

## Response to Comments

This appendix contains the Army's responses to comments received on the Environmental Assessment for Installation Fencing at Fort Richardson, Alaska. Comment letters and verbatim transcripts from the public hearings have been reproduced and are included at the end of this appendix. Each comment has been numbered and given a response. The Army has prepared seven general responses covering the most common items of concern raised by the public. The following table lists individual comments and their corresponding response number. Specific responses were provided when necessary. The general responses are listed following the table. Please refer to the general responses by number. The public comment process resulted in 35 separate comments.

Comment	Submitted by	Response
1	J. Windsor	Please refer to response 1.
2	W. Murphy	Please refer to response 1.
3	H. & B. Gazaway	Please refer to response 1, 2.
4	Anonymous	Please refer to response 1.
5	C. Sink	Please refer to response 1.
6	R. Nabinger	Please refer to response 1.
7	C. Hinds	Please refer to response 1.
8	D. Michaud	Please refer to response 1.
9	K. Drake	Please refer to response 1.
10	C. Jewel	Please refer to response 1.
11	L. Stender	Please refer to response 1.
12	M. Baum	Please refer to response 1.
13	T. Cummings	<p>Construction of the proposed fence is not in response to the deployment of the Stryker force on Fort Richardson but to delineate the boundary and deter illegal activities as outlined 1.2 of the EA. The U.S. Army Alaska has no plans to remove any portion of the proposed fence once erected.</p> <p>For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 2, 3, and 6,</p>
14	L. R. Shaw, SFCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As stated in the EA a main purpose of the proposed fence is boundary demarcation.</li> <li>- The Army held two open houses to garner public and agency input</li> </ul>

		<p>into the fence design. After release of the initial EA, Colonel Boltz and staff met with local community councils resolve conflicts with the proposed project.</p> <p>For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 1 and 3.</p>
15	M. Moore, Basher Community Council (BCC)	<p>-Authorizing improvement to the trail to North Fork of Campbell Creek running northeasterly from the parking lot at Basher Rd onto Army land is not within the scope of this proposed action.</p> <p>- USAG-AK personnel met with BCC on June 15 to collect local land use information for input into fence design.</p> <p>For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7.</p>
16	B. Talbot	<p>Authorizing improvement to the trail to North Fork of Campbell Creek running northeasterly from the parking lot at Basher Rd onto Army land is not within the scope of this proposed action.</p> <p>For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7.</p>
17	S. Key	<p>A request for bid or contract for the proposed fence has not been issued.</p> <p>For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7.</p>
18	S. Seaberg, AK DNR	<p>- Comments noted.</p> <p>- USAG-AK will obtain all requisite permits from the Department of Natural Resources, Office of Habitat Management and Permitting.</p>

		For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 4.
19	L. Schanche, AMATS	Please refer to responses 2.
20	S. Grenier	All outdoor recreational activities carry some inherent safety risk. Individuals choosing to recreate on USAG-AK land may incur additional risk. The potential of such additional risks is made clear to all users of USARTRAK during the process of reading and signing the Safety Permit Liability Release. The decision to recreate on USAG-AK land and therefore to incur this additional risk is a personal choice faced by every individual intent on recreating on Army land.  For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 1, 2, and 6.
21	C. Yoshimitsu	Please refer to responses 1 and 2.
22	L. Krip	Please refer to responses 5.
23	R. Kahlenbeck	Contractor selected for project will coordinate with all appropriate agencies and utilities to include Enstar prior to construction.  For the rest of your comments please refer to response 1 and 6.
24	C. Kelly, Chugiak Dog Musers	USAG-AK personnel met with Chugiak Dog Musers on June 7, 2004 to discuss placement and design of gates and routing of trail.  For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 2.
25	K. Pendleton	Please refer all questions regarding individuals working on the design and construction of the Fence to USAG-AK Public Affairs Office. For the rest of your comments

