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Sustainable Range Program

Keeping lands on JBLM useable yearlong

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Directorate of Public Works

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There is a greenhouse surrounded by a few hoop houses by the side of the road when entering Joint Base Lewis-McChord near the DuPont Gate. It looks out of place being inside the business side of the cantonment, however it is a small window into the efforts made to restore some of the 63,000 acres accessed in military training.

Integrated Training Area Management Program is a core element of the Army's Sustainable Range Program. The primary objective is to ensure all Army training lands are available for sustained perpetual use by providing a comprehensive approach to land management and is based on the integration of military mission, natural resources stewardship and environmental compliance.

Staff works with range control in military training out on the prairie. Its role is, as a facilitator, to work with the service members, ensure they understand the environmental rules and repair any damage done to the rare south sound prairie ecosystem.

"JBLM biologists work with federal and state fish and wildlife on the ecological and biological side of the house, Integrated Training Area Management Program is concerned with training efforts downrange and any environmental incursion by units," said Conrad Ely, the JBLM land rehabilitation and maintenance coordinator. "We do not make rules or enforce anything – we mitigate."

The greenhouse is central to the Integrated Training Area Management Program mission. Staff grow plugs for planting of 10 different species of native plants.

The hardiest of them are grasses like the native fescue, and they can survive winter in the hoop houses.

Plants grown in the greenhouse are also set out to cold harden, which means they make the transition from the cozy greenhouse (which is heated by overhead heaters to 80 degrees all winter), to regular Puget Sound weather and protected from frost, being set inside the hoop house. From there the plant plugs are planted in maneuver damage as it is identified.

"Over 2,000 plot surveys on every corner of the base inspires what should be grown and where it should be planted," Ely said. "The goal is to have as many native species out on the prairie to outpace the invasive species, and re-establish equilibrium. It always a race between us and the Scotch broom".

Integrated Training Area Management Program staff grows about 10 different types of native prairie seed, in raised beds made in the abandoned railway line, for seed harvesting in the fall. The seed mix is varied and supported with the additional seed grown and purchased from partners at Center for Natural Lands Management.

Depending on the area being reseeded the seed mix is either a general or more specific, such as Taylor's checkerspot butterfly habitat.

"We do have access to an amazing natural seed source," Ely said. There is a hardy natural seed bank on JBLM that produces a ton of seed."

The staff reseed areas downrange as well as planting plugs, depending on the circumstances and the depth of the restoration required.



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Conrad Ely inspects the bloom of the Puget Sound balsam root, a member of the sunflower family, at the greenhouse by the DuPont Gate April 19.



“Plugs give us the best opportunity to jump start on bare soil,” Ely said. “If we can seed at the same time we have the best chance of beating the invasive plants from getting established first.”

The staff have roughly a 10 to 1 seed-to-plug ratio.

Tackling invasive species is an on-going challenge. In 2017 Integrated Training Area Management Program staff and contractors mowed 927 acres. “It’s an imperfect method of knocking down Scotch broom,” Ely said. “But it keeps it bay. Ongoing prescribed burns and herbicide application help but the most effective strategy is a three-tiered approach utilizing mechanical removal (mowing), fire, and herbicide in succession (although not necessarily in that order).

“Basically it takes a village to manage Scotch broom. Scotch broom can produce upwards of 8,000 seeds per plant, and seeds can lie dormant for 30 years in the ground.”

Protecting JBLM training lands requires stewardship of land assets, proactive conservation and land management practices to ensure the support of current and future mission requirements and that there is no net loss of training capabilities.

It is a joint effort for sustainability supporting the triple bottom line plus: Mission, Community, Environment plus economic benefit.

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