Environmental Cleanup Program
NEWSLETTER
Volume 1, Issue 1 Fort McClellan, Alabama April 1999

This newsletter is published three times a year to inform community members about the cleanup and closure of Fort McClellan, Alabama. Cleanup of sites throughout the post are being conducted under the regulatory process called the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (also known as Superfund). In September 1999 the current mission of Fort McClellan ends with the post being closed under Public Law 101-510, Base Realignment and Closure Act.

Overview of Fort McClellan

Mission

- Began in 1917 at main post area as an artillery range.
- With outbreak of World War I, Fort became a military training site named in honor of Major General George B. McClellan.
- In 1940 U.S. Army acquired Pelham Range, west of the main post, named in honor of Major John Pelham.
- Post placed on inactive status 1947-1951.
- 1951-1973 The Fort was reactivated to operate the Chemical Corps School.
- In 1962 the Army Combat Development Command Chemical, Biological and Radiological Agency was stationed at Fort McClellan.
- In 1966 the post was renamed the U.S. Army School and Training Center.
- Currently, the post supports the U.S. Army Chemical and Military Police Schools, Department of Defense Polygraph Institute, a training brigade, and several Forces Command units.
- Scheduled for closure in September 1999 under Public Law 101-510, Base Realignment and Closure Act.

Location

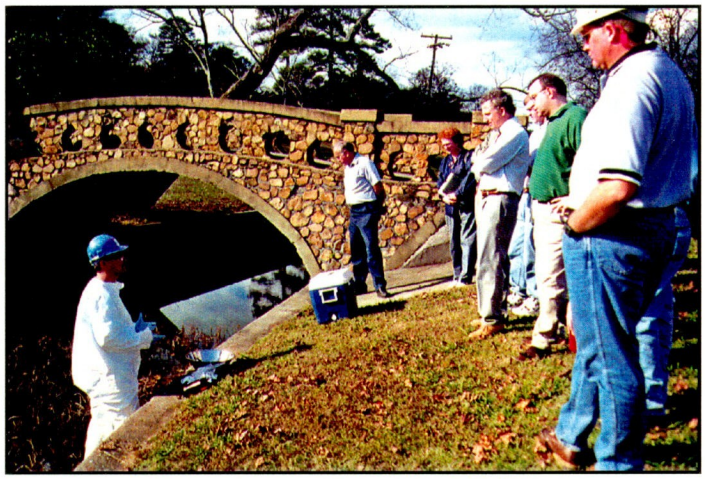
- Calhoun County, north of Anniston, Alabama.
- Fort McClellan has three parcels:
  - the main post, 18,954 acres that include administrative, mission and housing buildings
  - Pelham Range, 22,272 acres used for artillery, smoke operations and field training exercises
  - Choccolocco Corridor, made up of 4,500 acres used for field training and leased from the State of Alabama.

RAB provides feedback on environmental cleanup issues

Paul M. McGuire
Fort McClellan Community Relations Officer
Reprinted from McClellan News, August 21, 1998.

Don't come to a Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) meeting expecting excitement on par with Monday Night Football. A spectator sport it is not. But for people interested in environmental cleanup issues relating to the closure and reuse of Fort McClellan, RAB meetings are definitely the place to be on Monday nights.

The Fort McClellan RAB serves as liaison between the BRAC Cleanup Team (BCT) and the local community. (The BCT is the body responsible for identifying cleanup priorities and developing and overseeing implementation plans.) The RAB is not a decision-making body. Its volunteer members represent a broad cross section of interests from throughout the local community and the state. Collectively, they act as a sort of feedback mechanism, providing vital input to the BCT and others regarding environmental plans and issues that may affect them.



Community and RAB members recently toured Fort McClellan cleanup sites to review sampling techniques used to characterize soil and water on post.

Instituted in May 1996, the Fort McClellan RAB meets the third Monday of each month, usually in the Directorate of Environment conference room on post. Each meeting is open to the public and features a discussion or presentation about a particular issue facing environmental managers here. Issues range from groundwater monitoring, to archeological excavation, to protection of endangered species on post.

The August 1998 meeting was held off post in the public meeting room at Quintard Mall in Oxford, Ala. According to RAB Community Relations Director Joan McKinney, the purpose of the venue change was to bring the RAB closer to the people it represents.

"We have a responsibility to be proactive in the community and let the people know what we're doing," she said. "The community needs to be interested in what we're doing (in terms of cleaning up Fort McClellan property), because in a little more than a year, that property will become the community."

McKinney concedes that, up to this point, community interest in the RAB has been slight, and she feels there are some credible reasons for that.

"For so many decades there's been that fence line between the Army and the

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Abbreviations used in this newsletter

BCT
BRAC Cleanup Team
BRAC
Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1990, Public Law 101-510
RAB
Restoration Advisory Board

FEEDBACK

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local community. It may be that many people simply believe that the cleanup is 'Army business.' In fact, it's all our business," she said.

RAB member Chris Johnson agrees.

"The community obviously needs to be part of this," he said. "This is their home."

