

# Executive Summary

## Part 1: Special Resource Study

### Background and Study Process

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared the *Fort Hunter Liggett Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* to evaluate whether the resources of Fort Hunter Liggett are appropriate for inclusion in the national park system.

Congress authorized a study of Fort Hunter Liggett in November 1999, partly in response to the 1995 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission's (BRAC) recommendation that certain structures within the Fort Hunter Liggett cantonment area were excess to the Army's needs. The inventory of excess structures that are potentially available to the National Park Service has changed over the course of this study, but currently includes: the Hacienda complex, which includes the Julia Morgan-designed Milpitas Hacienda and adjacent swimming pool, tennis court and outbuildings; five ranch bungalows; the Gil Adobe; and one acre of land under and adjacent to the Tidball Store. In addition, the Javelin Court area, including 41 units of housing in twelve buildings, is also excess to the Army's needs and is under consideration.

The study area for this *Special Resource Study* includes all of Fort Hunter Liggett, totaling 164,261 acres. It is located in Monterey County, California, in the San Antonio Valley and on the east side of the Santa Lucia Mountains. The *Special Resource Study* addresses the resources of the entire installation. However, the "Alternatives" chapter and the *Environmental Assessment* focus only on the BRAC property as the remainder of the installation cannot feasibly become a national park system unit at this time. This study report was prepared with the recognition that Fort Hunter Liggett is an active Army Reserve training installation.

In a special resource study, a proposed addition to the national park system will receive a

favorable recommendation from the NPS only if meets all of the following four criteria:

- (1) it possesses nationally significant natural or cultural resources;
- (2) it is a suitable addition to the system;
- (3) it is a feasible addition to the system; and
- (4) it requires direct NPS management, instead of alternative protection by other public agencies or the private sector.

In cases where a study area's resources meet criteria for national significance but do not meet other criteria for inclusion in the national park system, the National Park Service may recommend an alternative status, such as an "affiliated area" designation.

Publication of the Draft Fort Hunter Liggett Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment will be followed by a public comment period. The NPS study team will then revise the study report if needed, and transmit it through the Director of the NPS to the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary will transmit the report to Congress, along with the Secretary's recommendation for the area. Congressional legislation would be needed to implement any alternative other than the "no action" alternative.



Rolling hills with the Santa Lucia Mountains in the distance, NPS photo

## Significance

The National Park Service has adopted four basic criteria to evaluate national significance. A resource is considered nationally significant if it:

- (1) is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource;
- (2) possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our nation's heritage;
- (3) offers superlative opportunities for public enjoyment, or for scientific study; and,
- (4) retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of a resource.

Fort Hunter Liggett contains the following nationally significant natural and cultural resources:

### CULTURAL RESOURCES

- The Milpitas Hacienda is nationally significant for its association with architect Julia Morgan and media magnate William Randolph Hearst. As the northernmost component of a 250,000-acre country estate that Hearst amassed in the 1920s and 1930s, the Hacienda provides an opportunity to expand and enhance the story of Hearst and his collaboration with Morgan. As such, the Milpitas Hacienda appears to be an excellent addition to the Hearst San Simeon Estate National Historic Landmark, also known as Hearst Castle® or La Cuesta Encantada.
- The national significance of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail was established through its Congressional designation in 1990. The oak savanna landscape of Fort Hunter Liggett provides one of the few remaining historically evocative settings of the trail. The Mission San Antonio de Padua, an inholding within Fort Hunter Liggett, was an Anza expedition campsite. The land, oak trees, and rivers of Fort Hunter Liggett were noted in the expedition's diary entries during their stay at the Mission.

### NATURAL RESOURCES

- The number of rare and sensitive plant species on Fort Hunter Liggett is among the highest for similar sized areas in California.
- Fort Hunter Liggett encompasses extensive oak woodland and savanna communities, including valley oak, blue oak, coast live oak and native grassland understory vegetation. It offers the widest diversity of oak taxa of any area of its size in California. Oak woodlands and savanna on Fort Hunter Liggett include the largest known contiguous valley bottom stands of valley oak. The native oak savanna provides important habitat for many rare, threatened, and endangered species, including purple amole, tule elk and San Joaquin kit fox. Fort Hunter Liggett has the highest concentration of oak savanna-specializing birds of any location in the nation.
- Chaparral, vernal pools and riparian areas are additional rare habitat types on Fort Hunter Liggett that support nationally significant species. Chaparral communities harbor rare and sensitive plant populations typically found only in other regions of California, as well as unique endemic species associated with serpentine soils. Riparian areas and vernal pools support rare and sensitive species such as the arroyo toad, bald eagle, Santa Lucia mint, and vernal pool fairy shrimp.

### STATE AND LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE

- The Gil Adobe and Tidball Store are locally significant historic structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Javelin Court area consists of recently built housing units and does not include significant cultural or natural resources.

