Record of Decision

Department of the Army officials have carefully considered the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska* (TEIS*)*. The TEIS provides an appropriate assessment of the potential environmental impacts represented by the different alternative courses of action considered for transformation of U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK). As indicated herein, USARAK will proceed with Alternative 4, the preferred alternative. This alternative consists of transforming the 172nd Infantry Brigade (Separate), hereafter 172nd SIB, into a Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), the stationing of additional personnel within USARAK, an assignment of new equipment, increased training requirements, construction of new facilities, and the expansion of the 1-501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) into an Airborne Task Force.

Background

In October 1999, the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army articulated a vision about people, readiness, and transformation of the Army to meet the security demands of the 21st Century. According to the Army Vision, the transformed Army would need to be substantially more responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable, and sustainable than the current Army force structure. In February 2002, the Army published its *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Army Transformation,* and on April 11, 2002, issued its Record of Decision (ROD).

The PEIS and the PEIS ROD identified three brigades and an armored cavalry regiment for transformation into SBCTs during the next five to ten years. These units were the 172nd SIB, FWA and FRA, Alaska; the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (Light), Fort Polk, Louisiana; the 2nd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Light), Schofield Barracks, Hawaii; and the 56th Brigade of the 28th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Pennsylvania National Guard. Prior to associated transformation decisions and actions, the environmental impacts were evaluated at the identified sites under the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). USARAK, in response to the selection of USARAK forces for transformation, completed an environmental analysis of the impacts of transformation.

Proposed Actions

The United States Army has proposed to transform from the Current Force to a Future Force during the next 30 years. This transformation would affect most aspects of the Army's doctrine, training, leader development, organizations, installations, materiel, and Soldiers. As part of these actions for the interim force, the Army has proposed to transform the 172nd SIB into an SBCT and to expand the 1-501st PIR into an Airborne Task Force.

The purpose of the proposed actions is to transform USARAK forces to meet the security demands of the 21st Century. Transformation of the 172nd SIB to an SBCT and expansion of the

1-501st PIR into an Airborne Task Force would strengthen the capabilities of USARAK forces without compromising their ability to respond quickly. In addition, transformation would provide critical information to the long-term development of the Future Force. The USARAK forces were selected for transformation because the existing force structures and location are most suitable for reorganization into interim force structure and for mobility.

In light of the security challenges facing the Army during transformation, the proposed actions balance the risks of change by sustaining the Army's readiness to meet the nation's present war-fighting requirements. The development and fielding of the Stryker Force serves to fill current capability gaps and to facilitate the ultimate design and fielding of the Future Force. This effort would also provide an option for employing a force capable of early entry into an area of operation to deter potential adversaries. On balance, the SBCT is more lethal and survivable than the Army's Current Force Units.

Decision Criteria

The decision criteria determine the extent to which alternatives achieve a balance between obtaining the overall Army Vision of transformation, including the accomplishment of various stationing, training, system acquisition, and deployment objectives, and protecting and managing the biological, physical, and socioeconomic environment at USARAK.

The Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army articulated a vision about the transformation of the Army to meet the security demands of the 21st Century. The new Army Vision required the Current Force structure to transform over a 30-year period, beginning with three brigades and an armored cavalry regiment. This national policy was a factor in the decision to transform USARAK forces and in the selection of the preferred alternative. The following objectives define the standards used to select the preferred alternative:

- Proximity to critical areas of interest for the United States.
- Capability to execute full spectrum military missions.
- Close association with sea and air bases in Alaska.
- Provide training infrastructure to sustain combat readiness.
- Provide infrastructure to meet rapid deployment requirements.
- Provide UAV support and maintenance facilities.
- Reasonable proximity to a seaport for possible SBCT sea deployment.
- Ensure USARAK provides support for interim and future Army transformation requirements.

Location

USARAK is comprised of two posts, Fort Wainwright (FWA) and Fort Richardson (FRA), along with multiple training areas that were further divided for purposes of analysis. USARAK lands encompass approximately 1,590,000 acres.

FWA is located in central Alaska, north of the Alaska Range in the Tanana River Valley, and lies 120 miles south of the Arctic Circle, near Fairbanks. The Main Post and associated training areas encompass approximately 917,000 acres. The Main Post consists of 13,700 acres, Tanana

Flats Training Area (TFTA) is over 655,000 acres, and the Yukon Training Area (YTA) totals 247,952 acres.

Donnelly Training Area (DTA), a third training location, lies within the Tanana River Valley and is located approximately 100 miles southeast of Fairbanks. DTA encompasses approximately 624,000 acres and includes parts of Fort Greely (much of Fort Greely has been transferred to the Space Missile Defense Command.) The southern portion of DTA is within the foothills of the Alaska Range, and the northern part borders the Tanana River. DTA is divided into DTA West (531,000 acres), and DTA East (93,000 acres). There are two additional outlying land parcels near DTA. The first is Gerstle River Training Area (19,000 acres), which is located about three miles south of the Alaska Highway and 30 miles southeast of the city of Delta Junction. The second is Black Rapids Training Area (2,780 acres), which is located approximately 35 miles south of Delta Junction along the east side of the Richardson Highway.