Johnson is an engineer with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management and also serves on the BCT. He says the RAB can carry a lot of weight in the decision making process. If, for example, environmental officials discover that insufficient resources are available to carry out certain projects that the community deems critical, then an active RAB can be very effective in motivating the Army to change the way resources are allocated.

"RABs can really help swing the bat for the installation," Johnson said.

For Weaver, Ala., Mayor Ed Kimbrough, membership on the RAB has been very beneficial. One of his major concerns is potential groundwater contamination from a nearby retired Fort McClellan landfill. Kimbrough rarely misses an opportunity to raise this issue at the monthly meetings. In part due to the mayor's persistence, groundwater monitoring has become a priority for environmental officials here.

"I've learned that, through the RAB, we can express our voice, and it will be carried to the powers that be," said Kimbrough.

In addition to receiving and acting on input, the RAB also functions as a tool for educating the community about a variety of environmental issues impacting fort cleanup and reuse.

The focus of Monday night's meeting, for example, was preservation of some rare stands of montane longleaf pine trees. RAB members watched a video about this unique species of pine which happens to be found only in certain high-elevation areas of the post. Members learned that this species has been able to survive here, ironically, due to the Army's longtime practice of using the trees' mountainous habitat for artillery training. By restricting access to the impact zones where the trees live (leaving the areas wild and unmanaged) and by occasionally causing artillery fires that weeded out the longleaf's competitors, the Army actually created an ideal environment for these trees to flourish.

McKinney hopes that by featuring this and similar issues, the RAB can heighten awareness of Fort McClellan's beauty and uniqueness.

"By dwelling not only on the cleanup process but also on the treasures of the installation, we can create pride in the distinctiveness of Fort McClellan," she said.

She believes this, in turn, will help make RAB meetings the place to be on Monday nights.

The next scheduled meeting is 6:30 pm, Monday, May 17, at a location to be announced.

RAB members meet monthly to discuss the cleanup at Fort McClellan. Left to right are: Margarette Longstreth, Dr. Barry Cox, Don Cunningham, Dr. Mary Harrington, James Miller and Ron Levy, co-chair. Seated in the foreground are: Charles Turner and Samantha Noble, court reporter.

Public participation program

Opportunities to participate in the environmental program at Fort McClellan are available throughout the cleanup and closure process. As actions are planned, they will be announced in local newspapers and other media. Public meetings about scheduled activities will be held, and RAB meetings are always open to the public. Fact sheets and newsletters like this one will be produced three times a year and also are available for review on the Internet web site: www.mcclellan.army.mil/doe. If you are not currently on a mailing list to receive information like this newsletter, contact anyone listed below to be added to the list.

Contacts

Ron Levy
Fort McClellan BRAC
Environmental Coordinator
Phone: (256) 848-3539/3758
E-mail:
LevyR@
mcclellan-emh2.army.mil

Lisa Kingsbury
Fort McClellan BRAC
Project Manager
Phone: (256) 848-7455
E-mail:
KingsburyL@
mcclellan-emh2.army.mil

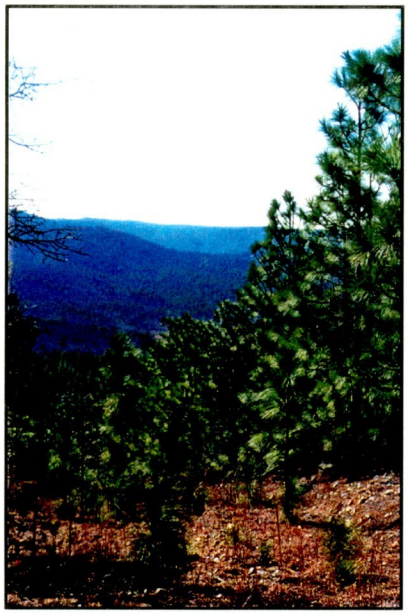
1999 RAB meeting dates

(Third Monday of each month, 6:30 pm)
May 17
June 21
July 19
August 16
September 20
October 18
November 15

Fort McClellan longleaf pine forests form unique habitat to be preserved

The gnarled, bonsai-looking trees that dot the landscape at Fort McClellan form a unique habitat that must be protected, said Ron Smith, natural resources biologist for the environmental program here.

"The montane or mountain longleaf pine ecosystem found on Fort McClellan is rare, and extra care should be taken to preserve this remaining example of forest that is so important to unique species of plants and animals, one of which will shortly be classified as threatened or endangered," Smith said.



Example of longleaf pine at Fort McClellan.

History of longleaf pine forests

According to Smith, longleaf pine forests in the last 400 years have decreased from 90 million acres to approximately 3 million acres worldwide. The majority of remaining longleaf stands in the United States are located at elevations 600 feet above sea level or below, along the coasts of North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. The history of logging, replanting, fire suppression and the use of herbicides within these coastal ecosystems has controlled the encroachment of hardwood trees which change the systems' composition.

Montane longleaf pine on Fort McClellan

The geography and history of the longleaf pine habitats found on Fort McClellan make them unique among other longleaf pine ecosystems, Smith said.

