

Special Resource Study



← Background & Study Process

Dos Bueyes Creek, Brenda Tharp photo

Background and Study Process

Background

STUDY AUTHORIZATION

In November 1999, Congress authorized the National Park Service (NPS) to prepare a Special Resource Study of Fort Hunter Liggett (P.L. 106-113 & H.R. 3194 Conference Report, 113 Stat. 1535, 1537 - Nov. 29, 1999). The purpose of this study report is to evaluate whether the resources of Fort Hunter Liggett are appropriate for inclusion in the national park system. This *Special Resource Study of Fort Hunter Liggett* provides information to Congress on the significance of the natural and cultural resources of Fort Hunter Liggett, evaluates the suitability and feasibility of designating the area or some portion of it as a unit of the national park system and provides recommendations for the preservation and public enjoyment of significant resources while recognizing that Fort Hunter Liggett is an active Army Reserve training installation.

STUDY AREA

Fort Hunter Liggett is the Western Training Center for the US Army Reserve. It is located in southwestern Monterey County, approximately 70 miles south of the city of Salinas, and 23 miles southwest of King City. The installation includes 164,261 acres in the San Antonio Valley and the east side of the Santa Lucia Range. It is bounded on the west and north by the Los Padres National Forest and on the east and south by private agricultural land. It is a landscape of rolling oak savannas, valley grasslands, and chaparral-covered ridges. The area is rich in natural resources, and has a 6,000-year history of human habitation. The U.S. Department of Defense acquired Fort Hunter Liggett in 1940 from William Randolph Hearst, other neighboring ranches, and the U.S. Forest Service, and has operated it as a training installation since that time. The area is located within California's 17th Congressional district (See Figure 1).



The Milpitas Hacienda, NPS photo

EXCESS PROPERTY AT FORT HUNTER LIGGETT Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Process Background. On July 1, 1995, under provisions of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-510, as amended), the BRAC Commission recommended a partial realignment for Fort Hunter Liggett. On September 28, 1995, these recommendations became law. The BRAC Commission's recommendations included elimination of the Army's active component mission at Fort Hunter Liggett, while retaining minimum essential facilities and training area to support the Army Reserve components. The recommendations also realigned Fort Hunter Liggett by relocating the US Army Test and Experimentation Center (TEC) missions and functions from Fort Hunter Liggett to Fort Bliss, Texas. As a result, 72 structures were found to be excess to the Army's needs.

National Park Service Involvement. The NPS first became involved with Fort Hunter Liggett in 1999 following the Army Corps of Engineers announcement of the availability of BRAC excess property at Fort Hunter Liggett in a notice dated January 5. The National Park Service Pacific West Regional Director responded to the Army Corps of Engineers on March 5, 1999, seeking to reserve the acquisition of the available property at Fort Hunter Liggett for possible designation as a

Timeline: Actions Related to Excess Property at Fort Hunter Liggett

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| September 1995 | Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission recommendations are signed into law by Congress. Approximately 72 structures comprising 325,900 square feet of Army facilities on approximately 110 acres of property are no longer needed to accomplish the installation's remaining missions and are determined excess to Army requirements. |
| January 1999 | The Army Corps of Engineers announces the availability of excess property at Fort Hunter Liggett. |
| March 1999 | The NPS Pacific West Regional Director responds to the Army Corps of Engineers, seeking to reserve the acquisition of the available property at Fort Hunter Liggett for possible designation as a national park unit. |
| April 1999 | Congressman Sam Farr convenes the first of a series of meetings with the Army, Navy, NPS, U.S. Forest Service and California State Parks to develop a collaborative arrangement for the reuse of excess property at Fort Hunter Liggett. |
| November 1999 | Congress authorizes the NPS to prepare a Special Resource Study of Fort Hunter Liggett to evaluate whether the resources of Fort Hunter Liggett are appropriate for inclusion in the national park system. |
| September 2000 | Army completes the Environmental Assessment for the Disposal and Reuse of the BRAC Property at Fort Hunter Liggett, California, proposing the transfer of 63 buildings to the NPS and 9 buildings to the U.S. Navy. Property available to the NPS included the North Cantonment Geographic Area, the Milpitas Housing Area, the Barracks/Directorate of Personnel and Community Activities Area, several buildings in the South Cantonment Geographic Area; two buildings in the Miller Ranch Geographic Area and the Jolon Geographic Area. |
| July 2001 | The list of excess properties proposed for transfer to the NPS is reduced. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army, Installations and Housing, notifies the NPS that the BRAC excess property available to the National Park Service will include only the historic properties and ancillary structures: 1) the Hacienda Complex, which includes the Milpitas Hacienda and its associated structures; 2) 5 buildings referred to as the Ranch Bungalows some of which were associated with the former Milpitas Ranch, 3) the Gil Adobe, and 4) one acre of land under and adjacent to the Tidball Store (the building is already owned by Monterey County). See Figures 3-4. |
| March 2002 | The Army requests that the NPS consider accepting the Javelin Court housing area, consisting of 41 housing units in 12 buildings in the Cantonment Area (See Figure 3). |
| June 2003 | The Army transfers 9 structures and 11 acres of land to the Navy, as proposed in the 2000 Environmental Assessment. |
| June 2004 | The NPS releases its <i>Fort Hunter Liggett Draft Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment</i> with management alternatives that address the transfer and management of the BRAC excess properties available to the NPS as of March 2002. The preferred alternative was a recommendation for the transfer of the Hacienda Complex and the Ranch Bungalows to California State Parks as an addition to the Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument and as an Affiliated Area of the National Park System. |
| October 2004 | Congress grants the U.S. Forest Service the right of first refusal for any future excess lands at Fort Hunter Liggett through the 2004 military construction appropriations legislation (P.L. 108 - 324). The Army would be required to remove unexploded ordnance and perform environmental clean-up before transferring future excess property to the U.S. Forest Service. |
| May 2005 | The Department of the Army sends a letter to the NPS stating that the BRAC excess property at Fort Hunter Liggett considered in the draft special study report is no longer excess to the Army and is needed in order to support the Army mission. |

