

A Fort McClellan
National Wildlife Refuge

FEASIBILITY STUDY

for the
Fort McClellan Local Reuse and
Redevelopment Authority

by

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OUTLINE

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General Description of Fort McClellan

Located in Calhoun County, Alabama and adjacent to the city of Anniston, the Fort McClellan installation includes three separate parcels of land. They are the Choccolocco Corridor (4,488 acres) , Pelham Range (22,245 acres) and Fort McClellan's Main Post (18,946 acres). All three lie within the Valley and Ridge Physiographic Province.

Background of Fort McClellan Leading to NWR Concept

Fort McClellan's Main Post was recommended for closure in 1995 by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRACC). The closure is scheduled to take place in 1999. In order to determine the future reuse and redevelopment of this base, a Fort McClellan Reuse and Redevelopment Authority (LRA) was established to provide recommendations to the Department of Defense. A variety of proposals have been submitted and evaluated for consideration in developing a final reuse plan. The vast majority of these proposals have concentrated on the currently developed cantonment area. They have included reuse and redevelopment concepts which are industrial, academic, educational, commercial, residential, and civic. A few proposals received by the LRA focus not on the cantonment area but instead on Fort McClellan's mountainous area. The most significant of these have come from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) Game and Fish Division, as well

as the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC). Although not a formal proposal, on December 26, 1996 the Department of the Interior's US Fish and Wildlife Service indicated to the LRA in a letter signed by Regional Director Noreen Clough (see "Letters" in Appendix), that "In view of the importance of protecting the unique longleaf pine ecosystem, the Service would like to actively participate with the Local Reuse Authority in formulating plans to preserve this habitat." The USFWS also indicated a particular interest in partnershiping with the ADCNR. The USFWS interest in Fort McClellan was clarified and pursued during a two-day meeting held in the offices of the Jacksonville State University Environmental Policy and Information Center (EPIC). Attended by five USFWS administrators (see Appendix for meeting participants and details), EPIC and, for the sake of introductions and Refuge concept briefings, the Fort McClellan LRA Executive Director, Chairman and Assistant Chairman attended portions of this meeting as well. Also attending the April 16-17 meeting was a representative from the Nature Conservancy of Alabama. Because the Nature Conservancy (TNC) has an interest in the protection of the rare habitat such as the longleaf pine ecosystem, TNC continues to prioritize the establishment of a Fort McClellan National Wildlife Refuge. The Nature Conservancy has played a major role in the reuse of many military installations. They maintain several Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and Memorandums of Agreement (MOA) with Department of Defense, they have many offices established on military bases and to further exemplify their relationship with the military, they have included five star General Norman Swartzcoff on their Board of Directors.

In June of 1995 the Nature Conservancy's Government Relations Office in Arlington, Virginia wrote a guide called "Military Base Closure and Realignment: A Guide to Opportunities for Conservation." It is included in the Appendix of this Feasibility Study.

In June of 1997 the Alabama Forestry Commission withdrew their interest in Fort McClellan. The ADCNR, however, has shown an increased level of interest and on July 7, 1997 wrote the Fort McClellan LRA requesting a meeting between the LRA, ADCNR and the USFWS. Coordinated by the Jacksonville State University EPIC office, these meetings have taken place to clarify the future roles of the USFWS and the ADCNR.

Why a National Wildlife Refuge?

The US Fish and Wildlife Service has a particular interest in protecting and educating the public regarding unique habitats such as Fort McClellan's longleaf pine ecosystem. The Alabama Department of Conservation's Game and Fish Division is interested in developing a partnership with the USFWS and has an interest in managing this area for game species. Due to the presence of unexploded ordinance (UXO) over this area, the Department of Defense (DOD) has not yet determined if it will allow for this land to be transferred to a state agency such as the ADCNR. In most cases and according to Major David LaBranche (Fort Ord Project Manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) contaminated lands "may not be released from federal custody until the most stringent efforts have been made to ensure appropriate protection of the public."

In situations involving biologically significant natural areas contaminated by UXO, precedence has been set allowing for the DOD to laterally transfer such contaminated areas to another federal agency. The USFWS would serve this purpose. In such a case the title and/or management of the land may be transferred to the USFWS while the Department of defense would maintain liability.