The majority of the longleaf pine on Fort McClellan grow on high, steep slopes that make them even more rare. This area of rugged topography includes steep ridges that peak at 2063 feet in elevation. These slopes and remote ridges contain isolated old-growth stands of mountain longleaf pine that are 180 years in age and individual trees that are 250 years old. The majority of the longleaf pine on Fort McClellan flourish on the rugged slopes of the Choccolocco Mountain Range.

Due to Army ownership, access to these natural areas was regulated. Needing training space, the Army left some areas of forest undeveloped. This factor, along with rough topography, reduced commercial timber production.

Fort McClellan's mountain longleaf pine forest has been maintained primarily with the use of wildfire. While fire regulations and public education decreased wildfire in the surrounding region, military training assured that a fire regimen was maintained on Fort McClellan. Within the past 100 years the forest on Fort McClellan has been exposed to fire-fighting exercises that equaled natural conditions under which longleaf pine thrive.

Red-cockaded woodpecker. (Photo by William H. Julian, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.)

Due to these activities, the formation of a more natural, fire-maintained forest system has been preserved on Fort McClellan.

Habitat for endangered and listed plants and animals

The resulting lack of development on Fort McClellan has kept the stands together, providing key habitat for neotropical migratory birds and the possible future reintroduction of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. The mountain longleaf pine complex also contains many plants that are state and federal species of concern. The three-flowered hawthorn, Fraser's loosestrife, white fringeless orchid and Appalachian cottontail are just a few examples of the vast diversity within this ecosystem.

The future of longleaf pine habitats at Fort McClellan

A four-year study by Auburn University has provided useful information about the state and makeup of the longleaf pine forest on Fort McClellan, Smith claimed.

In the first phase of the study, researchers reported that the longleaf pine forest on Fort McClellan is in danger of hardwood encroachment. Due to closure of Fort McClellan, the training exercises on the main post have been slowly reduced. The resulting

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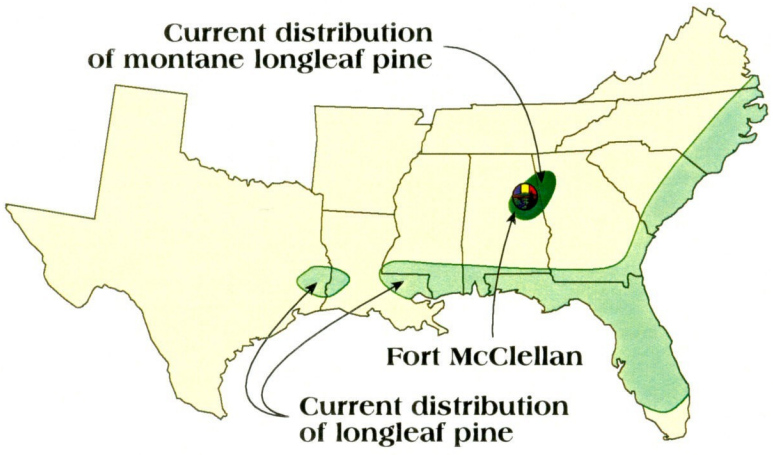

Information repositories

Technical documents and other publications about the cleanup and closure of Fort McClellan are available at the locations listed.

Anniston Public Library
Alabama Room
108 East 10th Street
Anniston, Alabama
Phone: (256) 237-8501

Houston Cole Library*
Jacksonville State University
700 Pelham Road, 2nd Floor
Jacksonville, AL 36265
Phone: (256) 782-5252

Directorate of Environment*
Building 141A, 13th Avenue
Fort McClellan, AL 36205
Phone: (256) 848-7455

You also may visit our website at:
www.mcclellan.army.mil/doe

**The Administrative Record is located here.*

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wildfires from this training also have been reduced, leaving the forest to further hardwood invasion.

In the second phase of the study, researchers have identified the total acreage that the forest encompasses and the age and condition of the trees.

Roughly 12,000 acres of forest with montane longleaf pine scattered throughout are found on the main post. In 1997 an effort was made to establish a National Wildlife Refuge from this undeveloped land. After negotiations between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Local Reuse Authority, approximately 7,700 acres have been approved for transfer into the Refuge. As environmental remediation continues at Fort McClellan, more land may be added to this total acreage, although the remaining 4,300 acres are currently slated for reuse by commercial interests or other government agencies.

The white fringeless orchid is one of many species of concern which grow in the montane longleaf pine habitat at Fort McClellan.

In addition to the acreage, the survey determined that longleaf pine on the main post has a 300 percent higher rate of red heart rot fungus than most populations of longleaf pine. This higher rate of heart rot provides prime nesting sites for red-cockaded woodpeckers. Additionally, Fort McClellan's forest land provides a good forage base for the reintroduction of other listed animals, once the land is transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"I hope that our children will be able to visit this unique place, enjoy it and not have to call it a 'thing of the past,'" Smith said.

Directorate of Environment
Building 141A, 13th Avenue
Fort McClellan, AL 36205-5000

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