national park unit. A series of meetings with the Army, Navy, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and California State Parks commenced in April 1999 to discuss reuse options for the excess property. Congressman Sam Farr convened the first of these meetings and challenged the participating agencies to develop a collaborative arrangement for the reuse of the excess property.

The status of BRAC excess property at Fort Hunter Liggett has undergone a number of changes since the NPS first announced interest in

these properties. The timeline above summarizes these changes and how they relate to the completion of this final study report.

On May 27, 2005, the National Park Service received a letter from the Department of the Army stating that the BRAC excess property at Fort Hunter Liggett considered in the draft study report is no longer excess to the Army's needs, and is needed in order to support the Army's mission (See Appendix F). Therefore the property referred to as the "BRAC excess property" in this

study is no longer available for consideration of management by the National Park Service or transfer to another agency. The Army will continue to own and manage these properties. As a result, the management alternatives considered in the draft study report which proposed the transfer of properties to other agencies are longer under consideration. This final study report contains the resource analysis completed according to the NPS special resource study process. It also presents ideas that emerged during the study process that the Army could pursue to support and enhance their efforts to protect nationally significant cultural and natural resources at Fort Hunter Liggett.

Study Process

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY DIRECTION

The National Park Service is responsible for conducting professional studies of potential additions to the national park system when specifically authorized by an act of Congress, and for making recommendations through the Secretary of the Interior, to Congress.

Several laws and policies outline criteria for units of the national park system. Congress declared in the National Park System General Authorities Act of 1970 (16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a- 1) that areas comprising the national park system are cumulative expressions of a single national heritage. Potential additions to the national park system should therefore contribute in their own special way to a system that fully represents the broad spectrum of natural and cultural resources that characterize our nation. The National Park System New Area Studies Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-391, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 1a-5) establishes the basic process for NPS studies of potential new national park areas. NPS management policies comply with this law, and provide further guidance. According to NPS management policies, a proposed addition to the national park system will receive a favorable recommendation from the NPS only if it meets all of the following four criteria for inclusion:

- (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. (NPS *Management Policies*, Section 1.3, 2001)

These criteria are designed to ensure that the national park system includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation's natural and cultural resources. They also recognize that there are other management alternatives for preserving the nation's outstanding resources.

Alternatives for NPS management will not be developed for study areas that fail to meet any one of the four above criteria for inclusion. Further definition of each of these criteria is provided in the related sections of this report.

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 NPS may recommend "affiliated area" status or designation as a "heritage area." Affiliated areas are nationally significant areas not owned or administered by the NPS, but which draw on technical or financial assistance from the NPS (NPS, 2001b). To be eligible for "affiliated area" status, an area's resources must: (1) meet the same standards for national significance that apply to units of the national park system; (2) require some special recognition or technical assistance beyond what is available through existing NPS programs; (3) be managed in accordance with the policies and standards that apply to units of the national park system; and (4) be assured of sustained resource protection, as documented in a formal agreement between the NPS and the non -federal management entity (NPS *Management Policies*, 2001, Section 1.3.4).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The study process included public scoping meetings to gather input on issues to be addressed and information on the natural and cultural resources of the area. Meetings were held on August 2, 2000 at Fort Hunter Liggett headquarters, August 3, 2000 in King City, California and on August 5, 2000 in Salinas, California. Stakeholders, including potentially affected agencies and organizations, neighboring landowners, local historians and resource conservation interests, were involved in the study process through meetings and consultations that occurred periodically.