History of The Refuge System

As the Fort McClellan Local Reuse and Redevelopment Authority considers establishing a portion of Fort McClellan as a National Wildlife Refuge it is useful to understand the history and operation of the National Wildlife Refuge system. (See Appendix for USFWS National Wildlife Refuge Internet overview).

The first National Wildlife Refuge was Florida's Pelican Island (east of Orlando) and it was established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903. The primary reason for this Refuge was to protect birds such as the heron and egret which were being over-harvested by the fashion industry for feathers. Since that time many additional threats to the natural environment have taken their toll on our nation's wild lands. For example, pollution, drought, deforestation, fire suppression, and urbanization have had a negative impact on wildlife habitats of all types. Over the years, National Wildlife Refuges have taken on more land and correspondingly, more significance as now they safeguard a variety of habitats through protection, restoration and management.

Operation of The Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge system is administered by the Department of Interior's US Fish and Wildlife Service. At present, this agency oversees more than 500 refuges encompassing approximately 92 million acres of land and water. Through cooperative efforts between Federal, State, and local agencies (such as the Fort McClellan Local Reuse and Redevelopment Authority), private organizations and individuals, the Refuge system has become a model for habitat stewardship and ecotourism. Although National Wildlife Refuges have typically been water related, more and more upland areas are being included in order to protect a variety of endangered species, habitats and unusual ecosystems. In the case of every National Wildlife Refuge, management is the key to success. Because of this, there are nearly as many management strategies as there are refuges. For example, some of the management practices include forest burning, thinning, and harvesting. Management may also include plantings, erosion control, as well as the harvest of fish and wildlife. Not all refuges are manipulated in this way, some are left to the grace of nature. There are 21 million acres of national wildlife refuge "wilderness" areas to benefit creatures such the Barren-ground caribou, green sea turtle, and Florida panther. While most people imagine plant and animal life to be the primary beneficiary of the refuge system, people also benefit through the protection of our heritage. Refuges also protect archaeological and historic sites. From prehistoric native American villages and campsites to World War II relics, our human heritage is protected by the Refuge system. And while our human past is protected by the

Refuge system so is our future. Refuges not only protect our environment for future generations but also they can generate significant levels of income for the communities where they are located. As a result of the diverse National Wildlife Refuge system wildlife populations, plant populations and human populations benefit.

Benefits of a Wildlife Refuge

It is generally believed that positive, national recognition comes to most national wildlife refuges. In fact, the overall level of visitation for national wildlife refuges continues to climb year after year. Last year there were approximately 31.2 million visitors to the national wildlife refuge system. These visits are for a variety of purposes. There were 1.6 million NWR visits for hunting, 5.2 million visits for fishing, .4 million (400,000) visits for environmental education programs, and 24 million visits for the sake of wildlife observation and photography.

Direct and Indirect economic benefits

Tourism is the number two industry in Alabama and the third largest retail sales industry in the United States, with over 424.5 billion dollars in sales. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the people who visit national wildlife refuges contribute to the surrounding area's economy. This premise has been verified by refuge managers around the country as well as by managers in Alabama.

Relating to the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge in Decatur, Alabama both the Decatur City Manager and the Refuge manager agree. According to Manager Tuck

Stone, over 600,000 people visit the Wheeler refuge on an annual basis generating millions of dollars to the local community. The Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge in southeast Alabama is another example of a successful tourism-based economy. According to Dr. Douglas Purcell, while many visitor attractions in the Eufaula region suffered decreases in visitor activity in 1996, the Eufaula National Wildlife Refuge continued to enjoy an increase in visitation during this same period of time. Specifically, there was a 26.9% increase of visitation from 1995 to 1996. The 1996 number of visits added to a total of 393,416 or 83,393 more visitors than the previous year.

Recent (1993-1994) studies by Dr. Paul Kerlinger (see appendix) have demonstrated the economic impact of bird watching or "birding ecotourism" on communities surrounding National Wildlife Refuges. In this study, Dr. Kerlinger researched eight US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuges as a part of a larger study of ecotourism. The refuges were located in California (Salton Sea NWR), Kansas (Quivira NWR), New Mexico (Bosque del Apache NWR), New Jersey (E. Forsythe NWR), Ohio (Ottawa NWR), Texas (Santa Anna and Laguna Atascosa NWR), and Virginia (Chincoteague NWR). At these refuges the number of visitors who were there just for bird watching activities ranged from about 17,000 per year at Quivira NWR in Kansas to nearly 200,000 at the Ottawa NWR in neighboring Ohio. With more than 70% of the survey respondents reporting that they had attended some college, the study showed that the income and educational levels of these visitors were well above the national averages. In Kerlinger's study, two measures of economic activity were

