



Match Game

States, Army work to find compatible neighbors for installations

The Army wants to ensure soldiers are able to train as they fight. Development, environmental laws, endangered species and dust and noise issues can create “encroachment” problems. States have worked with the Army and other branches of the military to resolve encroachment problems—those things that reduce training capacity at an installation—and at the same time address environmental concerns.

By Mary Branham Dusenberry

“Buffers are great for so many of us. We like open space next to our tank trails and firing ranges; livestock like open grazing land; endangered species like natural habitat; crops need open farmland; the public likes open space for recreation and hunting; and communities like compatible land uses and smart planning.”

—Lt. Col. Joe Knott,
Army Training Lands Support officer

The military plays an important role in North Carolina’s economy.

About 18 percent of the state’s revenue is derived from military activities, according to Chris Russo, a special assistant in the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources. But that’s just one reason the state has worked hand-in-hand with the military to make sure their installations in North Carolina can be used to the fullest extent.

“We have a responsibility to support national defense,” Russo said. “That goes along with supporting the military in our state. Their ability to eliminate encroachment so that they can do their training, so they can perform their mission, is as vital to us as it is to them.”

The Army defines encroachment as anything that reduces training capacity at an installation—from physical construction of houses on the borders to federal environmental laws to endangered species to dust and noise issues. Those encroachment issues require the Army, and other branches of the military, to develop “work arounds,” creating an artificial training environment, according to Lt. Col. Joe Knott, assigned as the Army Training Lands Support officer in the office of the director of environmental programs for the Army. He has worked with Army Compatible Use Buffer, or ACUB, program for the past three years.

“If they can’t perform the mission, they’re going to close (installations),” said Russo. “If they can’t perform the mission, we’re going to lose revenue. If you can’t train, you can’t do your mission.”

Fort Bragg, N.C., in fact, is the model for the Army’s program. The Army partnered in the mid-1990s with The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Environmental Center to develop an innovative approach called the Private Lands Initiative, whose primary purpose was to recover the population of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, thereby reducing restrictions on Army training.

Congress endorsed the approach, and in the 2003 Defense Authorization Act provided the military clear legislative authority to partner with government or private organizations to establish buffer areas in the vicinity of active training and testing areas. From that authorization, ACUB was born. Other branches of the military have similar programs.

The buffer program has been successful in achieving the goals of several groups in different parts of the country. The

Fort Bragg project—which was actually pre-ACUB—is a prime example of how such collaborative efforts can benefit the different groups involved.

The Army announced in June that the project had reached a recovery milestone for the red-cockaded woodpecker population five years earlier than expected. The recovery also means a reduction in training restrictions on Fort Bragg.

“This recovery validates the success of the Army’s ongoing sustainability efforts, demonstrates our commitment to preserve precious natural resources, such as the long leaf pine ecosystem of the Sandhills, and amplifies what we can achieve by working together with community partners,” Addison D. Davis IV, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for Environment, Safety and Occupational Health, said in a June press release. “Equally important, this accomplishment allows the young men and women of our great Army to conduct tough, realistic training.”

‘Train Like They Fight’

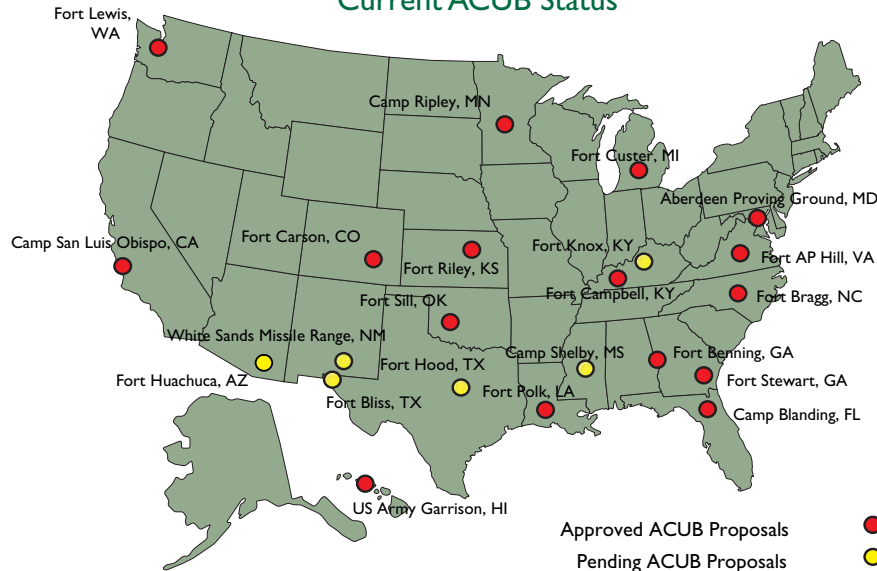
Many military installations were originally established in rural areas through condemnation and eminent domain, according to Knott. But the military bases attract development, which can create problems. In addition, there are environmental pressures—like those at Fort Bragg—which need to be addressed. “We’ve got to be able to train our soldiers like they fight in war,” he said. “How we mitigate those buffers can affect that. Anything that interrupts a training event compromises training realism and battlefield conditions.”

