trade-off between the nature and severity of impacts and the resources affected. In general, the No Action Alternative can be considered the environmentally preferable alternative among the five alternatives analyzed in the SEIS, but it is not a viable alternative because it does not include construction necessary to support the units identified for relocation to Fort Bliss under BRAC or the personnel-related effects associated with the BRAC decisions.

From a land use perspective, the No Action Alternative would avoid the impacts related to conducting off-road vehicle maneuvers on McGregor Range. On the other hand, it would not meet the Army's need to provide training to doctrinal standards to the units stationed at Fort Bliss. It would also severely curtail Fort Bliss' ability to support other missions, including missile firings, Air Defense Artillery training, and the mobilization mission. Furthermore, the No Action Alternative would concentrate the environmental effects of off-road vehicle maneuver training in the South Training Areas, North Training Areas, and TA 8, which are already approved for off-road vehicle maneuvers. The impacts to those areas would be more severe than under the other alternatives, making it more difficult to sustain their training capability and ecological condition. In addition, areas of the North and South Training Areas that are currently open to public access for recreation on a non-interference basis with the military mission would likely become unavailable for public use.

After the No Action Alternative, Alternative 1 is environmentally preferable in comparison to the other action alternatives because it would limit the effects of off-road vehicle maneuver training on McGregor Range to a smaller area than the other three alternatives. It would also avoid impacts to grazing in the north Tularosa Basin portion of McGregor Range, as well as impacts to grasslands in the southeast training areas.

Basis of the Army's Decision

In selecting Alternative 4—Proposed Action for implementation, the Army considered three main factors: (1) mission requirements posed by Army Transformation and BRAC, including the need to provide adequate training; (2) the need to provide a sustainable training base; and (3) the environmental effects of each alternative and public input regarding those environmental effects.

Alternative 4 is clearly superior to the other alternatives in meeting mission requirements. It provides adequate off-road vehicle maneuver and other training capability and capacity to support the units identified for stationing at Fort Bliss and train soldiers to doctrinal standards. Quality of training (i.e., training that meets doctrinal standards) better prepares soldiers to fight

and survive and enhances their effectiveness on the battlefield. Alternative 4 also offers more varied training by providing different terrain and environmental conditions that replicate different areas of the world where soldiers could be deployed. By opening more area to off-road vehicle maneuver training, it provides more flexibility to accommodate evolving training requirements and future mission needs.

Alternative 4 also provides more flexibility than the other alternatives for managing Fort Bliss lands to provide a sustainable training base. By making more area available for off-road vehicle maneuver, it provides more opportunity to disperse the effects of that maneuver, reducing the intensity of the impact in affected areas and potentially allowing more time for recovery. In addition, Alternative 4 offers better ability to allow more sensitive areas to be rested for longer periods of time, to place limitations in the use of certain areas, and to enable the installation's Integrated Training Area Management (ITAM) program to respond to training hazards or environmental damage.

The SEIS analysis and public comments on the Draft SEIS raised concerns about the severity of potential environmental and socioeconomic impacts. Many of the most intense impacts result either directly or indirectly from the personnel increases associated with the BRAC decisions. Because the personnel increases are mandated by the BRAC process, variations in personnel increases that would bring fewer soldiers to Fort Bliss than were decided upon in BRAC were not considered in the EIS. Consequently, the four action alternatives are similar in the type of population-related impacts, which include infrastructure (transportation and utilities), air quality, water resources, and socioeconomic effects. Although the effects of the BRAC decision were not germane to the selection among alternatives, they have been considered in the identification of mitigation measures described in the following section.

Impacts pertaining to land use, training area infrastructure, soils, biological resources, cultural resources, noise, and safety are germane to the selection among land use alternatives and were considered in the decision. The Army considered the magnitude and severity of the effects and the degree to which they can be effectively managed and mitigated. The cultural resources, noise, and safety impacts can be effectively managed and do not significantly vary among the alternatives. The most significant distinguishing factors are the geographic extent of the area exposed to increased soil erosion caused by off-road vehicle maneuvers and the location of impacts to biological resources and different habitats on McGregor Range. Although locally important, those impacts are less significant when considered in a regional or national context, and do not outweigh the benefits of the selected alternative to the Army mission.

