

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR THE ADDITION OF OBSCURANT MUNITIONS BOXES
FORT BLISS ARMY GARRISON EL PASO, TEXAS

Introduction

The United States (US) Army has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) to disclose the potential environmental impacts associated with the addition of multiple obscurant munitions boxes at Fort Bliss Army Garrison (Fort Bliss), Texas, in compliance with the *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969* (NEPA) ([42 United States Code \[USC\] § 4321](#) et seq.); Army Regulation 200-1, *Environmental Protection and Enhancement*; and [32 CFR Part 651](#), *Environmental Analysis of Army Actions*. The Army considered other pertinent environmental statutes, regulations, and compliance requirements during the preparation of this EA, which are addressed in relevant sections. The attached Draft EA is incorporated herein by reference.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to expand obscurant munitions training capabilities at Fort Bliss by designating more areas (i.e., obscurant munitions boxes) within the Fort Bliss Training Complex (FBTC) that are suitable for obscurant munitions impacts and training. The proposed action is needed at Fort Bliss to ensure that the full spectrum of training can be accomplished and to minimize training conflicts with other weapons systems. Additional obscurant munitions box locations would provide varied training opportunities to simulate live combat operations. Because there are distinct missions, such as marking and quick smoke, that are assigned to obscurants, this training cannot be replicated by using other rounds.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Fort Bliss proposes to establish multiple additional obscurant munitions boxes within the Doña Ana and McGregor Range portions of the FBTC.

Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1, Fort Bliss would establish nine additional obscurant munitions boxes within permanently duded designated impact areas (DIAs) within the Doña Ana and McGregor Range complexes. Under Alternative 1, five obscurant munitions boxes would be located in the western portion of the Doña Ana Range and four would be located throughout the McGregor Range.

Alternative 2

Under Alternative 2, Fort Bliss would establish seven obscurant munitions boxes within permanently duded DIAs within the Doña Ana and McGregor Range complexes. Under Alternative 2, three obscurant munitions boxes would be located in the Doña Ana Range and the remaining four would be located throughout the McGregor Range.

Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3, Fort Bliss would establish two obscurant munitions boxes within permanently duded DIAs within the Doña Ana and McGregor Range complexes. Under Alternative 3, one obscurant munitions box would be located in each the Doña Ana and McGregor ranges.

No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, no obscurant munitions boxes would be added at Fort Bliss. Training missions would continue to operate under existing conditions. Training conflicts with other weapon systems would not be resolved, obscurant munitions training would be limited to the four training locations currently on the Doña Ana Range, and training would not be expanded to support further training of howitzers and

mortars. Under the no action alternative, the FBTC would not be able to expand to a full spectrum of training opportunities for obscurant munitions.

Summary of Environmental Consequences

Potentially affected environmental resources were identified through communications with state and Federal agencies and review of past environmental documentation. Specific environmental resources with the potential for environmental consequences include land use; air quality; noise; geological and soil resources; water resources; biological resources; cultural resources; transportation and traffic; airspace; utilities; hazardous and toxic materials and waste; and human health and safety. Socioeconomics was eliminated from further analysis because the proposed action would occur entirely within the FBTC with no changes to socioeconomics beyond baseline conditions.. The potential impacts associated with the proposed action and alternatives, including the no action alternative are based on information discussed in detail in **Chapter 3** (Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences) of the incorporated Draft EA. **Chapter 3** includes a concise definition of the issues addressed and the potential environmental impacts associated with each alternative.

Land Use

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Although Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 establish different numbers of obscurant munitions boxes, all three alternatives are compatible with and would not change existing land use; therefore, there would be no adverse impacts to land use.

Air Quality

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would have no adverse impact to air quality and would result in no change to the attainment status of the El Paso-Las Cruces-Alamogordo Intrastate Air Quality Control Region.

Noise

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Although Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 establish different numbers of obscurant munitions boxes, none would involve construction or demolition activities; therefore, no temporary noise increases would occur. An increase in noise would occur from expanded training operations but would be consistent with existing noise levels and training within the FBTC. Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would result in long-term, negligible, adverse impacts to noise.