FRA encompasses 61,376 acres. The post is located in south-central Alaska adjacent to the municipalities of Anchorage and Eagle River, and Elmendorf Air Force Base. The Knik Arm of Cook Inlet borders the north side of the post, and Chugach State Park lies to the south and southeast.

Public Involvement

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on March 4, 2002. A 30-day scoping comment period began with the publication of the NOI and extended through April 3, 2002. Public scoping meetings were held in February 2002 in Anchorage, Delta Junction, and Fairbanks. During this period, public, agency, and tribal verbal and written comments were accepted and were used to help determine six issues of concern.

The Notice of Availability (NOA) of the *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Draft Environmental Impact Statement* was published in the *Federal Register* on July 7, 2003. This initiated a 65-day public review and comment period for the Draft TEIS. Verbal comments were recorded at public meetings held in Anchorage, Delta Junction, and Fairbanks. A total of 38 written comments were also received.

In addition, USARAK held four government-to-government meetings with federally recognized Tribes in Alaska after the release of the Draft TEIS. The government-to-government coordination and consultations were held independent of the public coordination process.

Comments on the Draft TEIS were considered in the preparation of the Final TEIS. The EPA's Notice of Receipt for the Final TEIS was published in the *Federal Register* on April 23, 2004, starting a 30-day waiting period prior to the publication of this ROD and project initiation.

Definition of Alternatives Evaluated in Detail in Final TEIS

Three alternatives were evaluated in detail in the Final TEIS:

Alternative 1 – No Action: The 172nd SIB would not transform into an SBCT. None of the actions specifically planned for transformation would occur.

The primary military mission of USARAK after the Cold War has been peacetime deployment to support U.S. interests worldwide, the defense of Alaska, and the coordination of Army National Guard and Reserve activities in the state. A majority of USARAK combat forces, notably the 172nd SIB, are stationed at FWA, with FRA as the primary support base. Under the No Action Alternative, these units would continue to follow their current military missions and would be maintained as the Current Force.

Alternative 3 – Transform 172nd SIB and Add New Infrastructure

All organizations and elements of the 172nd SIB, except for the 1-501stPIR, would transform to an SBCT. Transformation of the 172nd SIB and USARAK would require increasing the number of personnel and the assignment of new equipment. The 1-501st PIR would be reassigned to USARAK from the 172nd SIB. Four new facilities would be constructed. Transformation would increase the use of existing USARAK ranges, facilities and infrastructure.

Compared to the baseline conditions described under the No Action Alternative, Alternative 3 would involve the stationing of additional troops, increased training requirements, and the construction of new facilities. Alternative 3 also involves transforming the 172nd SIB to an SBCT.

Alternative 4 – Transform 172nd SIB, Add New Infrastructure and Airborne Task Force

Alternative 4 would also involve the transformation of the 172nd SIB to an SBCT, stationing of additional troops, an assignment of new equipment, increased training requirements, and the construction of new facilities. In addition, under Alternative 4, the 1-501st PIR would be expanded to a new Airborne Task Force.

Alternatives Eliminated from Evaluation in the Final TEIS

Alternative 2 (Transformation of 172nd SIB with No New Infrastructure) was considered and eliminated from further study as it failed to meet the Army's purpose and need. An entire SBCT could not be stationed in one location due to inadequate supporting infrastructure and the lack of necessary facilities. This would also prevent USARAK from executing full spectrum military missions, falling short of both general Army objectives and USARAK goals for transformation.

Other alternatives were considered and eliminated from further study because they were outside the scope of this analysis as determined by the Department of the Army. These included converting the 172nd SIB to an SBCT and stationing a second, new SBCT in Alaska. This was eliminated because stationing an additional brigade within Alaska was not practical in light of Current Force limitations and unit mission assignments. Another potential alternative, converting the 172nd SIB to an SBCT and stationing a new airborne brigade in Alaska, was eliminated. A new airborne brigade was not practical due to then existing manpower limitations and unit allocations. In addition, construction of infrastructure necessary to support this new brigade was

not seen as being cost effective given the goal of minimizing costs associated with construction of support infrastructure necessary for transformation. Finally, the alternative of using USARAK training lands to support division-level training events by outside units, whose equipment would be housed in Alaska, was considered. However, the costs associated with conducting division-level training events outside of a non-Alaskan division's primary installation would be contrary to Army goals for maximizing unit training cost-effectiveness.

Discussion of Alternatives Evaluated in Detail in TEIS

Seven activity groups were identified for Army transformation. Potential impacts of each alternative in the Final TEIS were analyzed by activity groups. Each activity group is defined below.

- Stationing. This activity group involves distribution of forces within USARAK in a manner that best supports achievement of the SBCT mission.
- Construction. This activity group involves all types of construction activities, including the creation of buildings, training facilities, and infrastructure, as well as demolition of buildings and facilities.
- Training. This activity group involves achieving and maintaining readiness to perform assigned missions on both an individual and collective (unit) basis.
- Systems Acquisition. This activity group involves the development, testing, production, fielding, and disposal of the weapons systems and equipment necessary to achieve the SBCT mission.
- Deployment. This activity group involves operational deployment of forces and specific training for deployment.
- Land Transactions. This activity group is not analyzed in this document. No land transactions have been planned.
- Institutional Matters. This activity group involves the diverse day-to-day actions, plans and programs not accounted for in other activities.