calculated: 1). the total amount of money spent by visitors including travel to and from a refuge, and 2). the overall economic impact of visitors on the communities surrounding a Refuge. This was done with simple arithmetic models and without economic multipliers. The total expenditures of visitors to the eight National Wildlife Refuges during their entire trips added up to over one hundred million dollars (including air fares, car rentals, gasoline, lodging, meals, and other travel expenditures). The actual economic impact of visitors on the communities surrounding each of the Refuges varied from just under \$1 million (\$0.63 million) at Quivira NWR to about \$14 million at Santa Ana NWR. It was determined that the average ecotourist was worth between \$12 and \$145 to the local community's economy.

These findings show that National Wildlife Refuge lands are an important economic asset to both the national economy and the economies of local communities where the individual refuges are located. In the Executive Summary of this study it stated that "Ecotourists provide a major source of external revenue to these communities for which the community does not have to provide or pay for the attraction that brings the ecotourists. The information in this study will be useful to local planners, businesses, and elected officials who seek long-term, sustainable economic development."

Recreational Benefits

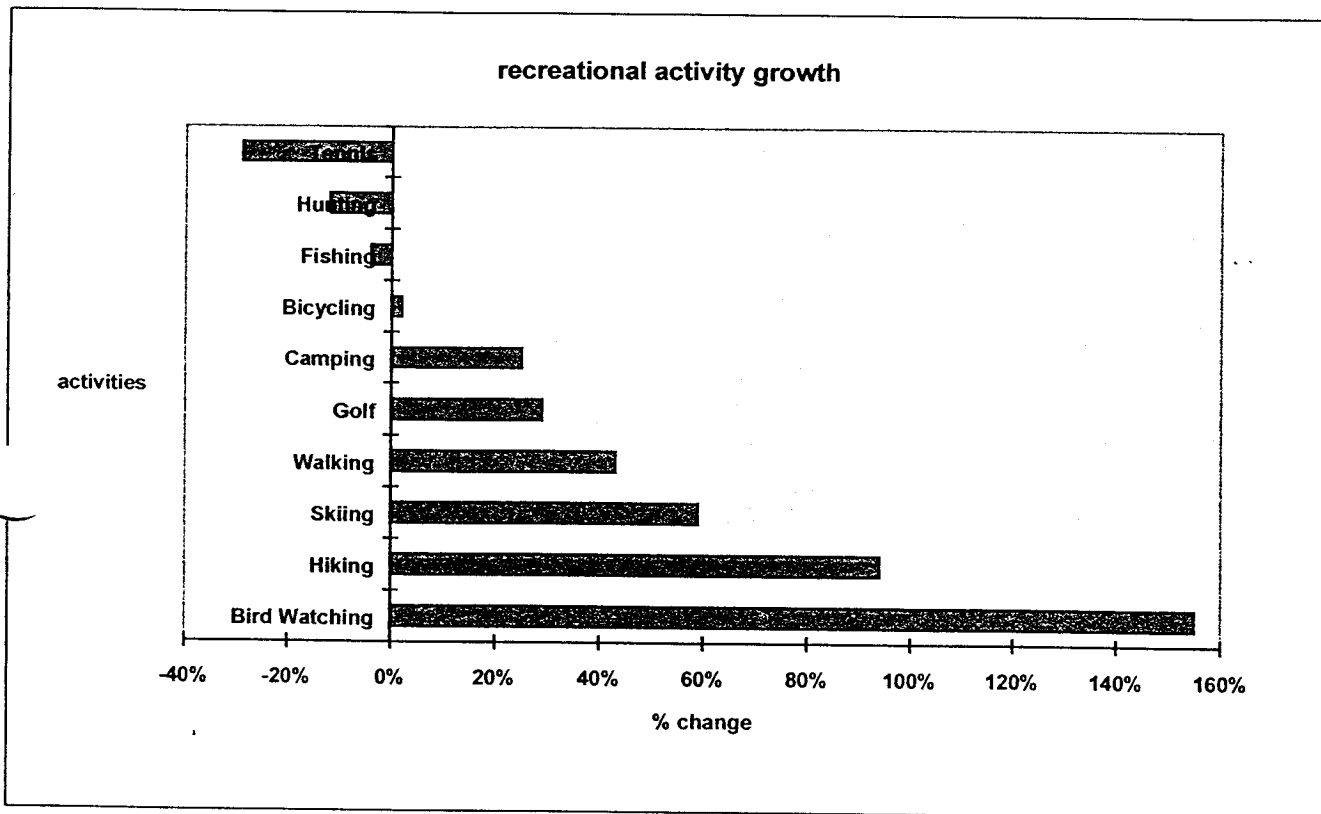
It is significant to note that over 50% of those visiting a National Wildlife Refuges do so specifically to visit the Refuge. Because of this, it is to be

