

Camp Ripley Maneuver and Training Center, Minnesota ARNG

Natural Resources Conservation, Large Installation

With over 19 miles of Mississippi River frontage and representing one of the largest land holders in the region, the Minnesota Army National Guard (MNARNG) and Camp Ripley have long been prominent protectors of the mighty Mississippi and its ecosystem. As the MNARNG's primary training area, Camp Ripley's 53,000 acres support over 600 plant, 203 bird, and 50 mammal species and provide 450,000 man-days of Soldier training every year.

Since Camp Ripley resides within the forest transition zone of Minnesota it is home to a large diversity of wilderness dwellers such as the timber wolf, black bear, bald eagle, and red shouldered hawk. Camp Ripley is also rich in history and is home to the Historic Fort Ripley, Indian burial mounds, and homesteads and cemeteries of the early settlers. Camp Ripley has about

28,000 acres of forested land, 8,800 acres of wetlands, and 7,700 acres of grasslands. The remaining portion of the land is comprised of 6,500 acres of impact areas and a 2,000 acre cantonment area. Camp Ripley has also expanded its outdoor recreational program to include hunting and fishing opportunities for youth, Disabled Veterans, deployed Soldiers and the general public.

All NRC activities at Camp Ripley support the MNARNG's training mission and the complementary relationship between military land use and NRC management has been well documented. NRC activities are closely coordinated with training needs, and staff develops mitigations when needed. The Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program is especially important. The mission of the ACUB is to prevent encroachment, protect

the mighty Mississippi, and ensure sustainable training for Camp Ripley without compromising mission and a Soldier's ability to train as they will be expected to fight on the battlefield.

Partnerships with state and local agencies and universities have made Camp Ripley second to none in the region for environmental excellence and expertise. NRC staff also conducts extensive outreach on and off the installation. There are 600 full-time personnel employed and nearly 7,000 visitors come to Camp Ripley each year to enjoy the post's environmental resources. Camp Ripley's conscientious NRC management preserves the post's diversity for future generations and supports the Army's triple bottom line for sustaining the mission, the environment, and the community.

On this page: Camp Ripley's ranges and facilities enable Soldiers to train to the highest level of proficiency such as firing the Multiple Launch Rocket System.

JUDGING CRITERIA



Program
Management



Orientation
to Mission



Technical
Merit



Transferability



Stakeholder
Involvement

SUSTAINING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR A SECURE FUTURE

BACKGROUND

The Camp Ripley Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) is updated annually in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The MNARNG has a signed Cooperative agreement with the DNR and both the USFWS and DNR sign a signature page approving each annual INRMP update. Camp Ripley has also completed a Biological Opinion with USFWS on bald eagles in support of a new range. These plans and the NRC program's close coordination with regulators and environmental partners have kept Camp Ripley in 100 percent compliance.

Camp Ripley's NRC program is supported by the installation's environmental directorate, which coordinates directly with the installation commander and MNARNG tenant commands. The environmental staff works closely with trainers to identify future mission needs and prioritize NRC activities around them. They are also in close coordination with the public works and Facilities Management



The Blandings turtle is a species of special concern in the state of Minnesota, and NRC staff have long worked to enhance the turtle habitat and protect them from impacts. This hatchling is indicative of Camp Ripley's success. Thanks to NRC management, the turtle has seen an increase in survival rates over the past years.

Office (FMO) to provide planning and implementation support for any new development. The environmental directorate also created an installation Sustainable Range Program Committee, comprised of command and unit representatives, Integrated Training Area Management personnel, engineers, FMO and others. The committee meets bi-monthly to coordinate new projects, review program budgets, and monitor progress of the conservation program.

One of the largest contributing factors of the installation's NRC success and ability to reach its many milestones over the past two years is their strong

program management. These milestones include developing new partnerships for ACUB funding and NRC management, securing special legislation that returns state timber revenues to Camp Ripley for its reforestation and forest management program enrolling 5,000 acres into the installation ACUB protecting an additional 18,000 acres in support of ACUB, and winning several awards and funding for the ACUB and other initiatives.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Camp Ripley lobbied for and secured new legislation this year that returns revenue from timber harvesting to the installation rather than the state general fund. This fund generates \$150,000 to \$500,000 annually to augment the NRC land fund and allow MNARNG an opportunity to more directly fund mission requirements.