Stationing

Transformation will result in increased numbers of personnel at FWA and FRA.
No Action – 6,577 (no increase)
Alternative 3 – 7,610 (increase of 1,033 personnel)
Alternative 4 – 7,912 (increase of 1,335 personnel)

Construction

No Action – 33 USARAK mission-essential capital improvement projects would proceed but no SBCT-essential facilities would be constructed.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Four new SBCT-essential projects will be constructed in addition to the 33 USARAK mission-essential projects. These include the company operations facilities at FWA, an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) maintenance support facility at DTA, a mission support training facility, and barracks at FRA.

Training

No Action – Approximately 9.4 million rounds of munitions, 67,000 km^2 of maneuver space, and 31,600 maneuver impact miles (MIMs) would be required.

Alternative 3 – Compared to No Action, munitions requirements would increase by 52%, maneuver space requirements would be 80% higher, and MIMs would increase by 400%.

Alternative 4 – Compared to No Action, munitions requirements would increase by 82%, maneuver space requirements would be 106% higher, and MIMs would increase by 410%.

Systems Acquisition

No Action – Small arms acquisitions would not change from current levels. About 1,180 vehicles would be required, with HMMWVs and the all-terrain SUSVs used most frequently.

Alternative 3 – Small arms requirements would increase by 99% compared to No Action. In addition, 121 anti-tank systems and seven demolition systems would be acquired. Approximately 1,600 vehicles in total would be needed, including about 1,180 preexisting vehicles, as well as 322 new Strykers.

Alternative 4 – Small arms acquisitions would increase 132% compared to No Action. About 1,840 vehicles in total would be required, including about 1,180 preexisting vehicles, as well as 322 new Strykers. Alternatives 3 and 4 would also require the acquisition of four UAVs.

Land Acquisition

No land acquisition is planned, regardless of alternative.

Deployments

No Action – The frequency and size of large-scale deployments (battalion and brigade level) would remain at current levels (four times per year).

Alternatives 3 and 4 – The frequency and size of large-scale deployments (battalion and brigade level) would increase compared to No Action. Under current training doctrine, deployment would not increase on a unit basis. However, the number of units, to include platoon, company, and battalion, will increase under the proposed actions. Therefore, the total number of unit deployments and miles will increase.

Institutional Matters

No Action – Programs such as Range management, Integrated Training Area Management (ITAM), and Environmental Management would remain under current management and would be funded as money is available.

Alternative 3 – As with No Action, the environmental programs would be funded as money is available.
Alternative 4 – The Range Management, Integrated Training Area Management, and Environmental Management programs will be included in future installation operational budgets. In addition, Sustainable Range Management will be eligible for full funding.

Environmental Impacts of Alternatives

The Final TEIS evaluated impacts to the following resources and issues: air quality, geology, soil resources, surface water, groundwater, wetlands, vegetation, wildlife and fisheries, threatened and endangered species and species of concern, fire management, cultural resources, socioeconomics, public access and recreation, subsistence, noise, human health and safety, environmental justice, infrastructure, and cumulative impacts.

Impacts to the resources and issues were evaluated using quantitative, descriptive, or qualitative methods, depending on the detail of information available for each.

The qualitative terms used to evaluate impacts to resources were generally defined as:

- None – No impacts are expected to occur.
- Minor – Impacts are expected to occur; impacts would be measurable and may have slight effects on resource.
- Moderate – Impacts are expected to occur; impacts would be noticeable and would have a measurable effect on resource.
- Severe – Impacts are expected to occur; impacts would be obvious and would have serious consequences to resource.
- Beneficial – Only beneficial impacts are expected to occur.

The first two qualitative impact categories (none and minor) were considered insignificant. The second two categories (moderate and severe) were considered significant. Mitigation measures have been developed to offset negative impacts. The following is a summary of environmental consequences of transformation.

Air Quality

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts would be expected at all locations.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Transformation will cause minor impacts to air quality. Fugitive dust from construction or training would result in decreased visibility on Army lands, as well as off post. Such impacts would be temporary. Emissions from other factors including new stationary air emissions, use of additional vehicles, or other mobile sources would not cause significant impacts to air quality.

Geology

Alternative 1 – No impacts to geologic resources would be expected at any location.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – No impacts to geologic resources are expected at any location.

Soil Resources

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts would be expected for each location.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Soil resources would be impacted from construction and training. Construction of new facilities at FWA Main Post, DTA, and FRA will result in removal of soil at the facility sites, and the construction process would cause temporary soil loss due to wind and water erosion. Impacts from maneuver and weapons training will occur at each post. Off-road use of the Stryker vehicle would cause compaction, erosion, and damage to permafrost. Damage from high explosive weapons would occur with increased use of these devices, but damage would be sustainable and limited to impact areas only. Compared to the No Action Alternative, impacts under Alternatives 3 and 4 would probably increase to moderate levels at FWA and DTA and possibly moderate to severe levels at FRA during the interim phase (2005-2010).

