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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 13, 2011

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U.S. Army publishes draft Environment Impact Statement about Fort Benning training land expansion program

FORT BENNING, Ga. – The Army published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) today about the comprehensive study of the impact Fort Benning's Training Land Expansion program may have on local economies and the environment.

The DEIS also identifies a Preferred Alternative for possible land acquisition by the Army.

In June 2010, Fort Benning began investigating the feasibility of purchasing up to 82,800 acres of additional training land to make up for an identified training land shortfall. Since then, Fort Benning officials studied approximately 260,000 acres of land in proximity to the installation in southwest, which included Russell County in Alabama, plus Stewart, Marion, Webster, Harris and Talbot counties in Georgia.

The criteria used in the land study focused on land similar to areas already used for Fort Benning training; land where large commercial timber holdings are located; land adjoining or close to Fort Benning boundaries; and land with the least population density.

Based on preliminary findings and information available to date, land in western and central Stewart County has been identified as the Preferred Alternative for possible land acquisition. Identifying a Preferred Alternative allows resources to be focused in one area. However, the preferred land, called Alternative 3, is one of five alternatives that have been identified. Any of these five alternatives could potentially meet the Army's needs. More data is needed before a final decision can be made.

Studies are ongoing and information is still being collected for the Final Environmental Impact Statement, which will include a more detailed environmental assessment, and a real estate assessment that can only be done by walking the land to determine its suitability for training. Real estate experts will continue to gather information on land ownership and begin to talk with land owners in the study area. In addition, environmental teams will research the presence of possible hazardous waste contamination to the land in the study area. They will also check for the presence of endangered or threatened species.

During the next 45 days, there will be public meetings and opportunities for the public to comment, express concerns and ask questions about the proposed acquisition of land.

Fort Benning officials will host public meetings June 6 to 9. The meetings will be conducted as an “open house,” running from 4 to 7 p.m. each day. Guests may drop in any time during the meeting, meet with representatives one-on-one, ask questions and register comments for the record.

Locations of the meetings are as follows:

- June 6 - Richland Hotel, Richland, GA
- June 7 - Russell County High School, Seale, AL
- June 8 – Josh Gibson Center, Buena Vista, GA
- June 9 – Community Center, Waverly Hall, GA

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement may also be viewed at the following locations.

- Fort Benning Web Site: <https://www.benning.army.mil/garrison/TLEP/>
- Fort Benning Sayers Library, 93 Wold Ave., #93, Fort Benning
- Cusseta-Chattahoochee Public Library, 262 Broad Street, Cusseta, Ga.
- Columbus Public Library, 3000 Macon Road, Columbus, Ga.
- Harris County Library, 138 North College Street, Hamilton, Ga.
- Hurtsboro Library, 501 Main Street, Hurtsboro, Ala.
- Marion County Public Library, 123 East 5th Avenue, Buena Vista, Ga.
- Parks Memorial Library, 890 Wall Street, Richland, Ga.
- Phenix City-Russell County Public Library, 1501 17th Avenue, Phenix City, Ala.
- Talbot County Library, 75 N. Jefferson Avenue, Talbotton, Ga.
- Webster County Library, 572 Washington Street, Preston, Ga.

The public may also view the DEIS at the new Digital Bookmobile that now operates weekly on the following schedule:

- Monday – Cusseta, Health Dept. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Tuesday – Stewart County, Omaha, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Tuesday – Stewart County, Louvale, 2 to 5 p.m.
- Friday – Cusseta – Neighborhood Service Center, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Comments from the public may also be sent in writing to:

The Maneuver Center of Excellence
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For more information about the Training Land Expansion Project, please call 706-545-8830.