For instance, soldiers at Fort Campbell, Ky., fly more than 100 different helicopter missions each evening to test night vision goggles, according to Knott. But development around the base that straddles the Kentucky-Tennessee border has added to the amount of light in the flight routes. “They have to adjust,” Knott said. “We can’t fly those routes anymore.”

Fort Carson, Colo., had similar problems. “One of the major advantages our soldiers have over many armies of the world is the ability to fight at night,” said Gary Belew, program leader of the cooperative conservation team at Fort Carson. “We use night vision apparatus. Any light on our boundaries washes out this night vision apparatus, making it very hard for our soldiers to train with this type of equipment.”

Light isn’t the only problem created when development backs up to Army installations. Fort Carson, for instance, was forced

Current ACUB Status



Source: Lt. Col. Joe Knott/DAIM-ED

States Benefit from ACUB, Similar Projects

The state benefits from this ACUB property purchase, too. “Anything that can help Fort Carson meet its mission and keep Fort Carson here helps the economy,” said Belew.

The Army is the biggest employer in Colorado, according to Belew. “They (state officials) recognize we’re a huge economic benefit,” he said. “It’s good for the local economy and the state economy.”

Larry Morandi, director of state policy research for the National Conference of State Legislatures, said that’s an indirect benefit for states.

“There was a concern before base realignments took place ... in those areas where there was encroaching development, that might be a factor in the military’s decision,” he said. “If by protecting open space and having these buffer zones, that stops development, presumably the military base sticks around.”

to reroute travel corridors and restrict the type of training near the boundaries because of the smoke and dust affecting developments around the post.

“When you drive an M1 Abrams tank, it creates dust,” Belew said. “Driving around the boundaries, we’ve had to restrict that type of travel. We have off-limits of boundaries now and have also mitigated this issue with dust suppressants on our roads.”

The ACUB program has provided Army officials with the capability to work with state and local governments and private landowners to reduce developmental recruitment along the southern and eastern boundaries of Fort Carson.

“The state has passed a law that requires notification of the Army of any new development within specified distances of boundaries,” Belew said. ACUB has allowed the Army to purchase easements along the Fort Carson boundaries not only to allow soldiers to train, but also to preserve the environment.

Belew foresees major development in the Fort Carson area—from the Front Range to the foothills of Colorado. “It’s so important for the conservation of natural resources and wildlife to provide and maintain some remnant habitat that otherwise would not exist,” he said.

The Army is working with The Nature Conservancy, Colorado Open Lands and the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service to purchase conservation easements around Fort Carson.

Current initiatives on Fort Carson are mutually beneficial by enhancing the Army’s ability to train soldiers, while concurrently assisting adjacent landowners in maintaining their current lifestyle.

In the Walker Ranch conservation easement, the landowner wants to make sure his ranch remains a working, viable ranch. The Army maintains a land use compatible with its training mission. The Nature Conservancy gets what it wants—protection of the shortgrass prairie ecosystem and endangered species habitat.

“Several rare plants occur on the property we’re acquiring,” Belew said. “It will be a huge conservation bonus to maintain this ecosystem as a viable and healthy natural landscape that supports these rare plants in perpetuity.”

The military has gone through several rounds of base closures, and Belew said encroachment issues have become part of the assessment of viable Army installations. Working with state and local governments, landowners and other groups, he said, helps to ensure installations can meet their training mission, and also develop partnerships that promote sound management of the installation, as well as natural resources. “That goes a long way to ensure that Fort Carson can remain a military installation,” he said.