Surface Water

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts to surface water would be expected for each location.

Alternative 3 – Impacts to surface water will result from stationing, construction, training, and systems acquisition. Increased troop numbers would cause greater demand for water and create non-point source pollution. Construction impacts would result from erosion and possibly emissions. Maneuver (with the newly acquired Stryker vehicle) and weapons training would increase erosion into water, as well as increase the potential for contaminants or pollutants to enter the waterways. Factors analyzed in the Final TEIS include bankside erosion, surface flow, channel morphology, sedimentation, stream width, water temperature, and water chemistry. Impacts to most of these resources will not be significant. However, due to bankside erosion, impacts from transformation would increase from minor to moderate at YTA and DTA.

Alternative 4 – Impacts from Alternative 4 will be similar to those described under Alternative 3. At FRA impacts from sedimentation would become moderate during the interim phase under Alternative 4.

Groundwater

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts to groundwater would be expected for each location.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Groundwater resources will be affected due to stationing, construction, training, and systems acquisition. Increased troop numbers would cause a greater demand of groundwater withdrawal which may alter the flow of groundwater or cause degradation of the resource. Construction activities would cause disturbance and affect local ground structure. Increased training impacts from the Stryker vehicle would adversely affect groundwater quality. Factors analyzed in the Final TEIS included groundwater flow, groundwater chemistry, persistence, and water use. However, no significant impacts to these factors are expected.

Wetlands

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts to wetlands would be expected at each location.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Transformation will cause adverse impacts due to stationing, construction, training, and systems acquisition. Higher numbers of troops will increase impacts on wetlands as a result of increased training activities and because they represent additional recreational users of Army training lands. There is potential for construction damage, especially from sedimentation, to wetlands at FWA Main Post and DTA. Training with the newly acquired Stryker vehicle would cause increased impacts to wetland resources. Types of damage may include loss of vegetative cover, rutting or compaction of wetland soils, loss of permafrost, and susceptibility to contamination from pollutants. The impacts would increase from 0-4 acres at each location year to 20-40 acres for each location per year at FWA Main Post, TFTA, YTA, DTA, and FRA. The increase will result in a moderate, localized impact to wetland resources.

Vegetation

Alternative 1 – The No Action Alternative would result in minor impacts to vegetative cover on USARAK lands. Impacts to forest resources would also be minor at FRA and FWA, but would be moderate at DTA.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Impacts to vegetation will occur due to stationing, construction, training, and systems acquisition. Greater numbers of troops will increase damage to vegetation, especially from training or recreation. Construction projects at the cantonment areas at FWA Main Post and FRA would not affect naturally vegetated sites. Construction of the UAV maintenance facility at DTA would impact approximately 0.5 acres of natural vegetation. Changes in maneuver and artillery training would cause long-term impacts to vegetative cover. Increased training levels and use of the newly acquired Stryker vehicle would increase MIMs by more than 400%, which would result in greater damage rates to vegetation. Forest resources at FWA and DTA would be moderately impacted due to increased wildfire potential as a result of additional training activities.

Wildlife and Fisheries

Alternative 1 – Impacts to most species of wildlife and fish would be minor under the No Action Alternative.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Wildlife and fisheries will be impacted from stationing, construction, training, systems acquisition, and deployment. Increased personnel on USARAK lands will cause greater recreational impacts to wildlife and fisheries. Construction at FWA Main Post and FRA will be limited to previously disturbed sites inhabited by urban-adapted wildlife. However, construction of the UAV maintenance facility will impact a small portion of natural habitat at DTA in an area that has been used by bison, moose, and predators (e.g., wolves and bears). Increased training intensities will result in higher disturbance rates for wildlife. Noise and movement of vehicles and troops in wildlife habitat are factors most likely to disturb wildlife.

Increased use of high explosive weapons would impact local populations of moose and waterfowl (including trumpeter swans) in the Alpha Impact Area at TFTA. Several other priority bird species will be affected by habitat alteration or training. Maneuver training at DTA would increase disturbance rates of wolf, moose, grizzly bear, caribou, and bison, and the impacts have potential to be moderate (by possibly causing temporary displacement or disruption of movements, or by causing a reduction localized populations) to these and several priority bird species. At FRA, increased training would result in moderate impacts to wolverine, grizzly bear, black bear, and several priority bird species. Deployments will result in temporarily increased noise levels near airports, and possibly increased disturbance and mortality to wildlife near highways. Impacts to fisheries resources are not expected to be significant at any USARAK posts.

Threatened and Endangered Species and Species of Concern

Alternative 1 – Impacts to species of concern would not be significant under the No Action Alternative. There are no threatened or endangered species that would be affected by training on Army lands.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Transformation is not expected to cause significant impacts to species of concern. There are no threatened or endangered species that would be affected by training on Army lands after transformation.