Geological and Soil Resources

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would not involve ground-disturbing activities and no construction would occur. Localized soil chemistry changes, phosphine contamination, and contaminated soil runoff would have the potential to occur due to the increased use of red and white phosphorus.

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would result in no impacts to bedrock properties, seismology, and economically viable minerals; long-term, minor adverse impacts to soil series and properties; and long-term, negligible, adverse impacts to soil erosion potential.

Water Resources

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would establish nine new obscurant munitions boxes; four of the boxes (A, B, D, and E) would be located within 1 mile of surface water. Five of the boxes (B, C, E, G, and H) would be located within 1

mile of floodplains, and none of the boxes would be located within a wetland. Best management practices (BMPs), as described in **Section 3.7** of the attached Draft EA, would be used to reduce adverse impacts to water resources.

Alternative 1 would result in long-term, moderate, adverse impacts to surface water and stormwater and no impacts to groundwater, floodplains, or wetlands.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would establish seven new obscurant munitions boxes; one box (B) would be located within 1 mile of surface water and a floodplain. None of the boxes would be located within a wetland. BMPs, as described in **Section 3.7** of the attached Draft EA, would be used to reduce adverse impacts to water resources.

Alternative 2 would result in long-term, minor, adverse impacts to surface water and stormwater and no impacts to groundwater, floodplains, or wetlands.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 would establish two new obscurant munitions boxes; one box (B) would be located within 1 mile of surface water and a floodplain. None of the boxes would be located within a wetland. BMPs, as described in **Section 3.7** of the attached Draft EA, would be used to reduce adverse impacts to water resources.

Alternative 3 would result in long-term, minor, adverse impacts to surface water and stormwater and no impacts to groundwater, floodplains, and wetlands.

Biological Resources

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Impacts to biological resources from Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would be localized to DIAs that have been established for the use of explosives training. As such, there is limited vegetation, the areas are undesirable to wildlife, wildlife is sparse, and wildfire is unlikely due to limited vegetation. BMPs, as described in **Section 3.8** of the attached Draft EA, would be utilized to limit risks associated with wildland fire.

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would result in long-term, minor, adverse impacts to vegetation, wildlife, migratory birds, invasive and exotic species, and wildland fires. The Army has determined that the proposed action would result in no effect to the federally listed New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*), Kuenzler hedgehog cactus (*Echinocereus fendleri* var. *kuenzleri*), Sacramento mountain thistle (*Cirsium vinaceum*), Sacramento prickly poppy (*Argemone pleiacantha* ssp. *Pinnatisecta*), Sneed pincushion cactus (*Coryphantha sneedii* var. *sneedii*), Todsens's pennyroyal (*Hedeoma todsenii*), and Wright's marsh thistle (*Cirsium wrightii*). The Army has also determined that the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the federally listed Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*), piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), rufa red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*), southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), and the candidate monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). On 6 May 2025, the US Fish and Wildlife Service New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office concurred with the Army's determinations.

Cultural Resources

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Fort Bliss has defined "Cultural Restricted Areas" within the Installation. These areas are categorized as "Limited Use Area" or "Off Limits." No cultural restricted areas are located within or near the Area of Potential Effect, with the nearest restricted area being nearly 2 miles east of proposed obscurant munitions box C.

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would have no effects to archaeological resources, historic architectural properties, and Traditional Cultural Properties.

On 1 May 2025, the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the Army's determination of no adverse effect. On 7 May 2025, the Texas State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the Army's determination of no adverse effect.

Transportation and Traffic

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Under Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, personnel on the Installation would not increase, resulting in no net increase of daily transportation and/or traffic. Training that would be conducted within designated obscurant munitions boxes would not impact traffic volumes or transportation resources. Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would have no impacts to transportation and traffic.

Airspace

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would not result in any significant impacts or changes to airspace in the Region of Influence. Operations and training activities under Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would be consistent with existing conditions. Fort Bliss would not modify or change existing military training airspace or Special Use Airspaces. The number of operations in the airspace would not change. Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would have no impacts to airspace.