expected that new moneys will be injected into communities that establish a National Wildlife Refuge. According to the Service's *1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, participants spent \$96.9 billion and supported hundreds of thousands of jobs. These figures represent a 59 percent increase in expenditures since 1991. In comparison, Americans spent \$81 billion dollars on new automobiles last year!

Wildlife Watching

Profiles exist defining and characterizing potential visitors to National Wildlife Refuges. The wildlife watchers known as "birders", for example, are family oriented and 50% of them travel with their spouse. The average age of these visitors are in the middle 40's to lower 50's and their sex ratio was slightly tilted towards men who accounted for between 49% and 61% (average approximately 54% male). Bird watchers are a significant population of people to study as the 1994-95 National Recreation Survey showed that birdwatching has become one of the fastest growing recreational activities in the nation. The chart on the following page shows how the popularity of bird watching has increased by 155% while the popularity of golf has increased by only 29%. Other activities such as tennis have actually decreased by as much as 29%.

In addition to the significance of bird watching on a national level, birders have a significant impact in Alabama. According to a 1995 Southwick Associates report, *The Economic Contributions of Bird and Waterfowl Recreation in the United States*, there are approximately 1,660 jobs in Alabama that are supported by non-consumptive bird use.



Overall, twenty-four million Americans took trips to observe, photograph, or feed wildlife in 1996, while 61 million enjoyed non-consumptive wildlife recreation around their homes.

In addition to the great variety of common plant life and wildlife at Fort McClellan, there are endangered, threatened, and candidate species as well. These species will increase a greater level of visitor interest in the area.

Hunting Opportunity

The mountain area of Fort McClellan has provided and continues to provide excellent habitat for a variety of game species. White tail deer, rabbit, squirrel, turkey, quail, dove and other species are abundant. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) Game and Fish Division maintains a keen interest in entering into an agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Their interest, which is to take part in the management of this area, is fully described in *Notice of Interest* that was filed on December 18, 1996, by the ADCNR.

It is one of the four major goals of the NWRS "... to provide refuge visitors with high-quality, safe, wholesome, and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent these activities are compatible with the purpose for which the refuge was established." The service recognizes hunting as an acceptable, traditional and legitimate form of wildlife-oriented recreation and, in many instances, as a management tool to effectively control wildlife population levels. In fact, hunting is authorized on refuges pursuant to the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, the Refuge Recreation Act, and in the enabling authorities for several individual refuges. Hunting on refuges should be coordinated with other public uses to minimize conflict or disharmony.

Fishing Opportunity

While opportunity for fishing at Fort McClellan is basically limited to the lakes which are present on the Main Post, it is a popular recreational activity which should be included. The bodies of water which provide for fishing are Lake Reilly and Lake Yahoo. Similar to the case of hunting, the Service recognizes sport fishing as an acceptable, traditional form of wildlife-related recreation that can be, and is sometimes used as a management tool to effectively manipulate fish population levels. Recreational fishing on refuges is also consistent with, and an important implementation tool for the Service's National Recreational Fisheries Policy.

Hiking Opportunity

As is shown in the chart on the previous page, the popularity of hiking has increased by nearly 100% over the past decade. It is thought that this trend will continue to increase as urban areas grow and residents continue to look for places to escape and enjoy recreation. Due to the proximity of Fort McClellan to urban areas like Atlanta, Chattanooga and Birmingham, and due to the fact that Northeast Alabama already represents an area rich with hiking trails, additional trails at the site of the proposed National Wildlife Refuge would create a synergistic effect that could potentially maximize the area's ecotourism/hiking potential. An existing trails system is nearly ready for use at Fort McClellan. Both primary and secondary fire breaks have been cut throughout the 12,000 acres. Before there was an overall awareness of unexploded ordinance, these

pathways were cut into the sides, bottoms and ridges of the mountain area. They could serve as a network of trails for both hiking and mountain bicycling.