Fire Management

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts to fire management would be expected at each location.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – The stationing of additional personnel within Alaska and increased training activities would slightly elevate the risk of wildfire events. Additional personnel will result in increased recreational use of USARAK lands. An increase in the numbers of recreational uses increases the potential for an accidental fire start as a result of failing to extinguish campfires or careless use of fire ignition materials.

Training can cause fires through the use of incendiary devices, field burning, vehicle use, trash burning, and warming fires in bivouac areas. Factors relating to fire risk analyzed in the Final TEIS include rounds of ammunition fired and training days. The rounds of ammunition fired are expected to increase at FWA, DTA, and FRA. Major weapons range user days are expected to decrease slightly at FWA and DTA, but increase substantially at FRA. Fire risk will remain minor at TFTA, but would increase from minor to moderate at FWA Main Post, YTA, DTA, and FRA.

Cultural Resources

Alternative 1 – Impacts to historic resources would be severe at FWA Main Post. Impacts to prehistoric resources would be moderate at FWA. Impacts to all cultural resources would be moderate at TFTA, and no impacts would be expected at YTA. Impacts to historic and prehistoric resources would be moderate at DTA and minor at FRA.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Cultural resources could be affected by increased stationing, construction, training, and systems acquisition. The increase in use and traffic on USARAK lands could cause degradation and disturbance to cultural resources. Cultural resources and historic properties or districts could be impacted from proposed construction projects. Under transformation the intensity and spatial extent of training would increase, and this could result in greater rates of damage to cultural resources. Use of the Stryker vehicle could cause more damage to previously undisturbed sites. In the Final TEIS impacts to prehistoric and historic sites, districts, and traditional properties are analyzed. At FWA impacts to prehistoric and historic sites and districts are probable, and the impacts could be severe, regardless of which alternative is chosen. Impacts to prehistoric sites, districts and cultural properties could be moderate at DTA; however, no impacts to historic properties would be expected. Neither alternative would impact prehistoric sites at FRA. Minor impacts to FRA historic properties would occur, but the impact would be the same under each alternative. USAG-AK will develop, in consultation with Alaskan Tribes, the Historic Properties Component to its Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan. Standard Operating Procedures of the HPC will include procedures for appropriate resource identification, consultation with appropriate Alaskan Native groups and employment of mitigation measures with the affected Tribes to sufficiently remove or lessen potential impacts to cultural resources important to Alaskan Tribes.

Socioeconomics

Alternative 1 – Impacts to socioeconomics would be beneficial or minor under the No Action Alternative.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – With either alternative, the socioeconomics of Anchorage, Fairbanks and Delta Junction would be affected by stationing, training, construction, systems acquisition, and deployment. Increases in troops and support personnel would add about $170 million, combined, to the local economies in Fairbanks and Anchorage under Alternative 3 and about $230 million under Alternative 4. During the interim phase of both alternatives, an additional $25 million would be generated. Both alternatives would result in increased training intensity and duration, reducing recreational access to USARAK lands. Construction projects associated with both alternatives are projected at $30 million for FWA, DTA, and FRA combined. This would serve to generate approximately $59 million in economic activity in the Fairbanks and Anchorage areas.

With either alternative, the use of the Stryker vehicles would require road improvements in training areas, thus increasing accessibility for recreation and subsistence activities on Army land. Deployment of USARAK forces outside of Alaska for wartime activities is expected to increase in frequency and duration under both alternatives and would affect local economies and social services.

Factors evaluated in the Final TEIS include regional economic activity, housing, public and social services, public schools, public safety, and recreational activities While minor impacts would occur to some factors, positive impacts from increased regional economic activity would

cause the overall socioeconomic impact of transformation to be beneficial in the areas surrounding FWA, DTA, and FRA.

Public Access and Recreation

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts to public access and recreation would be expected for each location.

Alternative 3 – Public access and recreation to USARAK lands will be affected by stationing, training, construction, and systems acquisition. Increased stationing of troops at FWA would crowd interior fishing and hunting opportunities. The SBCT training regime will require more frequent closures for military purposes. Construction projects would affect local game populations, and new ranges would reduce recreational opportunities or areas. Acquisition and use of the Stryker would increase the trail system on USARAK training lands, which will result in an greater accessibility to Army training lands for recreational activities. In the Final TEIS, impacts to the methods used to gain access to Army training lands (including off-road vehicles, ground, air, and boat), recreation types (including hunting, fishing, trapping, trail use, and camping), and time and area available have been analyzed. Impacts to, hunting, fishing and trapping at FWA will be minor, as a consequence of increased competition, more frequent closure of training lands, and the temporary disturbance to wildlife resulting from training activities. These same impacts are probable at DTA and would be minor or moderate. Increased training events would also reduce the availability of land for recreational use and hunting at FRA, resulting in minor to moderate impact.

Alternative 4 – With the exception of FRA, impacts to recreational use of Army training land will be similar to those described under Alternative 3. At FRA, impacts will be greater than under Alternative 3, as a consequence of the increased number of personnel assigned to the Airborne Task Force. With more soldiers using FRA training lands, the extent and frequency of closure of FRA training areas will be greater, causing an overall moderate impact to recreational use.