Utilities

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would not change the status of Fort Bliss' potable water supply, energy systems, or communications systems. Under Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, solid waste and wastewater would have the potential to be impacted through localized use of portable restrooms and the disposal of materials used for training purposes, resulting in long-term, negligible, adverse impacts. Stormwater impacts are discussed under Water Resources above.

Hazardous Materials and Waste, Toxic Substances, and Contaminated Sites

Alternative 1

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would not impact underground/aboveground storage tanks (UST/AST). Under all alternatives, the nearest AST is approximately 0.8 miles from proposed obscurant munitions box F. All other proposed boxes are located greater than 1 mile from a UST/AST. Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would not use polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Hazardous materials (HAZMAT) and hazardous wastes; unexploded ordnance (UXO); and petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POLs) would be managed according to Army regulations and management plans.

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would result in long-term, negligible, adverse impacts related to POLs and the *Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act*; long-term, minor, adverse impacts to HAZMAT and hazardous wastes and UXO; and no impacts to USTs/ASTs and PCBs.

Human Health and Safety

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would utilize obscurant munitions which contain red and white phosphorus posing a risk to human health as well as plants and animals. Exposure and contact with these chemicals would be limited during training activities because personnel would be required to maintain a safe distance from detonation within designated firing locations. The distance from firing to detonation would be great enough that no impacts to human health and safety would be expected.

The addition of new obscurant munitions boxes would increase the number and frequency of munitions to be fired and detonated within the FBTC. The new obscurant munitions boxes would be limited to areas that are permanently duded that have been designated for the purpose of impact and explosives training. During training missions, Army regulations would limit the use of the ranges, isolate DIAs, and maintain a safe perimeter from the firing location. Additionally, all obscurant munitions boxes would be located within existing safety danger zones which are designed to enforce safety by restricting access to munitions training areas from the firing point to the detonation area. Proper safety equipment for both explosives training and personnel would be utilized, and an emergency response plan would be in effect.

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would result in long-term, minor adverse impacts to health and safety.

Reasonably Foreseeable Impacts

The Draft EA considered reasonably foreseeable impacts that could result from the incremental impact of the proposed action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions within or in the vicinity of Fort Bliss. These reasonably foreseeable effects would be less than significant. Reasonably foreseeable impacts identified in the impact analysis process are summarized as follows:

- minor, adverse impacts to land use;
- negligible-to-minor adverse impacts to regional air quality;
- negligible, adverse impacts to noise;
- no impacts to geological and soil resources;
- minor, beneficial impacts to water resources;
- minor, adverse impacts to biological resources;
- no impacts to cultural resources;
- minor, adverse impacts to transportation and traffic;
- minor, adverse impacts to airspace;
- minor, beneficial impacts to utilities;
- minor, adverse impacts to hazardous and toxic materials and wastes; and
- minor, beneficial and minor, adverse impacts to human health and safety.

Mitigation

The Draft EA analysis concluded that the proposed action and alternatives, including the no action alternative, would not result in significant environmental impacts; therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

Public Review and Interagency Coordination

The Army published a Notice of Availability of the Draft EA and Draft FONSI in the following newspapers to commence a 30-day public comment period:

- *El Paso Times*,
- *Las Cruces Sun-News*, and
- *El Diario*.

The Army coordinated with federally recognized Native American tribes, in accordance with the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966* (NHPA); the US Fish and Wildlife Service, in accordance with the *Endangered Species Act of 1973*; the US Environmental Protection Agency; the US Army Corps of Engineers; and other Federal agencies with a topical interest. The Army also notified the New Mexico State

Historic Preservation Office, Environment Department, and Department of Game and Fish on issues related to NHPA Section 106 compliance; air quality, water quality, hazardous waste, and human health effects; and habitat and species of concern; respectively.

Conclusion

Finding of No Significant Impact. After review of the attached EA prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA, Title 42 USC § 4321 et seq.; AR 200-1; and 32 CFR Part 651; which is hereby incorporated by reference, I have determined that the proposed action and alternatives, including the no action alternative, would not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This decision was made after considering all submitted information, including a review of agency and public comments submitted during the 30-day public comment period, and considering a full range of practical alternatives that meet project requirements and are within the legal authority of the US Army.

COL Brendan Gallagher
Army Garrison Commander

Date