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Land restoration

Win for training area, native lark

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Around Close-In Training Area F near Gray Army Airfield on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, 85 acres have been selected as a mitigation site by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army Installation Management Command to replace habitat loss caused by construction projects in priority habitat for the endangered streaked horned lark.

The 555th Engineer Brigade; 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Center for Natural Lands Management and JBLM Fish and Wildlife have teamed up to perform the renovation and restoration to improve this landscape's training capabilities and streaked horned lark nesting potential.

"The size and location of the site allow 555th (Engr. Bde.) the chance to train at their convenience on a task that may not occur elsewhere on the installation," said Fiona Edwards, the JBLM biologist managing this project. "Restoring the training area provides for military training, as well as creates an improved space for wildlife. Before we started working out here, it was mostly just a field of Scotch broom and trash, but this spring it will resemble a native prairie."

The 2-75th Rngr. leases the training area and allows access and provides input on training needs for the area. Restoration activities, including seeding, planting, herbicide and prescribed fire will be completed by JBLM Fish and Wildlife and (through a cooperative agreement) Center for Natural Lands Management. The 555th Engr. Bde. conducts earthmoving and tree removal as a training opportunity.

The goals of the renovation area are to create an open landscape for streaked horned lark nesting and improve training conditions for service members. Nuisance vegetation such as Scotch broom and blackberry bushes will be removed and replaced with smaller, native plants which larks nest beneath. Perches, including trees, will be removed to eliminate predator attractants.

Project work started in 2014. Since then, prescribed burns have been conducted, invasive plants have been mowed down, tree stumps ground down and cottonwood trees cleared, chipped and sent to JBLM's Earthworks composting facility completing the circle.

The training area will continue to be used for training with improved opportunities now that debris and unnavigable vegetation have been removed. While it may be years before larks use the newly-created habitat, the site will host other native species which may have previously avoided the area.

"I saw a western bluebird on January 15th", said Nate Johnson, Center for Natural Lands Management invasive species specialist and project manager on site for the chipping project. "I think they like the work we are doing."

JBLM's Installation Sustainability Training Land goals are to assist in the recovery of all listed and candidate federal species in South Puget Sound region and to maintain the ability of JBLM to meet current and future military missions without compromising the integrity of natural and cultural resources, both on the installation and regionally. This joint endeavor is an example of meeting the needs of all the partners.

To keep up to date with latest environmental happenings on JBLM, visit [SustainableJBLM/Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/SustainableJBLM/).



Directorate of Public Works
Soldiers from the 555th Engineer Brigade practice making tank trenches during training on Close-In Training Area-F Nov. 29.



More information
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Fiona Edwards
Biologist, JBLM Directorate of Public Works

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