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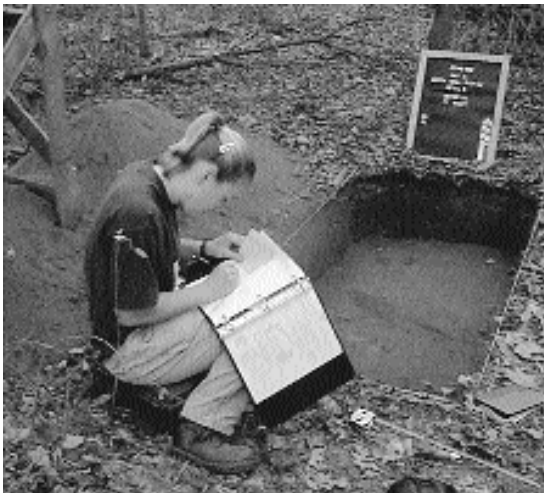
CRM at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin

Fort McCoy is a U.S. Army Reserve Command installation situated on 60,000 acres in west central Wisconsin. Indigenous peoples have occupied the Fort McCoy bioregion beginning nearly 10,000 years before the present, including Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Oneota cultures. The Ho-Chunk Nation is the only federally recognized Native American tribe culturally affiliated with the installation today. European-American settlers arrived in the mid-19th century, transforming the landscape for agriculture. Fort McCoy was established in 1908 as an Army field artillery range, and has served a major role in every American military conflict since World War I, training over 175,000 Army Reserve, National Guard, and Marine Reserve troops annually. Thus the landscape constituting present-day Fort McCoy is an area of unique cultural continuity that spans more than 10,000 years and has been home to indigenous peoples, early settlers, and military personnel.

Archeological surveys have been conducted over the Fort McCoy landscape since the 1970s, with focused National Historic Preservation Act compliance work dominating since the mid-1980s. Early archeological surveys were conducted as needed until a full-time professional archeologist was hired in 1993, and a formal cultural resources program was established. Since 1994, an integrated cultural resources management approach has been used to coordinate the actions and decisions of archeologists, land managers, and environmental specialists with military trainers and master planners. The integration of management decisions reflecting the needs and actions of installation managers on the landscape has been greatly facilitated by the development of a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) environment and successfully merging the GIS platform into installation long-term planning. This achievement has transformed archeology on Fort McCoy, creating an efficient, planned response to the Army's changing needs for land use while ensuring cultural resource law compliance.



Field technician Claudia Schugel recording data from one of the prehistoric sites at Fort McCoy. Photo by Ryan Howell.

Program Overview

The U. S. Army's goals include the practical concerns of training for combat readiness while maintaining a well-developed program of natural and cultural resources management. The Fort McCoy cultural resources management (CRM) program has served as the primary means for achieving the installation goals of promoting sound environmental stewardship while supporting Army mission requirements. The presence of an "in-house" CRM program has allowed installation land management programs to establish and maintain long-term, cost-effective management methods, such as predictive models and management plans, based on cultural landscape management.

At Fort McCoy, the CRM program is paired with the Natural Resource Management Program under the Directorate of Training and Mobilization (DTM) as the Biological and Cultural Resources Management Team (BCRMT). This integration has allowed the development of internal operating procedures that permit rapid consultation between program managers and installation training staff, resulting in the efficient sharing of important data and rapid response to requests for environmental clearances in support of the installation training mission.

What sets the Fort McCoy CRM program apart from other DoD installation CRM programs across the nation is the availability of a

trained specialist for each of the broad classes of cultural resources found at Fort McCoy.

Within the last three years, prehistoric archeologists have formally surveyed 1,090 acres in advance of training, construction, and timber harvests, which represents 7% of the total installation area designated as "high probability" for archeological sites, and brings the total percentage of installation land surveyed to 26%. An additional 760 acres were surface surveyed following a windstorm that severely damaged several areas of the installation in 1998. Over 61 miles of roads, vehicle paths, and trails also have been recently surveyed in conjunction with the Training Area Restoration Program. Fourteen new prehistoric sites and 108 isolated finds were identified as a result of these recent surveys. In addition to new site identification and evaluation surveys, archeologists have evaluated 30 sites previously identified by short-term contract projects, but which had remained unevaluated. Because all unevaluated sites are considered eligible for the National Register, thus requiring protection, a "backlog" of such sites represents a considerable investment in protection strategies and land-use restrictions. The 30 recently evaluated sites represent a reduction of 70% of the backlog, accumulated from years of identification surveys.

Fort McCoy's historic resources have recently received similar attention. During the 1999 field season, over 100 installation historic homestead sites were documented and evaluated for National Register eligibility. This project resulted in one of the largest and most thorough evaluations of historic homesteads within the state of Wisconsin. During the 2000 field season, the Fort McCoy CRM program also investigated a 19th-century saw and grist mill and associated village. The excavation was accomplished with an all-volunteer crew under the supervision of the staff historic archeologist.

During the same time period, Fort McCoy architectural historians documented and evaluated all of the approximately 1,200 buildings and structures located within the boundaries of the installation. The documentation was converted to a digital PDF format, enabling installation managers to "click" on a building footprint located on an installation street map and bring up the historic documentation for that building. Documentation includes photographs, historic use data, and architectural descriptions.

The Fort McCoy staff archeologists' dedication to their discipline is evident in their acknowledgement of their professional responsibility to disseminate the results of their work. Fort McCoy archeologists have presented six professional papers at regional and national conferences within the last year, and are currently preparing articles for publication in professional journals. Staff archeologists have also given presentations to local historical societies and a copy of the four-volume report for the historic homestead project was donated to the Monroe County History Room, which will also feature a display of artifacts found by local volunteers during recent installation mill project excavations.

Conclusion

The Fort McCoy Archaeology Laboratory supports the Fort McCoy mission by rapidly responding to requests for training area NHPA compliance surveys for new construction and training projects, while ensuring that data from their surveys are incorporated into the archeological and historical records of west central Wisconsin. The current program strives to maintain the Army's standards and goals of land stewardship, accomplish high quality, useful research, and meet the practical daily needs of a large military installation. The Fort McCoy Archaeology Laboratory's integrated management approach ensures a cost-effective balance between the installation's mission requirements and the careful stewardship of Fort McCoy's cultural heritage.

This article was supported in part by an appointment to the Environmental Management Participation Program for the U. S. Army Environmental Center (USAEC) administered by the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education through an agreement between the U.S. Department of Energy and USAEC.

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