		please refer to responses 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6.
26	G. Wetzel, Nordic Ski Association	Authorizing use of snow grooming equipment along the fence maintenance corridor is outside the scope of this project.  For the rest of your comments please refer to response 1.
27	F. Norris	Please refer to responses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6.
28	J. Jensen	-At this time there are no plans to incorporate additional languages into the USARTRAK system. -Currently the USARTRAK system is available telephonically with a web based system under development. -There are no plans to install call boxes along the fence.  For the rest of your comments please refer to responses 1, 3, and 7.
29	J. Scudder	Comments noted. USAG-AK Public Affairs Office (PAO) has plans to advertise the USARTRAK system in the local media, at Elmendorf Air Force Base and to various community groups.
30	Mayor Begich	Comments noted. Thank for your support.
31	Katie Lefebure	Comments noted. Thank you for your support.
32	Buzz Scher	Comments noted. Thank you for support.
33	John Bee Bee	Please refer to responses 1 and 2.
34	S. Bailey	Please refer to response 1.
35	J. McCormick	Please refer to response 1.

**Response to Comments – Installation Fencing, Fort Richardson, Alaska**

The following responses address specific issues raised by the public and representatives from local, state, and federal governmental entities. The community has demonstrated considerable interest in Fort Richardson's fencing initiative. This high level of interest is reflected in numerous comments we received, both orally and in writing. These public comments have been carefully considered, and many comments have helped USAG-AK to identify and evaluate further potential environmental impacts posed by the proposed project. Of the public comments received, the most frequently voiced concerns related to the fence location and access points along the fence.

These responses provide specific information helpful in understanding USAG-AK's evaluation of potential environmental impacts associated with the fence project. USAG-AK has carefully evaluated its training requirements, studied potential environmental impacts of the proposed project, and considered public comment, arriving at the conclusion that sufficient care and mitigation has been incorporated into the proposed project that there would not be a significant environmental impact presented by the fence installation and subsequent maintenance.

### **Response 1. Fence Location**

- a. Commentors expressed interest in moving the fence up to 30 feet inside the boundary to create an access corridor that could link trail systems in Eagle River with those in Kincaid and Centennial Park.

**Response:** Please refer to the Environmental Assessment Section 2.3.2 Alternative 2: Pipe Rail and Full Cantonment Security Fencing for discussion of fence design and placement.

The EA states that the fence will be constructed within one foot of the boundary. In addition to deterring vehicle and pedestrian trespass, one of the primary reasons for the fence is to demarcate the boundary. Providing a fence set back would undermine a primary purpose of the fence. Additionally, if the fence were set back 30 feet off the property boundary; USAG-AK would in essence relinquish control of valuable training land.

- b. Commentors stated that the pipe rail fence in the Stuckagain Heights area should terminate the end of Basher Road.

**Response:** The exact design of the fence is unknown, the depiction in the EA (see figure 6) represents a "conceptual" drawing of the proposed fence location based upon Geographic Information System (GIS) data that terminated the fence at the 400 foot contour line, not survey data. Prior to construction a boundary survey will be completed. Based on this site specific information, areas where no opportunity for a vehicle to penetrate the boundary because of extreme topographic variation, the fence will be terminated. It appears, from preliminary information, that the fence may be terminated near the top of Basher Road prior to the steep drop toward the North Fork of Campbell Creek.

- c. Commentors have requested leaving the parking lot accessible on the upper end of Basher Road that appears to be divided by the Fort Richardson boundary. Commentors requested that the

USAG-AK move the fence back (northward) onto Army land to accommodate continued use of the lot.

**Response:** The exact position of the Fort Richardson boundary line is unclear in many places due to overgrown, missing or otherwise obscured boundary markers. Once survey crews determine the exact position of the boundary line in relation to the above-mentioned parking area, USAG-AK will consider the suggestion.

- d. Commentors expressed a concern about the fence being built through wetlands, streams, and vegetated areas.