Mitigation Measures

The Army incorporated in the proposed action a number of measures to mitigate potential adverse environmental effects in defining the alternatives considered in the SEIS. These measures included maximizing the use of existing facilities and infrastructure, consolidating functions and maximizing functional relationships in siting new facilities, and locating proposed facilities and off-road vehicle maneuver training away from the installation's more sensitive ecological areas on Otero Mesa and in the Sacramento Mountains foothills. New and expanded live-fire ranges have been sited in accordance with applicable safety criteria to contain all surface danger zones within Fort Bliss boundaries. Any future live-fire ranges developed at Fort Bliss will also be sited to preclude off-post explosive safety impacts.

In addition, the Army is adopting all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm by (1) implementing specific mitigation measures, (2) using monitoring and adaptive management to better understand the effects of military training on the environment and adjust its activities to address those effects, or (3) working with other entities and agencies to help them reduce impacts in their areas of jurisdiction.

The Proposed Action is not expected to appreciably affect airspace or hazardous materials and items of special concern. Existing airspace management and scheduling procedures will be used to preclude adverse impacts associated with increased air operations. Fort Bliss will update existing planning and compliance procedures as necessary, including the Waste Analysis Plan; Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures Plan; and hazardous materials and waste management procedures, and continue an aggressive inspection and maintenance program to avoid releases of hazardous materials and waste and comply with all regulatory requirements in the event of a release.

While impacts on land use, air quality, and safety are not expected to be significant, this ROD includes mitigation measures to further reduce those impacts. Significant and potentially significant impacts have been identified in infrastructure, earth resources, water resources, biological resources, and cultural resources. Mitigation measures have been selected to address those impacts. Mitigation of some noise and socioeconomic impacts falls under the purview of other entities; and the Army will work with those entities to provide information and consultation assistance to address those effects.

The mitigation measures adopted by the Army address three main categories of impacts: construction-related impacts, training land-related impacts, and personnel-related impacts.

Mitigation of Construction-Related Impacts. Measures to reduce impacts from construction activities will be implemented primarily through terms and conditions incorporated in contracts between the Army and firms performing the construction. Contracts will be issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and by Fort Bliss. All contracts involving ground disturbance will contain at a minimum the following requirements:

- Ensure proper storage and disposal of hazardous waste and items of special concern, such as asbestos, and comply with regulatory requirements for hazardous materials and waste.
- Use Best Management Practices to minimize erosion, including implementing erosion and sedimentation controls, storm water management measures, dust suppression, and compliance with Storm Water Pollution Prevention regulations.
- Avoid allowing construction equipment engines to idle for long periods of time, use post-combustion control equipment on heavy duty diesel engines, and ensure equipment is operating properly and efficiently.
- Minimize the size of exposed soil during construction and use soil stockpiling methods that minimize dust generation.
- Install ground cover on remaining exposed areas after construction is complete.
- Stop ground disturbing activities if previously unrecorded archaeological deposits are uncovered and consult with the Fort Bliss Historic Preservation Officer.

Any construction or renovation that affects historic properties will follow the requirements and standard operating procedures in the Programmatic Agreement for Historic Properties on Fort Bliss. Facility sites that have not been previously surveyed or assessed will be surveyed for archaeological resources prior to construction. If any resources potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places are identified, the Army will follow the procedures specified in the Programmatic Agreement.

Some construction will occur in areas that currently provide habitat for small reptiles, mammals, and migratory birds and will unavoidably result in mortality and displacement of some individuals, loss of nests, and habitat reduction. Limiting construction to avoid nesting/breeding periods was determined not to be practicable because it would prevent the facilities from being completed in time to accommodate incoming units and personnel.

Mitigation of Training Land-Related Impacts. Conduct of different types of training activities on Fort Bliss could affect land use; training area infrastructure; safety; and earth, water, biological, and cultural resources. The Army will adopt the following mitigation measures to reduce those impacts:

- **Land Use.** In coordination with the Bureau of Land Management, the Army will realign fencing in grazing units in the north Tularosa Basin portion of McGregor Range to reduce potential conflicts between grazing activities and off-road vehicle maneuvers. As necessary, the U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Battalion will modify public access procedures for the Fort Bliss Training Complex to maintain the military mission and public safety.
- **Training Area Infrastructure.** Units at Fort Bliss will regulate the size, spacing, and speed of military convoys traveling public roads from the Main Cantonment Area to the Fort Bliss Training Complex to reduce potential impacts on traffic, particularly on Martin Luther King, Jr. Highway and New Mexico Highway 213. The Army will construct a new/upgraded range road on McGregor Range between Alvarado Crossing and the Orogrande Range Complex to reduce off-post traffic and dust from military vehicles. The Army will construct hardened vehicle crossings over New Mexico Highway 506 to prevent damage to the roadway from heavy military equipment. Units crossing Highway 506 with heavy equipment will provide traffic control and space vehicle crossings to limit delays to civilian traffic to 15 minutes or less in most cases. The U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Battalion will notify the Las Cruces District of the Bureau of Land Management and the Otero County Administrator of planned closures of Highway 506 on McGregor Range. These measures are expected to reduce adverse infrastructure impacts to non-significant levels.

Fort Bliss will program improvements to wastewater treatment and storm water facilities at range camps as necessary to address capacity shortfalls. The Army will take measures to maintain access to valid water rights in connection with the Orogrande pipeline that crosses the northeastern part of McGregor Range. These measures may include designating the pipeline off limits to maneuver by heavy equipment that could damage it, constructing hardened crossings over the pipeline, or burying segments of the pipeline at sufficient depth to preclude damage from vehicles and equipment.

- **Safety.** Increased training activity in the Fort Bliss Training Complex will incrementally increase the risk of wildfires. The Fort Bliss Range Standard Operating Procedure

requires units using the ranges and training areas to furnish on-site personnel and equipment to respond to any fires, and to notify Range Control immediately of any fire starts. It also restricts the use of fire-producing munitions in high-risk areas such as grasslands during extremely dry and windy conditions. Because of these precautions, the increase in wildfire risk is not anticipated to be significant.

- **Earth Resources.** Off-road vehicle maneuvers have the potential to increase erosion significantly, especially in high-traffic areas and on highly erodible soils. A limited-use area will be established on the loamy soils within 3.5 kilometers of Hackberry Tank on McGregor Range, where concentrations of vehicles and personnel will be restricted. The Fort Bliss ITAM program will conduct a Range and Training Land Assessment of unpaved range roads and tank trails in the Fort Bliss Training Complex to identify road segments that pose a hazard to maneuver due to erosion and develop repair and/or upgrade projects to reduce erosion.
- **Water Resources.** The potential for accidental spills, which could potentially contaminate groundwater or surface water – at Forward Area Refueling Points will be reduced by providing containment such as bermed areas for fuel bladders. The Army will also provide temporary or permanent containment at locations where hazardous materials, to include fuel, are stored.
- **Biological Resources.** Fort Bliss will designate restricted or limited-use areas to reduce impacts from off-road vehicle maneuvers in certain sensitive habitats. Specifically, grasslands and areas within a 50-meter buffer around arroyo-riparian habitat will be designated for limited use. Concentrations of personnel and vehicles, bivouacs, and digging will be restricted in these areas. Known populations of threatened and endangered species will be designated as restricted areas where no off-road vehicle maneuver is permitted. Restricted and limited-use areas will be shown on range maps, and proposed activities in those areas will be reviewed by Fort Bliss through the Range Facility Management Support System.
- **Cultural Resources.** Fort Bliss has executed a Programmatic Agreement for Historic Properties on Fort Bliss with the State Historic Preservation Officers of Texas and New Mexico and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. As required in that agreement, thirty percent of the unsurveyed land newly designated for off-road vehicle maneuver will be surveyed for archaeological resources, and any sites that are found will be evaluated for eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, prior to off-road vehicle maneuver on this land. Sites known to be eligible or with undetermined eligibility for listing will be managed according to the Programmatic Agreement. As provided for in the Programmatic Agreement, certain sites will be designated as restricted areas where no off-road vehicle maneuver is permitted. Restricted areas will be shown on range maps, and proposed activities in those areas will be reviewed by the Fort Bliss Historic Preservation Officer through the Range Facility Management Support System. Fort Bliss will endeavor to survey 10,000 additional acres per year, according to the Programmatic Agreement and subject to availability of funds. Additional mitigation will be determined in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Programmatic Agreement. The Army will consult with Native American Tribes that have an interest in Fort Bliss managed lands to identify and develop management procedures for potential

properties of traditional cultural and religious importance that could be affected by military activities.

