

# DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

## UNITED STATES ARMY

### Draft FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR TANANA FLATS TRAINING AREA ALL-SEASON ROAD AT FORT WAINWRIGHT, ALASKA

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Tanana Flats Training Area (TFTA) spans approximately 660,000 acres within the Middle Tanana River Basin. It is bounded by the Tanana River to the north and east, the Wood River to the west, and the 534th gridline, located 50 miles north of the Alaska Range, to the south. The TFTA is part of U.S. Army Garrison Alaska and provides a realistic training environment for soldiers of the 11th Airborne and other units but has no direct access to the rest of Fort Wainwright.

Because the TFTA is located adjacent to the Tanana River within a broad depression known as the Tanana-Kuskokwim Lowland, the area contains a network of wetlands and floodplains of the Tanana River and smaller creeks. Development in the TFTA is subject to:

- EO 11988, *Floodplain Management*, which requires federal agencies to determine whether a proposed action would occur within a floodplain and to avoid floodplains to the maximum extent possible when there is a practicable alternative; and
- EO 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*, which requires that each federal agency, to the extent permitted by law, “shall avoid undertaking or providing assistance for new construction located in wetlands unless the head of the agency finds: (1) that there is no practicable alternative to such construction, and (2) that the proposed action includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to the wetlands which may result from such use.” The term “wetlands” means “those areas that are inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction.”

#### 2.0 PROPOSED ACTION

##### 2.1 Proposed Action

The Army (US Army Garrison Alaska and the 11th Airborne Division), is seeking to develop year-round access to the Tanana Flats Training Area (TFTA) and the Blair

Lakes Range Complex (BLRC) via a 24.2-mile double lane gravel road. The proposed gravel road will follow the alignment for a winter ice road that is currently used to access TFTA and BLRC during the winter.

## 2.2 Alternatives Considered

Alternatives to the proposed Road that were considered include continued access by aircraft or access by a single lane road. Access by air does not meet the purpose and need of the action. Access via a single lane road is not as safe, efficient, or reliable as the preferred alternative, the construction of a double lane road.

## 3.0 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

### 3.1 Floodplains

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has mapped floodplains throughout the TFTA and project area, including special flood hazard areas subject to the 100 year flood with a 1% annual chance of flooding. Much of the proposed road alignment crosses floodplains. Based on updated preliminary FEMA flood maps, the alignment is not within the Zone AE floodway associated with the Tanana River; however, it would cross about 9,240 linear feet of Zone AE floodplains and about 10,520 linear feet of Zone A floodplains associated with streams (FNSB 2025).

Bridge and culvert designs would minimize potential harm to floodplains. Proposed bridges at Clear Creek and at Rigney Creek would avoid impacts below the ordinary high-water mark and would be designed to accommodate flood flows, and Beaver Pond Creek culverts would be oversized to accommodate flood flows. Other culverts along the alignment would be designed to accommodate known flood flows within Zone AE floodplains and expected flood flows in Zone A floodplains.

### 3.2 Wetlands

Construction of the road will involve the discharge of clean gravel fill into 35.2 acres (30,905 linear feet) of wetlands and waters (see map attached). To mitigate for wetland impacts, at least 70.2 acres of selected material sites would be converted into emergent wetland and open water complexes. Best Management Practices to be utilized to reduce adverse impacts to the wetlands, as described in the Tanana Flats Training Area All-Season Road Environmental Assessment (EA).

The draft of this finding was made available for public review and comment period for 30 days and is incorporated in the EA.

#### 4.0 FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE

The Tanana Flats is comprised of large wetland complexes interspersed with uplands and therefore complete avoidance of wetland impacts is not feasible. Prior to establishing the winter trail, wetland surveys and mapping were used to route the trail through the fewest wetlands possible. The route for the winter trail was laid out to avoid severely wet areas for the sake of ease of travel and to avoid traveling through unstable, saturated ground. Accordingly, I find there is no practicable alternative to siting the proposed action entirely outside of floodplains and/or wetlands; however, the Army will utilize all practicable measures to avoid and minimize impacts to the greatest extent practicable.

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Date

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Omar J. Jones IV  
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Commanding

Attachments:

Map

References:

EO 11988, *Floodplain Management*, 24 May 1977.

EO 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*, 24 May 1977.

EO 13690, *Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input*, 30 January 2015.