

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Natural resources managers on military installations perform a continuous balancing act. On the one hand, they must accomplish their goals within an organization whose primary purpose is not natural resources management. On the other hand, the public eye focuses intently on the millions of highly visible acres controlled by the military. Increasingly, the public demands that conservation of the natural resources on military lands be given a higher priority.

Other federal agencies charged with stewardship of natural resources as their prime objective do not face the same challenges as military natural resources managers. Military land is by definition subject to uses that damage soil and vegetation. Natural resources depleted by training activities must be managed, protected, and renewed so that the land can continue to support military uses.

When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers first assumed responsibility for construction on Army installations during World War II, they only reluctantly assumed the accompanying task of maintaining all of the surrounding installation land. Assisted by experts borrowed from the Soil Conservation Service, the first Army land managers developed techniques for controlling the erosion caused by widespread construction.

After the war, a handful of farsighted Corps of Engineers foresters and agronomists promoted the economic benefits of going beyond maintenance and

damage control. They pioneered land use planning on Army installations. Installations leased unused land to neighboring farmers and reaped the benefits of both income and free maintenance. Forest management evolved from control of fires set by training exercises to development of commercial timber production. The resulting economic benefits allowed natural resources managers to carry on their work despite the low priority given them in the military budget.

Although economics spurred the growth of natural resources management, evolving public policies influenced its direction. During the 1960s, the multiple use and sustained yield concepts developed for national forest management became Army policy. Army lands began to support multiple uses and to promote forest growth. At the same time the public demanded and received greater access to hunting and other recreational uses of Army land. The success at creating viable ecological niches led to new concerns in the 1970s and 1980s. Conservationists recognized that many endangered species took refuge on military installations and that they needed protection. Consequently, public law increasingly governed the details of Army land use and management.

Throughout these decades, heavier vehicles and longer-range weapons increased the strain that training put on the environment. However, the budget for natural resources management remained limited. Charged with protecting and conserving natural resources according to rigorous public requirements, the Corps of Engineers strove to meet the challenge. The success they achieved came from keeping abreast of new technology, building a staff of qualified natural resources management professionals, and fostering greater cooperation among the natural resources disciplines and the branches of the military.

The Corps of Engineers' 46 years of experience managing natural resources on Army installations has demonstrated what is required to succeed under challenging circumstances. Given limited money and manpower, a host of legal requirements, and the pressure of public opinion, the Army's natural resources managers have met the twin demands of maintaining land to support military uses while conserving natural resources.