In addition to minimizing dependence on nonrenewable

Over the past several years, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been actively involved in the development and implementation of Camp Ripley's Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan, along with other federal actions requiring consultation. It has been tremendously satisfying working with Camp Ripley.

- Nick Rowse, USFWS Biologist

resources, Camp Ripley has also realized a significant cost saving in utilizing its most common renewable resource – trees. A portable sawmill recently generated about 16,200 board feet of lumber from trees harvested on Camp Ripley. The lumber is valued at about \$11,500 and will be used for targetry and for repairing training facilities.

In 2008, Camp Ripley won second place in the Army Communities of Excellence “Special Category,” bringing the post a \$25,000 prize. Additionally, as a part of a new sustainability initiative, NRC staff and Camp Ripley reclaimed nearly 3,000 tons of concrete and over 1,100 tons of bituminous material to be reused in trail stabilization, thereby avoiding landfill disposal costs. These savings represent \$92,000 in addition to metal recycling revenue.

Camp Ripley reclaims about 80,000 tons of gravel per year from 16 miles of existing trails, avoiding the purchase of new materials for trail reconstruction and rehabilitation. This represents a cost savings of about \$970,000 each year.

The continued implementation of the installation ACUB has been a driver of the NRC program over the past two years. In addition to threatening the military mission, encroachment can have a detrimental effect on natural resources, contributing to loss of habitat and subsequent decline in threatened or endangered species. The ACUB prevents further fragmentation of natural communities, thereby preserving habitats and sensitive species.

Additionally, the ACUB program has received approximately \$10.7 million in federal funding, and

Camp Ripley has successfully leveraged partnerships in this initiative resulting in over \$45 million in funding through local contributions.

Camp Ripley has two primary partners to implement ACUB on their behalf including the DNR and more recently the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). BWSR has greatly expedited the process of acquiring conservation easements and has significantly enhanced the ACUB outreach for the 5,000 landowners in the three-mile buffer zone. The BWSR introduced a formula-based system that allows Camp Ripley to easily identify priority parcels and track the compensation available to those landowners.



The BWSR provides a 50 percent contribution to land easement acquisitions to maximize federal funds, and in-kind contributions from other involved agencies and partners often increase contributions above 50 percent. In the region, land is valued at approximately \$2,000 per acre; landowners are offered \$1,000 per acre to enroll their properties in the program and relinquish development rights. The funding provided by partners significantly reduces the burden on federal funds.

Since the program’s inception in 2004, the number of interested landowner participants has grown to 200, representing over 29,000 acres. Approximately 5,000 acres have already been acquired (through purchase or permanent



NRC activities are closely coordinated with training needs to enhance training opportunities and ensure no interruption. State of the art range complexes enable Soldiers to train to maximum proficiency. All NRC efforts are undertaken with an emphasis on best serving the MNARNG’s Soldiers.

easement), and as funding and resources increase, additional lands will be incorporated.

A customized ACUB database management system was developed within the NRC program for the purpose of integrating natural resource land characteristics with mission requirements. All ACUB parcels are ranked and prioritized according to military and natural resources criteria within the database. In addition to tracking funding and land values, the database can serve as a template for other installations involved with ACUB.



Partners such as the DNR and TNC assist in training Camp Ripley personnel to conduct prescribed burns and combat wildland fires. Prescribed fires reduce fuel loads, enhance training, and sustain natural diversity on nearly 11,000 acres every year. Prescribed fire has also been effective at controlling and minimizing the spread of some invasive species.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Overall Natural Resource Conservation

In an effort to overcome the consequences of depleting nonrenewable resources, Camp Ripley and the MNARNG are leading a sustainability initiative to enhance mission capability while reducing dependence on nonrenewable resources. Camp Ripley has already capitalized on two opportunities, resulting in considerable cost savings and resource utilization that would otherwise be wasted.

One opportunity involved reclamation of about 80,000 tons of gravel per year from existing trails. Without reclamation newly crushed material or resources would be required to maintain existing trails. Another project involved reclaiming 3,000 tons of old concrete and 1,000 tons of bituminous material that would otherwise have gone to a construction/demolition landfill. The newly crushed product is used to stabilize maneuver trails in support of training.