Subsistence

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts to subsistence would be expected at each location.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Transformation under either alternative will not significantly restrict subsistence use of the federal land under review. Stationing, construction, training, and systems acquisition will have some impact on subsistence activities. Increased stationing and training at FWA and DTA will likely impact regional game populations, forcing increased competition for subsistence resources. Range construction would affect wildlife populations. Moose and bison populations would benefit from clearing, but forest dwelling species would be negatively affected. Training closures would limit resource harvest on USARAK lands for subsistence and might affect local game populations. Acquisition and use of the Stryker is expected to require expansion of the USARAK trail system, which will allow greater subsistence access on USARAK lands, serving to open alternative sections when conventional areas are closed. In the Final TEIS, impacts to trails, off-limits areas, time availability, and resource availability are

analyzed. The increased roads and trails will have a beneficial impact to subsistence activities. Impacts to subsistence as a result of decreased time and area availability will be minor.

Subsistence management regulations exclude FRA from those federal lands available for subsistence activities. Because there are no subsistence activities on FRA training lands, neither transformation alternative will change the status quo.

Noise

Alternative 1 – Minor noise impacts would be expected at FWA, DTA, and FRA, primarily due to artillery training. About 165 acres of undeveloped, off-post land near FWA would be affected by significant noise levels, but this would not impact residential areas, hospitals, or schools. At FRA about 2,500 acres of non-residential land or sea would be affected.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Under either alternative, there would be increased noise levels as a result of construction, training, systems acquisition, and deployment. Construction activities would contribute to temporary and localized increases in noise levels. The primary source of noise from training would result from use of munitions, in particular, large caliber weapons (greater than 20mm). The Stryker vehicle and UAV would also contribute to increased noise levels, but such effects would be confined to the area where a particular training event was occurring and be of short duration. . Noise levels during deployments will increase near airfields, but the effect will be short-term, and would not contribute significantly to annual noise levels. In the Final TEIS, high noise levels (Zone II and III levels) were analyzed on training lands, cantonment areas, and off post. Off post noise levels would affect about 340 of land acres under Alternatives 3 and 4. These would not be in residential areas or in areas where there are schools, hospitals, and offices. No lands off post at DTA would be affected by Zone II or III noise levels. At FRA, Zone II and III noise levels would increase off post to over 3,500 acres. The areas impacted would be over uninhabited lands. No residential areas, schools, hospitals, or offices would be impacted by Zone II and III noise levels.

Human Health and Safety

Alternative 1 – Minor impacts to human health and safety would be expected for each location.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Human health and safety will be affected by stationing, construction, training, deployment, and systems acquisition. Increased stationing would involve greater quantities of hazardous materials used and stored on USARAK properties. Construction that involves renovation or removal of old buildings would serve to remove lead-based paint and asbestos materials within facilities on FWA and FRA. Training increases would lead to increases in unexploded ordnance within controlled range impact areas, and inadvertent releases of petrochemicals throughout training areas. Under current training doctrine, deployment would not increase on a unit basis (e.g., individual platoon unit deployments would remain at four times a year regardless of alternative). However, the proposed actions will increase the number of units assigned to USARAK. Disparity between USARAK convoy speed and civilian traffic is now exacerbated with the recent highway speed limit increase to 65 mph. The addition of Stryker vehicles to Alaskan highways during convoys is not expected to significantly degrade roadways.

Acquisition and use of the Strykers is expected to require greater quantities of petrochemicals and solvents.

Health and safety concerns such as increased traffic, additional use of hazardous materials, the removal of asbestos and lead-based paint, use of pesticides, presence of radon, existing contaminated sites, and unexploded ordnance have been analyzed in the Final TEIS. The removal of asbestos and lead-based paint at FWA and FRA would be a beneficial result. Impacts to traffic, hazardous materials, contaminated sites, and unexploded ordnance are possible at FWA but would be minor to moderate. The same impacts are expected at DTA. Impacts upon traffic, hazardous materials, contaminated sites, and unexploded ordnance at FRA would be minor to moderate.

Environmental Justice

Alternative 1 – Minor environmental justice impacts would be expected for FWA and DTA. No impacts would be expected at FRA.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Transformation activities such as stationing of personnel and equipment, construction, training, systems acquisition, and deployment activities will have an adverse impact on neighboring communities. With the exception of Native Alaskan Tribes in the DTA area, impacts associated with Transformation would be proportionate for all, regardless of ethnic or economic status. For Native Alaskans in the DTA region, construction and training activities could result in moderate impacts to cultural resources important to those tribes having traditional ties to the region. These impacts will be sufficiently mitigated through procedures developed and incorporated in the USARAK Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan, in consultation with Alaska Native tribal groups.

Infrastructure

Alternative 1 – No impacts to infrastructure would be expected under the No Action alternative.