**Response:** The Army recognizes there will be minor impacts to wetlands and vegetation in the area, but these will not be significant and will be mitigated where necessary within the permitting guidelines and the use of best construction practices. Wetlands occur along the proposed fencing route with the proposed project impacting less than 6 acres. All construction activities in wetlands would be conducted during the winter months to prevent damage. The proposed fencing will terminate five feet outside of the high water mark of water bodies encountered during construction of the proposed fence to mitigate for potential flood hazards. Where necessary, the fence would be designed and installed according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidance. A strip of natural riparian vegetation will be left intact along the banks of waterways to mitigate for potential loss of cover and to minimize erosion and downstream siltation. Within the maintenance corridor on Army property, vegetation will be managed to prevent the establishment of invasive plant species and to maintain low vegetative cover. When possible, existing large white spruce and paper birch will be used in the landscape design.

- e. Commentors expressed a concern on the aesthetics of the fence along Muldoon and Stuckagain Heights.

**Response:** Please refer to the Environmental Assessment Section 3.12.3 Environmental Consequences of Alternative 2: Pipe Rail and Full Cantonment Security Fencing for discussion of aesthetics.

Alternative 2 has the potential to diminish the aesthetics of neighboring property. The aesthetic effect of the proposed fencing would be more pronounced in areas where no fence currently exists. The use of pipe rail fencing along those portions of Fort Richardson bordering residential communities will minimize negative visual impact. The chain link security fence intended for the cantonment area represents a greater impact to aesthetics. Unlike the pipe rail fence, no private property borders the area of Fort Richardson where chain link fencing will be placed.

## **Response 2. Openings and gates along the fence.**

- a. Commentors expressed concern over number, location and design of wildlife and pedestrian openings.

**Response:** Please refer to EA section 3.5 Wildlife

As a result of the public comment process, the Army was able to compile a list of nearly 30 specific locations for pedestrian, wildlife and vehicle openings as suggested by a variety of individuals, organizations and representatives of municipal and state agencies. The bulk of these suggested locations for openings correspond to areas on south post where main trails, utilidors and public easement corridors intersect the Fort Richardson boundary. Army personnel have suggested additional locations for pedestrian and wildlife openings after field investigation. The Army is also working in coordination with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to determine the location and number of any additional wildlife openings, beyond those suggested and those already existing (i.e. moose gates in existing netwire fence along the Glenn) that may be required. USAG-AK must analyze these suggested locations for a variety of factors before a final determination on number and location of openings can be made.

The design of openings in the fence have yet to be finalized and will vary depending on the type of passage desired, the specific location of the opening and type of fence. The Army is coordinating with ADF&G to design openings that will meet the purpose and need of this proposed action as stated in the EA while at the same time help to maximize wildlife, and where appropriate, pedestrian passage across the fence.

Pedestrian and wildlife openings on South post will, for the most part, be considered interchangeable. Openings in the fence on north post will be maximized for wildlife passage but will include provisions to make them secure upon demand.

- b. Commentors from Chugiak Dog Mushers expressed concern about access to mushing trails on North Post.

**Response:** USAG-AK continues to work in conjunction with representatives of the Chugiak Dog Mushing Association to determine appropriate locations for openings as well as gate specifications that will allow for safe passage by dog sleds.

- c. Commentors expressed concern over the gap and gate design in reference to potential access hindrance to utility and emergency crews.

**Response:** Please refer to EA section 2.3.5 Mitigation, Fire Management, as well as to EA section 3.7 Infrastructure.

USAG-AK continues to work with Chugach Electric, AWWU, and Alaska Fire Service, to determine locations and gate specifications that will maximize access to the area behind the fence for both routine maintenance and emergency purposes.

In the event that unforeseen problems relating to utility or emergency access arise post-construction, USAG-AK will make necessary modifications to the fence and/or will take other actions as appropriate to rectify said problem(s).

### Response 3. Construction

- a. Commentors were concerned with clearing too much vegetation during construction.

**Response:** Where necessary a *maximum* of 30-feet of vegetation will be removed for construction purposes on military property. Where access corridors of sufficient size already exist no additional vegetation will be removed. The total length of the proposed fence is 32.6 miles with approximately 11.2 miles of that area previously being undisturbed. A maximum of 78 acres of undisturbed vegetation would be impacted along the 30-foot corridor. Any woodland or shrub dominated area would be cleared to ground level and over time be converted to an herb/grass plant community. Vegetation along the fence line would be maintained at an herb/grass stage with shrub growth discouraged for security and wildland fire purposes.