Land Management

As a part of its INRMP, Camp Ripley conducts regular surveys of plants, birds and animals. Additionally, with assistance

from the University of Minnesota, Camp Ripley completed a wetlands demonstration project that inventoried all wetlands and set enhanced guidelines for their preservation. Also, prescribed fire training and implementation is conducted with The Nature Conservancy's assistance. Prescribed fire enhances the mission-scape for training, improves ecological habitat, and controls invasive species. Annual, prescribed fires are used to reduce fuel loads on 10,000 acres and enhance habitat on 600 to 700 acres of grasslands and forests. Prescribed fire in forested areas is eradicating invasive hazelbrush.



Forest Management

The Camp Ripley Land Fund was approved by the state legislature this year, which permits state revenues generated by installation timber harvests to go back to Camp Ripley. About 300 acres of timber are harvested on post annually, generating \$150,000 to \$500,000 that will be reinvested in Camp Ripley's NRC program.

“Camp Ripley has brought conservation of scale to the local community as recognized by other local units of government partnering with Camp Ripley in ACUB and other community based programs. By working locally with Camp Ripley our effectiveness as conservation organizations is enhanced. We consider it a privilege to work with the outstanding environmental resource professionals at Camp Ripley.”

- Todd Holman, Director, Central Minnesota, The Nature Conservancy

All forestry activities are conducted in partnership with the state DNR, including harvests, rehabilitation, replanting, nursery development, and invasive species control. Areas are selected for harvest based on habitat enhancement and training needs. Trees are thinned, spaced, or cleared with regard to sound forestry practices, with priority given to areas where training space is needed according to the desired future condition (DFC) from a military training perspective.



Camp Ripley is also developing a partnership with a local ethanol plant that needs wood fiber biomass for fuel testing. Trees that must be cleared but are not valuable as lumber or paper and residual slash piles from ongoing timber sales provide a source of wood fiber for the benefit of alternative fuel research.

Invasive Species Control and Pest Management

Prescribed fire is a primary tool for plant pest species management, augmented by mechanical removal and limited chemical use. Camp Ripley completed an analysis and delineation of invasive plants last year that tested treatment techniques in partnership with St. Cloud State University (SCSU). SCSU developed a web site that tracks the effectiveness of treatment combinations, which helps the installation and MNARNG to implement the most effective, efficient approach.

In partnership with the MN Department of Health and University of MN, Camp Ripley has implemented a tick testing program to combat Lyme disease. Any ticks that attach to Soldiers are removed and tested. The data generated by this testing is used on a state-wide level by the MN Department of Health.



Mission Enhancement

All NRC activities at Camp Ripley are undertaken in support of the MNARNG's training mission, and the complementary relationship between military land use and NRC management has been well documented. In some cases, training activities support NRC activities. For example, training using unmanned aerial vehicles in simulated military missions benefit the conservation program with exercises that track deer populations, triangulate telemetry-tagged animals, and identify land in need of rehabilitation. NRC activities are closely coordinated with training needs according to DFC plans, and the staff works to develop mitigations when necessary to expand training. One example of this is the completion



of a Biological Opinion on a bald eagle nesting site and the associated habitat enhancement for eagles in fiscal year 2008 to clear the way for construction of a new Urban Assault Course.

Environmental Enhancements

Internally, the NRC program's continuity is ensured by the installation INRMP, ACUB program, and partnership networks. Information on all NRC activities is electronically captured in databases accessible throughout the MNARNG. These databases track projects, protect data, and help with MNARNG training and NRC planning. The database Camp Ripley developed for the ACUB has particular potential for transfer to other military installations. Comprehensive and easy to use, the database has been presented at NGB workshops as an example to follow, and NGB and the Army are considering standardizing this tool for ACUB projects. The MNARNG has shared this tool with the South Carolina and Idaho Guard as well to assist those states in ACUB implementation. The NRC staff at Camp Ripley has



“Camp Ripley’s approach to land management prioritizes the requirements of military training, and fully integrates those requirements into the execution of training, environmental, and facilities management programs. This level of integration has enabled them to implement one of the best, if not the best, ITAM program in the Army National Guard. I continually find myself holding up their business practices as an example of how an effective ITAM program should be run.”

- Dr. Lee Barber, National Guard Bureau ITAM Program Manager

also presented their activities at national environmental symposiums and Land Trust Alliance conferences, and their expertise has been sought for the Army Sustainable Range Program.

Community Relations

Strong partnerships and a commitment to community involvement and cooperation have given the Camp Ripley NRC program strength and staying power.