Alternatives 3 and 4 – Impacts to USARAK infrastructure associated with transformation will result from stationing, construction, training, systems acquisition and deployment. Increased stationing at FRA and FWA may place a slight strain on current housing, community and installation support infrastructure. The average vacancy rates of Fairbanks and Anchorage, coupled with existing and projected housing at FWA and FRA will be sufficient to accommodate the increased population. Fairbanks area school officials have determined that there exists sufficient space to accommodate the added students associated with the increase in installation population. Because of the larger population of Anchorage and the relatively smaller increase in population associated with the transformation at FRA, the changes will have minor impact on the metropolitan school system.

Increased personnel will result in greater training range and maneuver area requirements while deployments would impact transportation and installation support facilities. Systems acquisition would mostly affect installation support facility infrastructure, particularly maintenance facilities. Under transformation, beneficial impacts are expected to transportation and installation

support facilities infrastructure at FWA, DTA and FRA. Minor impacts are expected to training ranges at both DTA and FRA and to community facilities, training ranges and maneuver training land at FWA. Under Alternative 3, FRA community facilities would not be impacted in the end state but under Alternative 4 but there would be a minor impact. Impacts to maneuver training land at DTA would be minor to moderate, and, at FRA, impacts would be moderate. Overall, impacts to USARAK infrastructure at all three installations are expected to be minor.

Cumulative Impacts

Section 4.20 of the Final TEIS analyzes the contribution of USARAK force transformation to cumulative impacts. FWA, DTA and the Gerstle River and Black Rapids training areas are analyzed in the context of the interior Alaska region of interest, with FRA analyzed within the south-central/Anchorage area region of interest. Cumulative impacts are described in terms of military activities, infrastructure, land management, use of renewable natural resources, and communities.

In addition to past, , current and future Army activities on USARAK lands, the analysis considered regional activities of other federal agencies, state agencies and the private sector. These include the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System; oil and gas exploration, refinement and storage activities; a proposed natural gas pipeline; commercial mining operations; existing and proposed changes to transportation systems and corridors; utility systems; state and federal forests; general residential and commercial development; and public lands set aside for recreational use and conservation. Current and reasonably foreseeable USARAK activities contribute to cumulative impacts in these regions. Incorporated by reference into this decision document, these cumulative impacts are summarized at Table 4.2.f of the Final TEIS, and factored into the overall assessment of potential impacts resulting from transformation of USARAK forces.

The Decision

The Department of the Army has identified Alternative 4 as the preferred alternative and has decided to proceed with the full transformation of USARAK forces. The primary decisions include:

- The transformation of the 172nd SIB to an SBCT.
- The assignment of the 1-501st Parachute Infantry Regiment to USARAK and its subsequent expansion into an Airborne Task Force.
- The assignment of additional personnel to the newly created SBCT and the Airborne Task Force, necessary to bring those units up to their required respective strengths.
- A significant increase in personnel and equipment in USARAK.
- The construction of four new SBCT-related facilities at USARAK. Although considered in the TEIS analysis, the Army will not construct a staging facility at the Port of Anchorage.
- Increased use of existing USARAK ranges, facilities, and infrastructure by the SBCT and the Airborne Task Force.
- Implementation and budgeting of environmental and cultural management, monitoring and mitigation programs identified in the TEIS.

Under Alternative 4, changes to force structure and stationing, and increased use of ranges, facilities, and infrastructure will occur. In addition, new systems will be acquired. The Stryker, an eight-wheel-drive light armored vehicle designed to increase ground mobility and firepower, will be used on USARAK lands. In addition, the UAV will be utilized for reconnaissance or surveillance training missions. Training will be designed to fulfill the new USARAK transformation mission, and increased use of land and impact areas for live-fire and maneuver training is expected.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the preferred alternative will be considered and adopted. These measures are discussed further in the *Implementation, Monitoring, and Mitigation* section.

Reasons for the Decision

The selection of the preferred alternative was based on the analysis described in the Final TEIS, supporting studies, and comments provided during formal comment and review periods. Alternative 4 reflects the proper balance between initiatives for protection of the environment, appropriate mitigation, and actions to achieve the objectives of the USARAK mission and the overall Army Vision. Alternative 4 transformation efforts include mitigation actions the Army has identified and shall adopt as practicable means to reduce potential impact and ensure the sustainability of the biological, physical, and socioeconomic environment of USARAK.

Reasons for Not Selecting Other Alternatives

Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative, would not provide for transformation of the existing force to ensure USARAK is capable of executing a full spectrum military mission, including operations in complex terrain because transformation would not occur under this alternative. Changes to force structure and stationing, and modifications of ranges, facilities, and infrastructure would not occur, thus not allowing USARAK to achieve the Army Vision.

Alternative 3 would not provide the transformation of the 1-501st Parachute Infantry Regiment to an Airborne Task Force. The addition of an Airborne Task Force substantially enhances USARAK capabilities to respond quickly to contingencies throughout the world.

Response to Issues of Concern

Verbal and written comments received from the public and agencies during the scoping period were used to help determine specific issues of concern to the public. Impact analysis was completed for each issue to determine the consequences of the alternatives. The Final TEIS identified the following issues of concern:

- Issue A: Impact of changes in access to fishing, hunting and other recreational opportunities.
- Issue B: Impact of Army vehicle convoys on highway safety and infrastructure.
- Issue C: Impact to wildlife, fish, and their habitats.
- Issue D: Impact of military vehicles to off-road areas.

