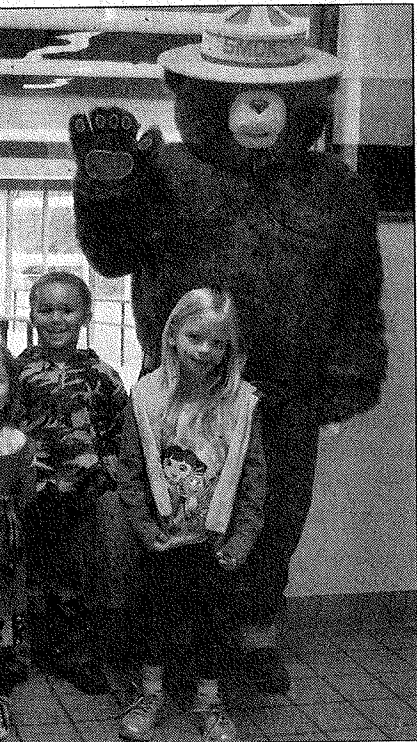


Fort Benning's Training Land Expansion takes a needed pause



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Week at the ion Center



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Teacher Kellie Powell

The Training Land Expansion effort at Fort Benning will take a necessary pause to allow time to study the changing circumstances that now face the Army and leaders at the Maneuver Center. The requirements for training land have not changed, but conditions and the fiscal environment have. Significant community concerns and comments about the Draft Environmental Impact Statement must be properly addressed, Fort Benning Maneuver Center training requirements are being re-looked, and the Federal Budget is shrinking. Due to all of these factors and legitimate concerns, the Army needs more time to explore existing and additional courses of action in order to make fully informed decisions that both meet Army needs and result in minimal impact on the public.

The Army recently released the statement below.

We recognize that folks in the communities around Fort Benning are anxious for a decision and for a resolution, but we owe it to all of them to select the best course of action. This might include acquiring a smaller number of acres or taking no action at all to require additional land. As we continue to move forward, know that we have heard all community concerns and comments, and we are considering all of your feedback. Additionally, we are carefully assessing pending decisions with regard to future Army budgets and force structure needs.

We believe we'll be able to provide a more detailed path

forward and present a clear timeline for any appropriate next steps in the National Environmental Policy Act Process by the first quarter of calendar year 2012 (not later than March). By this time, we believe we will have resolution on budget decisions and will have completed the additional analysis necessary to respond to the concerns and comments that the public has provided.

The Fort Benning Training Land Expansion program is taking additional time to study the changing circumstances that are facing the Department of the Army and reassessing the need for additional land for the Maneuver Center of Excellence.

The Department of Defense is faced with a fundamentally different fiscal reality than we faced when the Secretary of Defense approved our request to study the possibility of acquiring additional land, almost two years ago.

Training, support operations and manning budgets have also been significantly affected by projected funding levels, and the Army is currently deliberating on how this will affect future recruiting training, force structure and operations, all of which could require changes at Fort Benning.

In addition, as the Army looks for ways to be even more efficient in coming years, the level of available funding for land expansion at Fort Benning is no longer clear.

If current allocated funding remains unchanged for Fiscal

Years 2011-13, it would allow acquisition of less than one-third of the 82,800 acres currently identified as our requirement.

This smaller acquisition would allow heavy unit maneuver at the company level instead of the battalion level initially sought, and would ease environmental impact of the current footprint in sensitive areas. While funds for Fiscal Years 2011-12 have already been requested from Congress, FY2013 funding is under review at Department of the Army of the Army in Washington, D.C., meaning there is no longer certainty that previously anticipated FY2013 funds will remain intact.

Necessarily, pending fiscal decisions by our national political leaders will impact the Department of Defense budget and the Army's decision on how to proceed with Training Land Expansion at Fort Benning.

As we continue to move forward, we will be carefully analyzing and considering all feedback. Additionally, we will be carefully examining all potential alternatives identified in the Draft EIS to be absolutely sure that our way forward is the right choice...for the Army and for our neighbors in the Valley area. This could be a decision to proceed with a smaller acquisition or to take no action at all.

We believe we'll be able to provide a more detailed path forward and present a clear timeline for appropriate next steps in the National Environmental Policy Act Process by the first quarter of calendar year 2012 (no later than March 2012).

