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Release # A-6-1
Date: 5 Jan 2011

FORT BENNING, GA – The Fort Benning Garrison Commander, Col. Tom Macdonald, has released an updated map identifying the areas of land being considered for potential acquisition by the Army. The new map is more defined and also includes new areas of study located in Harris and Talbot counties.

Harris and Talbot counties were not initially included in the study area, since much of the property bordering the northeast portion of the installation was unavailable for purchase due to the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program. The ACUB program prevents encroachment and protects natural resources by creating buffers around the installation. While the ACUB program can purchase land for this purpose, it cannot be used to acquire training lands.

Harris and Talbot counties were also not included in our initial study area as land values in the two counties were considered too costly due to the tremendous growth in that area. However, during the Public Scoping period (June 4 – July 7), several comments from citizens questioned why these two counties were not included for consideration.

“The National Environmental Policy Act requires us to consider all reasonable comments and suggestions as part of our Environmental Impact Statement study,” Macdonald said “In addition, the Savannah District Corps of Engineers Real Estate Division was contacted by a Mead Westvaco land management agent. The agent proposed we include in our study approximately 23,000 acres of contiguous lands owned by Mead Westvaco, located in Harris (5,700 acres) and Talbot (17,400 acres) counties.”

From the onset of this process, the preference has been to focus on large tracts of commercial timberland. Purchasing land through timber companies would limit the number of real estate transactions and insure the land is purchased from a willing seller.

As a result of the Public Scoping comments regarding Harris and Talbot, both counties are now included in the environmental and real estate study process.

Coordination efforts to schedule public information meetings in the various affected counties are underway. Public comments or questions may be directed to Ms. Kim Raymer at (706) 545-8830 or email land.benning@us.army.mil.

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