Bicycling Opportunity

Similar to the popularity of hiking, the popularity of bicycling has increased dramatically . Many believe that the reason for this is due to the corresponding popularity of off-road, (non-motorized) mountain bikes. As described in the previous section, the Fort McClellan National Wildlife Refuge would have ample opportunities for the development of mountain bike trails in connection with wildlife observation. Such trails have already proven successful in the area as the Alabama Forestry Commission, in cooperation with JSU's Environmental Policy and Information Center, have established a series of popular mountain bike trails in the Choccolocco Corridor of the Talladega National Forest. Nearby, is the Chief Ladiga Trail, another popular bicycle attraction. Adding to the synergistic effect described in the previous section, this rail-to-trail conversion is currently attracting up to 50 people per hour and attracting positive national attention.

Camping Opportunity

Throughout the region being proposed for reuse as a National Wildlife Refuge, there are many level areas that could be developed as primitive camp areas. Recreational vehicles camp areas would also be possible adjacent

to the NWR boundary. Although unexploded ordinance must be considered in such cases, models like the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area have shown that the US Army considers a potential camp ground safe when cleared to a four foot level.

Timber Harvest Opportunity

Throughout the 12,000 acres of land being proposed as a National Wildlife refuge there is a substantial amount of timber. This timber, however, is not of particular value. Due to its having grown on steep rocky slopes much of the hardwood timber is hollow, the pines are inaccessible, and harvesting them would cause too much environmental damage (i.e. erosion). Never the less, the USFWS allows for commercial harvesting as a management tool when it is deemed necessary in order to maintain or restore the natural ecosystem. As an example, harvest of timber may be allowed in the case of potentially damaging infestations of the southern pine beetle. Harvesting timber on a NWR is not allowed for the sole purpose of generating funds.

Local Benefits of a National Wildlife Refuge

Aside from benefits related to economic development, tourism, resource protection, and positive national recognition, there will also be educational opportunity and a synergistic, combined effect of establishing Northeast Alabama as a "hub" for outdoor recreation and appreciation.

Environmental Education

The 12,000 acres of proposed Fort McClellan National Wildlife Refuge would provide a natural laboratory for students of all ages. According to the USFWS, the Service places a high priority on education and programs that serve to enhance the visitor's appreciation of the natural world. As described by the Service, natural history and ecological relationships are integrated through publications, signage, displays, interpretive kiosks, and visitor centers. In 1994, 108 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System had visitor centers. Interpretive programs on refuges include films, guided nature walks, lectures, and demonstrations. During FY 1996, there were 27.7 million participants (94% of participants in activities on refuge system lands) took part in interpretation and nature observation on units of the NWRS. The USFWS also promote and sponsor several special events on many of their NWRS units. Examples of these include "birding festivals" and "watchable wildlife" events where program goals are to:

- provide the public an enhanced opportunity for the enjoyment of wildlife;
- contribute to the local economy of the region surrounding a particular refuge;
- promote learning about wildlife and habitat needs;
- enhance active support for resource conservation.

When the educational goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System are combined with the goals of local resources such as the Anniston Museum of Natural History, the Alabama Department of Conservation, Jacksonville State University, Ayers State Community College, the Anniston office of the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, etc., there would be the potential for the development of a sizable environmental education effort.

Another possible collaboration involving the Anniston Museum of Natural History has been discussed. This concept involves the construction of a NRWS visitor center at the museum. Although most NWR visitors centers are located within the boundary of the refuge they are meant to interpret, there may be a possibility to establish the Fort McClellan National Wildlife Refuge visitor center outside the boundary. In such a case it could be constructed on museum property. This partnership option would save the museum and USFWS funds by presenting the possibility of shared administrative costs, infrastructure costs and staff costs. It would also be mutually beneficial by increasing visibility and visitation to both facilities.