- Issue E: Impact of military training on forest fires and the ability to put out fires on military lands.
- Issue F: Impact of maneuvers and exploded ordnance on cultural resources.

The Army responded to these issues by conducting focused analysis of each topic within the Final TEIS and by developing measures to minimize or mitigate expected impacts resulting from each alternative. The alternatives do not vary greatly in their impact to the issues of concern. However, the level of funding provided to implement the proposed solutions differed. Under Alternative 4 in the Final TEIS, several measures were developed in response to the issues of concern and are identified in the *Implementation, Monitoring, and Mitigation* section of this ROD.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require that the ROD identifies "the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable" (40 C.F.R. § 1505.2(b)). The environmentally preferred alternative has been interpreted to be the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in the NEPA Section 101 (CEQ's Forty Most-Asked Questions, 46 FR 18026, March 23, 1981). Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative that best protects historic, cultural, and natural resources. Alternative One, the No-Action Alternative, is the environmentally-preferable alternative. However, the No Action Alternative would not provide for transformation of the existing force to ensure USARAK is capable of executing a full spectrum military mission, including operations in complex terrain because transformation would not occur under this alternative. Changes to force structure and stationing, and modifications of ranges, facilities, and infrastructure would not occur, thus not allowing USARAK to achieve the Army Vision. Both Alternative Three and Four would result in increased impact to the natural environment as a result of construction projects, increased training activities and new weapons systems. While both Alternatives 3 and 4 represent increased impact upon the natural environment, Alternative 4 provides additional programs for continued monitoring, assessing and mitigating environmental impacts.

Implementation, Monitoring, and Mitigation

Mitigation measures identified in the TEIS are expected to reduce significant environmental impacts and ensure sustainability of the natural environment of USARAK training lands. Subject to the availability of funds,[1] USARAK shall undertake all steps necessary to implement the best management practices, mitigation efforts and monitoring programs set forth in Sections 2.2.1.6 and 2.2.3.7 of the USARAK TEIS, within each resource section of Chapter 4 of the TEIS, and within Appendices C and H of the TEIS, which are hereby incorporated by reference into this ROD. USARAK will create a mitigation effectiveness monitoring plan to ensure that these

[1] Included within the Anti-Deficiency Act [31 USC § 1341(a)(1)] is a prohibition against officers or employees of the U.S. Government (1) making or authorizing an expenditure or entering into an obligation that exceeds an amount available in an appropriation or fund for a particular expenditure or obligation, and (2) obligating the government to a payment of money before an appropriation is made, unless otherwise authorized by law.

mitigation measures are fully implemented. This plan will provide procedures to track and report the effectiveness of mitigation efforts.

All regulatory requirements will be implemented in their entirety. The mitigation and monitoring plans set forth in the TEIS and incorporated by reference into this decision document will be developed and implemented within 365 days of the signing of the ROD, unless otherwise identified. The mitigation effectiveness monitoring plan shall define the goals and objective of the plan and shall include status report due dates, monitoring timeframes and thresholds, and will include contingency measures to ensure the plan meets the defined goals and objectives. The mitigation effectiveness monitoring plan will adhere to the guidance set forth in 32 C.F.R. Part 651, Appendix C.

The mitigation and monitoring measures adopted in this decision document reflect all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm resulting from the proposed action. In conjunction with existing resource management programs, the implementation of these mitigation and monitoring measures will serve to avoid, minimize, reduce or rectify averse effects to air quality, water resources, biological resources, cultural resources, soils, recreational resources, subsistence resources, human health and safety, geological resource, environmental justice concerns, and the socioeconomics of neighboring communities.

USARAK will submit timely funding requests on an annual basis for that amount necessary to cover the expenses of all mitigation and monitoring measures identified and adopted in this ROD. The U.S. Army Pacific and the Headquarters, Installation Management Agency, shall evaluate and validate funding requests and subject to the availability of funds,[2] provide the necessary funds to USARAK for undertaking these measures.

Conclusion

In accordance with NEPA, and agency regulations, the Department of the Army's decision to transform USARAK forces at FWA and FRA was made after careful consideration of the information provided in the environmental analysis entitled *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska, Final Environmental Impact Statement*.

For further information on the Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final TEIS or this ROD contact: MAJ Robert D. Hunter, PAO, Building 1, 600 Richardson Drive, Fort Richardson, AK, 99505; telephone 907-384-3306, facsimile at 907-384-2060, or via e-mail at robert.hunter@richardson.army.mil. Individuals may also contact Mr. Kevin Gardner, Directorate of Public Works, 730 Quartermaster Road, Attention: APVR-RPW-EV (Gardner), Fort Richardson, Alaska 99505-6500; telephone 907-384-3331, facsimile at 907-384-3047, or via e-mail at kevin.gardner@richardson.army.mil. The FEIS and ROD are also available for review at the following Web site: *www.cemml.colostate.edu/alaskaeis*

[2] Supra, 31 USC § 13451(a)(1)