- b. Commentors wanted to be informed of timing and location of construction activity.

**Response:** The contractor selected for the proposed fence project will be required to contact homeowners adjacent to an intended construction zone prior to commencement of construction activities. While the exact details have yet to be worked out USAG-AK will ensure that notice will be both timely and adequate.

- c. Commentors were concerned with the 30 foot buffer clearing will result in further establishment of invasive plant species.

**Response:** The width of the buffer corridor may approach a maximum of 30 feet but in many cases will be considerably less depending on local topography and conditions. Where possible, existing clearings and roads will be utilized instead of clearing new vegetation. It is therefore likely that the total area available to pioneering invasive flora resulting from the proposed action will be much smaller than that suggested in the EA.

USAG-AK monitors for the presence of invasive plant species through its Land Condition Trends Analysis (LCTA) program and is a cooperating agency on the Alaska Committee for Noxious Invasive Plant Management (CNIPM). A comprehensive invasive species management plan for USAG-AK is currently under development and will include specific methods for control of invasive plant species along the corridor and elsewhere on U.S. Army lands.

Until this plan is implemented, however, USAG-AK will coordinate with the Division of Forestry Matanuska-Susitna/Southwest Office and the Alaska Fire Service to determine preferred methods to maintain the buffer corridor to prevent the regeneration of flammable, prolific invasive species.

#### **Response 4. Recreation and natural resource impacts**

- a. Commentors were concerned wildlife will be negatively affected, specifically moose.

**Response:** Please refer to EA Section 3.5 Wildlife.

The EA acknowledges that the proposed action may impact individual moose movement patterns in the Anchorage and Eagle River area. However, the proposed action is not expected to cause a significant adverse affect to the overall moose population of the area. The Army will continue to monitor the moose population on Fort Richardson as part of its Ecosystem Management Program. If a change in the moose population is observed, adaptive management techniques, which are fundamental to the Ecosystem Management process, would be applied. Examples of adaptive management may include improvements to habitat, installation of additional gates, modification of fence or gate design or a combination of any of these.

- b. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources suggested a program to radio-collar moose on Fort Richardson

**Response:** USAG-AK will investigate the feasibility of such a study to include a thorough cost benefit analysis.

- c. Commentors were unclear whether or not frequency and duration of training events will curtail residents' recreational access.

**Response:** While the exact frequency and timing of future training events is still to be determined, it is USAG-AK's intent to maintain recreational access to Fort Richardson as much as possible and consistent with military training needs and the safety of military and civilian recreational users. However, with new ranges under construction on South Post, is should be expected their will be more frequent closures of previously open areas. Access for outdoor recreation activities are only closed during range operations or other military training activities.

- d. Commentors suggested a 100-foot undisturbed riparian buffer be maintained along the waterways.

**Response:** USAG-AK will, where possible, maintain up to a 100 foot undisturbed riparian buffer along waterways encountered during construction of the proposed fence.

#### **Response 5. Public safety issues**

- a. Commentors were concerned that increased training and weapons firing poses a risk to area residences.

**Response:** An Infantry Platoon Battle Course (IPBC) is being constructed on the Davis Range off Bulldog Trail. Once this facility is operational a higher usage of the area is expected. The range complex and surface danger zone areas (area based on empirical data that is designed to contain all fired rounds with at failure rate probability of 1 in 1 million) would be off-limits during range use for recreational activities. There would be no potential

for unexploded ordnance in this particular area due to the proposed range upgrade. Only non-dud-producing munitions would be used within the south post ranges.

b. Commentors were concerned with the metal pipe rail in close proximity to power lines.

**Response:** Modern power lines are designed to exacting specifications and rarely break. In fact, most failures are due to physical stress exerted by fallen trees. The power line corridors on Fort Richardson are well maintained minimizing the possibility of a tree-strike with subsequent line failure. However, in the event of such a failure, it is possible that the line could contact and temporarily energize a nearby metal fence such as the proposed pipe rail fence or any of the private fences erected along the Fort Richardson boundary. The proposed pipe rail will, for this reason, be properly grounded. In addition, gaps in the proposed fence would limit the length of fence that could be energized to the area in contact with the power line.

c. Commentors were concerned with flying debris from hydro-axe during construction.