## Suitability

An area is considered suitable for addition to the national park system if it represents a natural or cultural resource type that (1) is not already adequately represented in the national park system; or (2) is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by another land managing entity, including other federal agencies; Tribal, state, or local governments; or the private sector.

Based on resource quality, character, rarity and its representation of cultural and natural history themes, the Fort Hunter Liggett study area is suitable for inclusion in the national park system. The Milpitas Hacienda represents the themes “expressing cultural values” and “developing the American economy” for its connection to William Randolph Hearst’s historic estate and media empire. Hearst’s estate, including La Cuesta Encantada (Hearst Castle®), stands out among American country houses and would provide the best example of this type of estate on the west coast. Inclusion of the Milpitas Hacienda in the national park system would provide an excellent opportunity to interpret the lives and work of William Randolph Hearst and Julia Morgan and could expand visitor experience and interpretation at Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument.

The Fort Hunter Liggett study area represents the theme “peopling places” and the topic “encounters, conflicts, and colonization” through resources that represent Spanish settlement and encounters with the native Salinan people. The relatively unchanged landscape provides the historic context for the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, the Mission San Antonio de Padua, and associated archeological sites.

The landscape at Fort Hunter Liggett provides representation of the natural history themes “dry coniferous forest and dry woodland,” “chaparral,” “riparian woodland” and “vernal pools.” Fort Hunter Liggett contains over 72,000 acres of oak woodlands and savanna. There is no equivalent size area of California oak habitat protected,



Oaks along Nacimiento-Fergusson Road, NPS photo

whether by federal, state, local or private managers, anywhere in the United States. The protected oak habitat at Fort Hunter Liggett is suitable for inclusion in the national park system, however it is not available to the NPS.

Intact riparian areas along the San Antonio and Nacimiento rivers, vernal pools and serpentine chaparral provide important habitat for Federally-listed and endemic species. The combination of rare plant communities on Fort Hunter Liggett is suitable for inclusion in the National Park System. However, the natural areas of Fort Hunter Liggett are not available to the NPS because they are in use as an Army Reserve training facility and expected to be retained by the Army indefinitely.

## Feasibility

To be feasible as a new unit of the national park system, an area must:

- (1) be of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment (taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond proposed park boundaries); and
- (2) be capable of efficient administration by the NPS at a reasonable cost.

In evaluating feasibility, the National Park Service considers a variety of factors including boundary size and configuration, land use, ownership patterns, planning and zoning, access and public

enjoyment potential, existing resource degradation and threats to the resources, public interest and support, social and economic impact, and costs associated with acquisition, development, restoration and operation.

The feasibility analysis was conducted with the understanding that the only part of Fort Hunter Liggett that is available for possible park use is the BRAC excess property. The feasibility of NPS designation and management was examined separately for the BRAC excess property and for Fort Hunter Liggett as a whole.

**BRAC Excess Property:** It is not feasible for the NPS to manage the Fort Hunter Liggett BRAC excess property as a national park unit. Based on current NPS budget constraints and financial priorities, the NPS is not able to undertake new park management responsibilities of this potential cost and magnitude.

California State Parks could feasibly fund annual park operations, provided: a) cost savings can be achieved by sharing staff, equipment and administrative services with Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument, and b) suitable concession arrangements can be made to ensure adaptive use of the Hacienda complex and to retain the franchise fees from the concession contract for park use at Fort Hunter Liggett. The Milpitas Hacienda could feasibly be designated as an affiliated area of the national park system. Affiliated areas are nationally significant areas not owned or administered by the National Park Service, but which draw on technical or financial assistance from the Park Service. Technical and limited financial assistance from the National Park Service could be feasible in areas such as historical research, treatment of historic structures, planning, interpretation and fundraising.

**Fort Hunter Liggett:** The Fort Hunter Liggett study area as a whole is not a feasible addition to the national park system because the land continues to be an active Army Reserve training installation, and is not available to the National Park Service. Cost issues and the presence of unexploded ordnance are also concerns.

## Management Options

Unless direct NPS management of a studied area is identified as the superior alternative, the National Park Service will recommend that one or more other entities assume a lead management role, and that the area not receive national park system status. The National Park Service developed and considered a number of options involving NPS management, before determining that such options were not feasible. These options include:

**National Park Service Ownership of BRAC Property.** The National Park Service considered taking title to all BRAC excess property proposed for NPS reuse. This option was rejected when it was determined that NPS ownership and management was not financially feasible, and that many of the BRAC properties were not nationally significant.

**Visitor Programs on FHL Lands.** The National Park Service considered proposing a partnership program with Fort Hunter Liggett to allow for controlled public recreational and educational use of parts of Fort Hunter Liggett, through guided tours and other programs. This option was rejected due to Army concerns over safety and compatibility with the Army training mission.

**Direct Transfer Authority for Future Excess Land.** The National Park Service considered seeking legislation to authorize Fort Hunter Liggett lands to be directly transferred to the National Park Service or the US Forest Service, if Fort Hunter Liggett were ever declared excess to military needs. This option was rejected because these areas are in active use and are expected to be retained by Fort Hunter Liggett for the indefinite future, and because of concerns about clean-up of unexploded ordnance and other hazardous materials.