Combined effect of NE Alabama outdoor recreation

Due to the presence of many outdoor recreation and nature related education facilities in Northeast Alabama, it is believed that the addition of a National Wildlife Refuge could create the "critical mass" required to establish this area as the hub for nature appreciation and outdoor recreation. A Fort McClellan National Wildlife Refuge would be well suited to serve a large number of people. It would be closer to Atlanta than any other National Wildlife Refuge facility (the Piedmont NWR near Macon, GA is the next closest NWR to Atlanta.) A synergistic effect may result by establishing a NWR near the following areas and facilities:

- Anniston Museum of Natural History
- Little River Canyon National Preserve
- Chief Ladiga Rail Trail
- Appalachian Hiking Trail
- Talladega National Forest
- Dugger Mountain Wilderness (proposed)
- Cheaha State Park

Compatibility and Negatives Associated with LRA Plan

The establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge would enhance all aspects of the existing Fort McClellan Comprehensive Reuse Plan. After considerable review and analysis there would be minimal contradictions

associated with such a concept. The only negatives are the limitations that a refuge would place on timber harvest and the area's development. Due to the presence of unexploded ordinance, however, it has been determined that timber harvest and development would not be possible in any event.

Aesthetic attractiveness of the Area

For nearly any reuse or redevelopment plan chosen by the Fort McClellan Reuse and Redevelopment Authority, a natural back drop of undisturbed, forested mountains would maintain the aesthetic nature of the area. It is generally believed that such scenery generally benefits plans to market an area.

A NWR may Enhance the Presence of:

A Retirement Community

The establishment of a Fort McClellan NWR may increase the attractiveness of a nearby retirement community. Jacksonville State University's Dr. Mark Fagan is supportive in establishing Fort McClellan's mountain area as a national wildlife refuge. According to him such a designation "is consistent with the overall reuse of the fort...". Dr. Fagan has also stated that "it (the refuge concept) seems to be the best reuse of the land".

Woodland walking and running trails

According to Dr. Mark Fagan, outdoor walking is a retired person's number one recreational preference. The establishment of a Fort McClellan Wildlife Refuge could provide many miles of primitive hiking/walking opportunity.

Picnic areas

As it relates to the establishment of a Fort McClellan industrial park, retirement community, or educational campus, employees, residents, and students generally utilize available picnic grounds for meals and events. There are many sites that would accommodate the development of picnic grounds.

A Botanical Garden Concept

A proposal by Anniston resident and botanist, Mr. Hayes Jackson, to establish a botanical garden and arboretum in collaboration with the proposed National Wildlife Refuge may be beneficial. As proposed, the botanical garden would have three major functions in that it would serve as an educational outlet for local and non-local visitors wishing to learn about our native flora as well as other rare and unusual plants that can be grown in this area of Alabama. The garden would provide information about particular plants and the diverse plant communities contained within the boundaries of the proposed Refuge.

Second, the gardens would be a conservation facility where rare and endangered plants would be grown for preservation of a particular species,

propagation of species to be distributed to other botanical gardens/arboreta, and seed exchange.

Third, according to the Association of American Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA), botanical institutions should be actively involved in plant research. The facility would experiment with landscape and urban forestry species candidates for Alabama and others southeastern states. Active research would involve state universities and independent researchers.

The botanical garden site could contain a variety of habitats such as open and wooded areas, wet and dry areas and a water source including a stream, pond and swamp. The diverse habitats would support a variety of plant species contained in their natural surroundings.

The presence of a larger body of water would have aesthetic and functional value. A lake or larger pond would be the centerpiece or focal point on which the garden would be based.

The land area for the proposed garden could serve as the welcome or information center and should be in close proximity to the proposed wildlife refuge. The acreage should be large enough to accommodate a variety of planting areas, a maintenance facility, and could include a park-like setting to achieve a multipurpose function.

Regulatory Facilitation

The Environmental Impact Study (EIS) under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) must assess the disposal of Fort McClellan's main post.

The degradation or loss of undisturbed areas, as well as, effects from management changes, can be expected to complicate and possibly lengthen the finalization of the EIS. By assuring proper management and protection of these lands through the establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge, protection of these values could be demonstrated to facilitate and possibly shorten the EIS process. In other words, the designation of the Fort McClellan's mountain area within as a National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) could facilitate the NEPA process and enable the reuse of all of Fort McClellan at the earliest possible date. By insuring protection as a NWR, potential adverse effects associated with reuse would not require evaluations within the Environmental Impact Study (example: clearance of the mountain slopes, sedimentation, loss of biological organisms, etc.) This can be expected to shorten the evaluation process, allowing for an environmentally suitable Record of Decision (ROD) to be published. If extensive impacts must be evaluated from cleanup and reuse, further analysis and studies could extend the process, delaying publication of the ROD, and the potential of all reuse alternatives.