The NPS study team published four newsletters to keep community members and others informed about the study process. The mailing list included approximately 500 names. All information sent by mail has also been available on the web site for the study, www.nps.gov/pwro/fhl. The NPS study team has been open to comments and input from all parties throughout the study process. There has been periodic media coverage.

The *Draft Fort Hunter Liggett Special Resource Study and Environmental Assessment* was published and released for public comment in June 2004. The initial public comment period on the draft report closed on August 6, 2004 but was later extended to October 31, 2004. Public meetings about the draft study report were held on July 7, 2004 in King City, California and July 10, 2004 in Salinas, California. A meeting with Fort Hunter Liggett staff was held at

the installation on July 8, 2004. A newsletter was released on October 1, 2004 summarizing comments on the draft study report and announcing the extension of the public comment period. A summary of comments and responses on the draft study report has been prepared and included in Appendix H. Further details on the public involvement process can be found in the “Consultation and Coordination” chapter of this study report.

RESOURCE ANALYSIS

This report evaluates the significance and suitability of the resources of the entire installation. The study team used information gathered from the scoping process, public meetings, public databases, resource reports, environmental impact reports, library and historical society collections, land and resource management agencies, and other resource specialists to assess the national significance of the resources within Fort Hunter Liggett. A statement of significance was developed by evaluating Fort Hunter Liggett’s resources against the NPS criteria for national significance of cultural and natural resources. An assessment of suitability was developed by comparing Fort Hunter Liggett’s cultural and natural resources to other areas with similar themes and resources already represented in the national park system or comparably protected and managed by other organizations. Resources within Fort Hunter Liggett were found to be both nationally significant and suitable for inclusion in the national park system. Further details on these resource assessments can be found in the “Significance” and “Suitability” chapters of this study report.



Training activity, Fort Hunter Liggett Public Affairs Office photos



A feasibility assessment was prepared to determine whether the area was of appropriate configuration for sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment, whether the area could be efficiently administered at a reasonable cost, and whether there was an appropriate role for the National Park Service in the area's management. Given the change in status and policy regarding excess property at Fort Hunter Liggett, and the continuing use as an active Army Reserve training installation, no property at Fort Hunter Liggett is considered a feasible addition to the national park system at this time. Military use is expected to continue at Fort Hunter Liggett.

DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

In consultation with the Army, California State Parks, the US Forest Service and others, the National Park Service identified two possible alternatives in the draft study report that addressed only the former BRAC excess property:

A) no-action and B) transfer to state and local agencies, primarily California State Parks. These two alternatives and other management options that were once considered in the study process are described in the "Management Options and Opportunities" chapter of this report.

Because the BRAC property is no longer available for transfer to another agency, Alternative A (no action) is no longer an accurate depiction of current management. The Army will continue to manage the unique resources of Fort Hunter Liggett. Additionally, Alternative B is no longer a feasible alternative because there is no longer property available for transfer to California State Parks and other local agencies or organizations. Although no alternatives from the draft study report are being put forth as a recommendation to Congress, some of the actions formerly proposed under Alternative B in the draft study report could enhance the Army's efforts to protect and preserve resources at Fort Hunter Liggett.

Given the significance of resources at Fort Hunter Liggett, the NPS at the request of the Army, could provide technical assistance under its current authorities in areas of resource conservation,

historic preservation, interpretation or education. Additional management opportunities for the preservation and public enjoyment of significant resources at FHL that the Army could consider are included in the "Management Options and Opportunities" chapter of this report. This includes some of the actions formerly proposed in the draft study report.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The *Draft Fort Hunter Liggett Special Resource Study* was accompanied by an *Environmental Assessment* to evaluate the foreseeable environmental consequences of each alternative presented. Because neither alternative is applicable or feasible at this time and the NPS is no longer putting forth these alternatives for consideration, the environmental assessment will not be completed. The former alternatives and environmental assessment published in the draft study report are included in Appendix I.

TRANSMITTAL TO CONGRESS

The study legislation (P.L. 106-113 & H.R. 3194 Conference Report, 113 Stat. 1535, 1537) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to submit the final report to Congress. Because the BRAC excess properties at Fort Hunter Liggett that were recommended for transfer to California State Parks in the draft study report are no longer available, there is no new Federal action envisioned or recommended and no action is required by Congress. Although, no Federal action is recommended, the NPS has provided a list of possible future management opportunities that could be pursued by the Army to further enhance and provide public enjoyment of the significant resources identified in this study report.