**Response:** The contractor selected for the proposed fence project will be required to contact adjacent homeowners prior to construction activities. Contractors selected will adhere to all industry safety standards. Major trails and roads leading into an area where a hydro axe and/or other form of brush removing equipment are working will be blocked at some specified distance from the project to help deter inadvertent pedestrian trespass into the work zone.

d. Commentors were concerned regarding access for fire fighting and emergency vehicles.

**Response:** USAG-AK is working with local emergency response officials to ensure sufficient access through the fence for fire fighting purposes.

e. Commentors desired information regarding fence patrols and were concerned that these patrols may pose a health and/or safety risk to nearby neighborhoods

**Response:** as mentioned in the EA, USAG-AK personnel other than soldiers scheduled for training events will conduct patrols. These patrols would be conducted by a combination of personnel from the Military Police, Conservation Law Enforcement Office, or Range Inspectors. Vehicles used to patrol the boundary would include conspicuous (non-camouflaged) pick-up trucks, light sport utility vehicles and All-Terrain-Vehicles. All vehicles used on patrols would be modern, efficient and well-serviced and would create minimal emissions. Personnel will also conduct foot patrols as necessary.

The buffer zone along the fence would be maintained at a low vegetative state using methods suggested by the Fire Service and thus would emit very little dust when traversed by slow-moving patrol vehicles. Patrol frequency and timing would vary greatly depending on a variety of logistical and circumstantial factors as well as the need to avoid establishing predictable and therefore exploitable patrol patterns. Patrols are, by design, conducted at low speeds with personnel vigilantly watching for wildlife and pedestrian presence throughout

the entirety of the patrol. Potential danger to any children playing along the boundary fence would thus be greatly minimized. In addition, the area of the Fort Richardson boundary immediately adjacent to Muldoon Elementary is currently protected by a netwire fence, which would further minimize potential safety hazards, associated with patrol vehicles in that area.

In addition to watching for wildlife and pedestrian presence, patrolling personnel would look for any illicit or suspicious behavior, safety hazards, emergencies, or any other issues requiring attention. Rather than posing a risk to the community, USAG-AK considers the addition of these patrols as a benefit to our neighbors along the boundary as well as to the many citizens choosing to recreate on Fort Richardson.

### **Response 6. Procedural dissatisfaction**

- a. Commentors stated the Army did not take the convenience of the community into consideration when coordinating the meeting place.

**Response:** A public meeting was held at West High School May 25 to inform the community about the Fort Richardson proposed fencing project. Public testimony and written comments were received indicating concern about potential fence issues. Those comments were recorded, noted and taken into consideration in the NEPA process. The meeting was held at West High due to size limitations at venues near the Muldoon community. A previous public meeting was held at Susitna Elementary School that was insufficient to comfortably accommodate a concerned public. Since the turn out was so great at the previous public meeting, USAG-AK preferred a venue that could comfortably hold a minimum of 500 persons with fixed seating, limiting possible locations in the Anchorage Bowl. USAG-AK Public Affairs Office inquired at all possible locations that qualified with only two locations West and Chugiak High Schools available on the desired date.

- b. Commenters questioned why the initial Draft EA was released.

**Response:** In May of 2003 a *final* EA with a *Draft* Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) was released. After the public open house, which presented USAG-AK with many of the communities concerns, the Garrison Command withdrew the EA and ordered a review of the public and agency comments. USAG-AK staff rewrote the document while incorporating many of the public and agency comments.

### **Response 7. USARTRAK**

- a. Commenters requested a convenient location to obtain Recreation Access Permits (RAP) and register for the USARTRAK system.

**Response:** USAG-AK will make available an area in the Visitor Center at Main Gate to sign-up individuals for their RAP. Additionally, USAG-AK representatives may be available for off-site visits for larger groups to facilitate individuals obtaining their RAP. Please contact the Natural Resources office to set-up an appointment.