UXO will be an ongoing issue for many years at Fort McClellan. By establishing a National Wildlife Refuge, this land could be managed and used by the public under a controlled basis. This would provide management, as well as, financial income at the earliest possible date. Without this controlled management, much of this land could be restricted and closed to the public for many years into the future.

Need for Resource Protection

Biological and Ecological

Many surveys and studies of Fort McClellan describe the Main Post as being of outstanding ecological and biological significance and based on research conducted by Auburn University, Jacksonville State University, and the Nature Conservancy, of most notable significance is the area's exemplary examples of the unique and threatened longleaf pine forest community. It is special for its size and quality, but also for its being intact in what Nature Conservancy ecologist Chris Oberholtzer describes as "an unfragmented matrix together with other natural habitats characteristic of the mountains of Alabama, such as forested mountain seeps, Virginia pine forests, rocky talus slopes, and chestnut oak and other hardwood dominated forests." Protecting this habitat is also timely in that the longleaf pine, *Pinus palustris* Miller, has recently been named by the legislature as Alabama's "official state tree."

In an interdepartmental memo from Oberholtzer to Kathy Stiles Cooley, Nature Conservancy of Alabama's Executive Director, many other areas of biological significance were described. In part, the following summarizes this memo and identifies the area's most notable natural resources.

A major category of Fort McClellan's biological significance is the area's bird life. Largely due to the area being an unfragmented forest, many species are present that have been eliminated from other areas which have been impacted by development such as roads, logging, construction, and/or agriculture. The Appendix of this study lists 144 species of bird that have been

actually observed at Fort McClellan. Also in the Appendix of this study is a paper which describes in detail: "The effect of forest fragmentation on the risk of predation of passerine bird nests at Fort McClellan, Alabama."

One bird of particular interest is the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW). This federally protected species was a breeding resident of Fort McClellan until at least the late 1970's. As of today, active colonies of RCW occur on the nearby Talladega National Forest, which serves as home to a recognized recovery population for the species.

Another federal species of concern is a rare plant known as the white fringeless orchid. Fort McClellan is thought to harbor one of the largest remaining populations of this species in existence. It occurs in the mountain seeps within the mountain longleaf community complex. One particularly notable population of the white fringeless orchid is marked by roadside signage located just east of the Bains Gap waterfall and back gate to Fort McClellan.

Although numerous populations of several other rare plants and animal species occur throughout the 12,000 acre forested complex, another notable species is the federally endangered gray bat. This mammalian species has been documented along stream corridors on the Main Post of Fort McClellan. It is also the focus of research currently being conducted during the Summer of 1997.

The streams of the Main Post also harbor many rare aquatic, invertebrate species which require cool, clean, running water to survive. It is significant to note that these species exist due to the fact there is very little erosion associated with the streams of Fort McClellan. Any reuse alternatives (ie. the extraction of

unexploded ordinance) that would result in the removal of forest cover, soil disturbance, increased erosion, sedimentation, stream turbidity, or water temperature would result in the degradation of these resources. This, in turn, would have a great impact on the NEPA process and ultimately the installations final Record of Decision.

To satisfy the NEPA process, those portions of Fort McClellan which are home to ecologically significant features will need to be managed by an agency or organization with a history of proficiency in dealing with such resources. The USFWS has such a record of proficiency.

An example of management that would require proficiency is the area's need for controlled burning. Components of the forest, including the mountain longleaf community, require fire at regular intervals in order to maintain the ecological health of this ecosystem. Without fire, new longleaf pine seedlings as well as other plant species such as grasses and legumes (important as food sources for wildlife) fail. Any reuse plans that would fragment the forested regions of Fort McClellan would interfere with future prescribed burning. In turn, this would lead to the deterioration and ultimate loss of the fire-dependent habitat types.