One of the goals of the MNARNG is to add value to the community. The NRC staff has done this by working in harmony with resource agencies such as the DNR and USFWS. Camp Ripley works with institutions of higher learning, such as St. Cloud State College and Central Lake College, to design and provide conservation internships and other learning opportunities. There is no better place to learn and gain field experience than from a 53,000 acre laboratory.

Camp Ripley conducts annual briefings for all the county boards and city councils in the region, presenting on upcoming training activities, ACUB progress, and environmental initiatives. Also, since the Camp Ripley ACUB began in 2004, over 250 ACUB presentations have been given to the public and local governmental officials.



Conservation Education

Camp Ripley hosts a bi-annual event for the community, welcoming the public to the



Using state-of-the-art radio tracking equipment to monitor the wolf populations, NRC staff have been able to demonstrate the complementary relationship between the military mission and the survival of this federally-protected species.

installation to learn more about the MNARNG and its NRC program. The installation also hosts annual events for Earth Day, National Public Lands Day, Boy and Girl Scout Jamborees, and local water and environmental festivals.

Camp Ripley opened its environmental classroom in 2006 and now hosts field trips and special events for 6,500 to 7,000 visitors every year, including Soldiers and their families, school children, and a variety of special interest groups. The NRC staff conducts over 200 educational presentations each year in classrooms and on post, along with field tours. A mentorship program gives high school students the opportunity to learn more about jobs in the field by shadowing members of the environmental staff. Additionally, as a part of an established outreach program, school groups come to Camp Ripley for bird watching throughout the

installation. Camp Ripley has also established a bog walk and nature trail for school groups and the general public to use. Bird watching is also available at these picturesque sites.

Fish and Wildlife

NRC staff use telemetry equipment to monitor sensitive species such as timber wolves, black bears, and white-tailed deer. Radio tracking collars on wolves and bears show where populations are during training, allowing the NRC office to mitigate for their protection. This tracking also demonstrates the positive relationship between training and habitat enhancement, proving that these populations are enhanced by the limited disturbance that training and NRC activities provide. The installation is investigating the federally-protected Canada lynx population on post.



Other Natural Resources

Camp Ripley has an active hunting and fishing program that encompasses special youth archery, disabled veteran, and deployed Soldier deer and turkey hunts, as well as regular deer hunts open to the public. Special accommodations are provided for Disabled Veterans including elevated blinds, mentors, and handicap sleeping quarters. In total, these hunts provide access and recreation for over 5,500 hunters, including youth, deployed Soldiers, and disabled veterans. These are largely conducted with a lottery system that allows hunting with no fees or with minimal permit fees. The revenue generated by the hunts is administered by the DNR to support hunting programs. NRC personnel also manage lakes on the installation through a stocking program to provide Soldiers and the public with fishing opportunities.



Natural Resource Compliance Programs

The Camp Ripley team takes pride in working through partnerships to accomplish the ultimate goal of sustaining the Army's triple bottom line of sustaining the mission, the environment and the community. They realize that the natural resources don't abide by fence lines, rivers or political lines and continual interaction with their partners has allowed them to achieve many successes as noted by Mark Holsten, DNR Commissioner.



“For more than 23 years the Department of Natural Resources has worked in partnership with the Minnesota National Guard. Together, we have successfully blended natural resource conservation and restoration with high quality military training... with the addition of the ACUB program, our partnership has grown. The DNR has become enthusiastic and committed to creating a buffer around Camp Ripley that serves both a military mission and a goal of protecting significant natural areas.”

*- Mark Holsten, Commissioner,
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources*

Camp Ripley has an open dialogue with regulators and inspectors and has never had any violations within its conservation program. On a national level Camp Ripley's conservation budget has been funded at about 85 percent of its critical level. On the state level Camp Ripley now utilizes annual timber revenues (\$150,000-\$500,000) to enhance the land management program. Natural

resources damage assessment efforts are implemented through the Range and Training Land Assessment program and all deficiencies, if any, are corrected through the ITAM program. Camp Ripley has an outstanding compliance record that includes one closed biological opinion and zero court actions, past or present.



Over 5,500 hunters visit camp Ripley every year. Special hunts are hosted for deployed Soldiers, disabled American veterans, and youth. The hunts are administered in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources. The Disabled American Veterans turkey hunt is the first of its kind in Minnesota.