Helicopter operations by the Combat Aviation Brigade will generate noise along routes between Biggs Army Airfield and the Fort Bliss Training Complex and between Orogrande Range Camp and McGregor Range. Mitigation measures have not been developed at this time to address this impact. Appropriate mitigation measures will be examined in consultation with the Combat Aviation Brigade commander when that unit arrives at Fort Bliss, currently expected in 2009. These mitigation measures may include rerouting air traffic, or other actions designed to reduce noise impacts.

Due to the variability in timing, duration, frequency, and location of off-road vehicle maneuvers, the Army will be relying on adaptive management as an important component of its mitigation strategy. To that end, Fort Bliss will develop a plan for adaptive management to support sustainable training lands. The Fort Bliss ITAM program will develop a protocol for monitoring the effects of training on installation lands, which information will feed into the Fort Bliss adaptive management plan. Land Repair and Maintenance projects will be identified through this monitoring effort as needed to sustain the training base. The U.S. Army Combined Arms Battalion will modify the Range Standard Operating Procedure as needed to incorporate adaptive management processes developed through this plan. These measures could include use restrictions and/or rehabilitation projects to protect, repair, or stabilize lands and ecological conditions, including designation of additional restricted and limited-use areas.

The mitigation measures described above are expected to reduce the adverse impacts of training activities effectively in the Fort Bliss Training Complex. Despite this, some impacts will be unavoidable. Some erosion, habitat loss, wildlife mortality, and loss of archaeological deposits cannot be practicably avoided. Use of chemical and physical erosion and dust control measures throughout off-road vehicle maneuver lands is not considered practicable because of the vast extent of those lands, which include approximately 687,000 acres under the selected alternative. Similarly, the size of this area renders conducting 100 percent survey for historic resources impracticable.

Mitigation of Personnel-Related Impacts. Potable water and wastewater treatment for the increased population on Fort Bliss will be furnished by El Paso Water Utilities (EPWU). Fort Bliss has already partnered with EPWU to increase the potable water supply in the region by providing an easement to construct and operate a brackish water desalination plant and supporting facilities on Fort Bliss land. Fort Bliss will work with EPWU to increase use of reclaimed water for landscaping on the installation.

The Army has decided not to construct a new landfill on Fort Bliss. In the future, domestic solid waste generated on post will be transported to off-post disposal facilities. As reported in the SEIS, although the additional refuse will incrementally decrease the life of these facilities, the impact is not expected to be significant.

The Army is performing an updated Housing Requirements and Market Analysis to determine whether additional on-post housing will be needed.

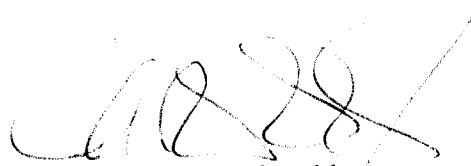
Cooperation with Other Agencies and Entities. Several of the impacts identified in the SEIS pertaining to infrastructure, air quality, water resources, and socioeconomic resources are primarily caused by projected population increases related to the BRAC decisions rather than the

land use decisions that are the scope of this ROD. Measures to meet increases in demand for utilities, water resources, and socioeconomic resources will need to be undertaken by the relevant providers, including EPWU (water supply and wastewater treatment), the electric and gas companies that serve communities in the region of influence, local government agencies (law enforcement, fire protection, schools), and private entities (housing and medical services). The El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization will need to incorporate considerations of increased traffic in plans for roadway improvements and conformance with National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Portions of El Paso, Doña Ana, and Otero Counties will be exposed to elevated noise levels from large-caliber weapons firing on Doña Ana and McGregor Ranges. Land use controls are recommended in those areas to prevent incompatible future development. These mitigation measures are not within the jurisdiction of Army, and so Army cannot guarantee their implementation. However, Army will cooperate with the appropriate entities and furnish information to assist them in addressing these effects.

Monitoring

Fort Bliss will monitor the implementation of all mitigation measures listed in this ROD through the installation Environmental Management System and report on the status of each measure to the Garrison Commander quarterly. Other monitoring activities that will be conducted at Fort Bliss include the following:

- Changes in vegetation and land cover will be monitored using remote sensing, augmented with field surveys, to provide input into adaptive management strategies and to monitor the effectiveness of mitigation measures.
- Monitoring projects included in the Fort Bliss Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan and the Range and Training Land Assessment program described in the SEIS.
- Fort Bliss will monitor fire breaks on McGregor Range and schedule appropriate maintenance and repair actions as conditions warrant.



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