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Recycling provides more military training

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Joint Base Lewis-McChord covers more than 113,000 acres in Pierce and Thurston counties and sits next to the populated areas of both Tacoma and Olympia. While only about 14,000 acres are fenced, the remainder is not.

This creates access that can be improperly used. Being near a populated area, some have used this access indiscriminately for unauthorized off-roading, timber theft and illegal dumping.

Some of the toughest areas to police and monitor are in rural Thurston County where numerous unobstructed access points lead to unauthorized activity.

Illegal dumping is rampant and unhealthy. The dumping includes hazardous materials, household trash, heavy appliances, yard waste, animal carcasses, vehicles and vehicle parts and construction debris. Greg Mason, JBLM environmental investigator, conducted hundreds of investigations in 2016 alone.

"I am only able to determine who is responsible about a third of the time," Mason said. "And those people are then sent financial claims for the cleanup and disposal of the dumped trash and other items."

This winter, a collaborative effort was undertaken to prevent unauthorized access to these unfenced areas. The 555th Engineer Brigade was involved in removing large stumps from a construction project on base.

Instead of having to landfill the stumps, the project took a positive turn by repurposing the stumps to block access to several of the roads in Thurston County.

This collaborative effort between JBLM Directorate of Public Works's Environmental Division (solid waste, roads, forestry, cultural, Installation Restoration Program), The 555th Engr. Bde., Disaster and Emergency Services, and Conservation Law Enforcement is part of an ongoing effort to fortify road closures that had been degrading over the last several years that are often used by illegal dumpers to gain access to JBLM property.

"By reducing the number of entry points, we are then able to utilize surveillance equipment, cameras and such, on those fewer open spots and be more effective," Mason said.

Repurposing the stumps maintains the ability of JBLM to meet current and future military missions without compromising the integrity of natural and cultural resources, a goal of the Installation Sustainability Program.

The stumps are a natural Jersey barrier, protecting training lands from contamination and unauthorized use.

This project included the benefits of troop training on the heavy equipment needed to move the stumps and place them exactly where they need to be. Plans are in the works for many other entry points in Pierce County as well. It is a win-win for all parties involved – except for potential illegal dumpers.

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