

Habitat management

Plan to reduce impact of cleanup on plants and animals

Fort Ord is located on California's central coast, a biologically diverse and unique region. The range and combination of climactic, topographic, and soil conditions at former Fort Ord support many biological communities. The 11 plant communities identified at Fort Ord include coast live oak woodland, central maritime chaparral, dunes, grassland, and vernal pools. Central maritime chaparral is the most extensive natural community at former Fort Ord, occupying approximately 12,500 acres in the south-central portion of the base. Oak woodlands are widespread at Fort Ord and occupy the next largest area, about 5,000 acres. Approximately 4,000 acres of the base are considered to be fully developed and do not support ecological communities.

Special-status biological resources include plant and wildlife and native communities that receive various levels of protection under local, state, or federal laws, regulations, or policies. Two former Fort Ord plant communities, the central maritime chaparral and valley needlegrass grassland, are given the highest inventory priority by the California Department of Fish and Game.

The Installation-Wide Multispecies Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for the former Fort Ord requires action be taken to reduce the impact of the cleanup on rare and endangered animals and plants and their habitat reserves. The habitats of former Fort Ord are being protected during the excavation of contaminated soil, closure of the landfill, and cleanup of unexploded ordnance. The protective requirements of the HMP are applied according to the Biological / Conference Opinion issued to the Army by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) on March 30, 1999. Annual reports describing results of monitoring vegetation recovery following cleanup actions have been provided to the Service every year since 1994. Some of the activities that have been done under the HMP are:

- Monitoring of the 150-acre Beach Ranges area continues and the first annual report for the site was submitted to the Service in January 2001. Habitat management of the beach range has been very successful. In addition to recontouring the dunes and controlling exotic weeds, the population of federally endangered sand gilia plants

on the beach ranges which was documented to be 600 plants in 1993 has reached a population of more than 1,715 plants.

- Excavations within the Multi-Range Area (MRA) to extract lead contaminated soils and bullets have been limited to future development areas. Excavation of lead contaminated soils and bullets is expected to begin in habitat reserve areas of the former Fort Ord next year.

Vegetation Clearance Activities

Chaparral that is cut or burned in OE sites that are located within designated habitat reserve parcels is being monitored to ensure a healthy recovery. The results of this monitoring is included in annual reports and submitted to USFWS each January. A series of public symposia are underway to provide members of the community information concerning proposed vegetation clearance actions in preparation for ordnance and explosives removal actions.