## Alternatives

Alternatives for NPS management are only developed if NPS management is considered feasible. Therefore, this report presents and analyzes two alternatives that do not include NPS management. These alternatives include:

**Alternative A: No Action.** Under Alternative A, the Army would retain the excess property in interim use status for an indefinite period, during which minimal or no maintenance activities would be conducted. No change in use is expected for any of the excess property during this interim period. The Milpitas Hacienda would be operated by a concessioner for lodging and food service. The Army and California State Parks have negotiated an interim lease for the Milpitas Hacienda to provide for ongoing management until longer-term disposal or transfer is implemented. The ranch bungalows would be used for housing, storage, and other non-public uses. The Gil Adobe and the Tidball Store would continue to be unused. The Army would continue to manage the remainder of the Fort Hunter Liggett installation. The National Park Service (NPS) would have no involvement in the ownership or management of any FHL structures or properties. At some future time, it is assumed that the Army would pursue one of the options outlined in the Army Environmental Assessment for the Disposal and Reuse of the BRAC Property at Fort Hunter Liggett or would take other action, at their discretion.

**Alternative B: Addition to Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument and Designation as an Affiliated Area of the National Park System.** Under this alternative, legislation would authorize direct transfer of the Milpitas Hacienda complex and the ranch bungalows to California State Parks to be managed as an addition to Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument (Hearst Castle®) and as an affiliated area of the national park system. A separate study would be prepared by the NPS to consider the addition of the Milpitas Hacienda and the ranch bungalows to the Hearst San Simeon Estate National Historic Landmark (NHL).

Legislation would authorize direct transfer of the Gil Adobe and the land under the Tidball Store to California State Parks or Monterey County Parks Department. An agreement with a nonprofit organization could be developed in order to provide for management of these sites at little or no cost to the receiving public agency.

This alternative includes an option for the Javelin Court area, including 41 housing units, to be transferred to California State Parks to be operated as rental housing. The revenue from managing the housing area could be used to partially offset operating costs of the Milpitas Hacienda complex and the ranch bungalows.



The Milpitas Hacienda, NPS photo

## **Part 2: Environmental Assessment**

### **Purpose and Need**

This environmental assessment has been prepared in order to address the environmental and socioeconomic consequences of each management alternative considered in the Fort Hunter Liggett Special Resource Study. Alternative B supports the Army's need to transfer the BRAC excess property to other agencies, protects nationally significant resources, and ensures that these resources are available for public enjoyment.

### **Summary of Environmental Impacts**

**Alternative A: No Action.** Under Alternative A, likely impacts include reduced maintenance and possible minor deterioration of historic structures. If the interim use continues for an extended period of time, deferred maintenance due to lack of funding for major repairs and rehabilitation would result in further deterioration of the historic structures over time, particularly if there is a damaging event such as a fire or natural disaster. Visitation and related impacts on traffic, air quality, noise and the regional economy would remain at levels similar to current use; however if interim use continues for an extended period of time, minor to moderate impacts on public use and enjoyment would be expected due to lack of funding for repair or rehabilitation.

**Alternative B: Addition to Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument and Designation as an Affiliated Area of the National Park System.** Alternative B would result in beneficial effects for the Milpitas Hacienda and its historic setting. California State Parks, with NPS technical assistance, would manage the Milpitas Hacienda and related structures according to historic preservation standards, and provide regular maintenance and long-term rehabilitation. California State Parks would be able to provide visitor programs and interpretive and educational media and materials, thus providing for moderate beneficial impacts on public use and enjoyment

opportunities. California State Parks would be in a position to collaborate with the Mission San Antonio de Padua on shared concerns such as visitor management, resource management, and artifact curation. The likely increase in visitation would have minimal adverse impacts on traffic, air quality and noise, and a minor to moderate beneficial impact on the regional economy.

### **Preferred Alternative**

The environmentally preferred alternative is the one that best protects, preserves and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources, and that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment. Under Alternative A, adverse cumulative impacts on cultural resources could occur over time. Lack of funding for maintenance and rehabilitation could result in cumulative impacts to the historic structures and setting. Alternative B provides additional opportunities for long-term sustainable management and conservation of nationally significant resources. Alternative B would ensure the management and protection of historic cultural resources through assignment of the BRAC structures and features to California State Parks and technical assistance from the NPS. Alternative B is identified as the environmentally preferred alternative.

The NPS preferred alternative is the one that would be most effective and efficient in protecting significant resources and providing for public enjoyment. Alternative B is the NPS's preferred alternative as it provides greater environmental benefit and results in effective protection of the Milpitas Hacienda and other historic resources through management by California State Parks and technical assistance from NPS. This alternative allows for operational efficiencies between California State Park's Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument and the Milpitas Hacienda.