A direct benefit to the states, Morandi believes, is the open space created in these buffer projects. “If the state feels there is a need to protect more open space ... it has that environmental and natural resource benefit to the state in addition to the economic benefit,” he said.

In the last five to ten years, Morandi said, 18 states have approved legislation setting up land use management components, requiring local governments to review their comprehensive land use plans and ensure the planned development around military bases is compatible with the military base.

“We’ve seen a real interest in state legislatures, especially in the last three years, in passing legislation to try to accommodate both the military training needs as well as the need to protect open space,” Morandi said.

Three states—North Carolina, Florida and Arizona—have established solid funding programs to work in tandem with the federal program. Florida, for instance, established the “Florida Forever” program in 2000, setting aside \$3 billion bonding capacity—\$300 million a year for 10 years—for land and water conservation. As of 2005, according to Morandi, the state has spent \$719 million to protect 482,500 acres of land near military installations.

North Carolina’s legislature authorized a \$20 million expenditure to acquire title or development rights for up to 17,000 acres near a military installation. Arizona is appropriating \$4.8

million a year to acquire land and related infrastructure around military installations to make sure the bases are sustainable.

These state and federal projects complement each other because land is expensive, “especially land subject to growth and development pressure,” Morandi said.

Russo, of North Carolina, said the population in the Southeast is expected to grow 60 to 80 percent by 2020. And, he said, development growth tied to population growth is expected to be twice that.

“Obviously sustaining pristine cultural areas and natural areas ... we have quite a task,” said Russo. “Being able to partner with the Army, in this case—and all the branches (of the military) really—it allows us leverage to do some of the sustaining we need to do.”

ACUB, Russo said, allows North Carolina to “support the national defense and allow them (soldiers) to continue training without being encroached upon and allows us to deal with sustainability of the land to deal with the increased population. It’s a no brainer.”

Knott said the Army’s partner in these ACUB projects can structure the transaction to fit the needs of the groups or individuals involved.

States are also eligible to apply for federal conservation funding, which can be used on property near military installations to preserve the land.

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ACUB, Knott said, can be a tool for Army installations, city planners and planning commissions when discussing regional planning objectives. “Why not coordinate our greenspace and conservation objectives?” he said. “ACUBs can give the community open space, conservation and agriculture preservation.”
—*Mary Branham Dusenberry is the managing editor of State News magazine.*

States Address Military Compatibility

States have taken different steps to address compatibility issues for military installations and surrounding property. Here are some initiatives states have taken that support military range sustainability.

State Military Committees

Committee or Executive Branch Office formed to advise the legislature or governor on such issues as recommendations for future legislative actions and reviewing rules and procedures to support the military mission.

Enhanced Disclosure

Requirements that prospective property owners be notified in advance of their purchase that the land is near a military facility and may be affected by aspects of military activities such as noise.

Money for Administration

Appropriations relating to state efforts to retain military facilities or to assist in the mitigation of the adverse effects of a military base closure.

Studies

Statewide studies conducted to support military activities, such as the impact military facilities have on a state’s economy,

Enhanced Planning Communication and Disclosure

- Creates or expands procedural requirements to provide planning and zoning information to the military.
- Creates a specific mechanism for the military to make comments on how the proposed development or planning change affects the military mission.
- Sets forth provisions to include a nonvoting military representative on zoning or planning boards

Enhanced Planning and Zoning Restrictions

- Requirements created for government to plan “compatible” land uses in the vicinity of military facilities.
- Established definitions of “compatible” and accompanying zoning restrictions or building standards.
- Gives land in the vicinity of any Department of Defense installation or type of installation, such as a military airfield, an elevated status as land of special concern or other such designation. Also, create additional procedural or other requirements applicable to the development or use of such land.
- Includes conservation tools that do not require funding such as provisions to allow for transfer of densities so that the more intense land uses can be located further away from a military facility.

Funding Allocations

Money made available to support military mission sustainability. This includes general appropriations, grants and funds to acquire easements, land exchanges or bonding authority for infrastructure projects of benefit to the military done at the state level.

Open Space and Conservation Funding

Allocation of state resources for open space and conservation such as acquisition or conservation easements for restoration and preservation of historical and cultural resources, open space, farmland and land protection projects.

To find out what your state is doing, check out the interactive map at: www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/Library/Sustain/Ranges/StateLeg/usamap.html.