Finally, it should be recognized that by the nature of Fort McClellan's terrain, any activities that cause erosion on the area's steep slopes will have a detrimental effect on the area's ecosystem. According to TNC's Chris Oberholtzer, "Reuse alternatives involving removal of the forest canopy and/or disturbance of the soil, such as the might occur with attempted removal of

contaminants or unexploded ordinance, would have a devastating negative impacts on the ecosystem, in the form of erosion of the steep, highly erodible slopes, siltation of the streams and seeps, and the loss of habitat for native plants and animals. the impacts associated with the various reuse alternatives need to be addressed comprehensively in the NEPA analysis."

Archaeological

In addition to its biological and ecological worth, Fort McClellan is known for its high level of archaeological significance. From the Paleoindian Periods to the Missississippian Periods, Fort McClellan is well-represented by sites and artifacts that have been researched and studied for years.

There are a several sites at Fort McClellan of particular significance.

Examples of these include:

- two caves which have been reported by researchers. They may contain burials or signs of previous dwellings.
- Reported is a "Snake Effigy" resembling a long, undulating stone wall on the crest of Skeleton Mountain. It is large enough so that it can be seen from the air and if it is verified as such, it could serve as a significant tourist attraction.
- Large stone mounds have been discovered which may have been the site of burials or other ceremonious activity. Although evidence has shown that many of these stone structures were the product of prehistoric residents of the region, the exact origin of these features remains unknown. A complete analysis of the mounds can be found in the January 1995 report entitled,

“Archaeological Investigation of Stone Mounds on the Fort McClellan Military Reservation Calhoun County, Alabama” prepared by the Archaeological Resources Laboratory at Jacksonville State University.

Administrative Design Alternatives

Based on significant resource values at Fort McClellan and based on the demonstrated interest of both the USFWS and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resource Game and Fish Division, the USFWS is pursuing involvement with the reuse of Fort McClellan. There are several alternatives that may be explored:

1). Fee transfer from the DOD to the USFWS and establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge with cooperative or exclusive management by the Alabama Game and Fish Division.

This alternative would provide for maximum participation by the USFWS and allow for the establishment of a fully recognized National Wildlife Refuge in Calhoun County. Through the development of a full-scale National Wildlife Refuge visitation benefits and tourism potential would also be maximized. This would be the case as units of the NWR system are well-publicized in national publications, standardized road maps, USFWS literature, and by the use of large signs located strategically on US Intestates (local examples: I-20, I-59, etc.)

2). Develop an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the DOD and the USFWS where the Service will act as a contractor to

manage the natural resource values with cooperation of the Alabama Game and Fish Division.

This alternative would allow for a substantial amount of participation by the USFWS, but it is not certain as to whether or not it would allow for the establishment of a recognized National Wildlife Refuge. Additional research is currently being conducted by JSU's EPIC so as to answer this question. There are examples of DOD owned land with recognized/established Refuge units as well as units which have not been allowed to achieve this of national recognition.

3). Fee transfer from DOD to the Alabama Game and Fish Division with some level of oversight from the USFWS. This alternative would allow for the establishment of a state regulated hunting area without the benefits of national recognition.

Funding Alternatives

Currently there are two primary concepts relating to the funding of a Fort McClellan based National Wildlife Refuge. They are:

- 1). Congress directs funding for the establishment of a Fort McClellan based National Wildlife Refuge to the USFWS.
- 2). The Department of Defense directs funding to the USFWS for the establishment of a Fort McClellan based National Wildlife Refuge. (In the case of Jefferson Proving Ground in Indiana, DOD has directed \$250,000 for the next

three years to the USFWS for its establishment and operation. This agreement is renewable at the end of the first three years.

3). A third, but less substantial source of funding would be moneys directed towards the management of game by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Fifty (50) Year Lease Alternative

Because it is thought that a technology may develop allowing for the ecologically safe removal of unexploded ordinance, the concept of a fifty year lease to the USFWS has been discussed. In such a case, after fifty years, the land would be returned to the community for development or whatever reuse deemed appropriate at that time. This concept was discussed by the USFWS and it was determined that such an arrangement would limit the Service's level of participation. Any deed limitations would have a negative impact on the possibility of USFWS capital improvements. If the Service is given no assurance of being able to develop a long term care and management program for the Fort McClellan National Wildlife Refuge, they would be unlikely to invest in capital improvement like roads, interpretive centers, bridges, etc.

Bureau of Land Management Acreage

Amidst the 12,000 acres being proposed as a refuge, there is a smaller tract. It consists of 1,160 acres of BLM lands. These lands were withdrawn from the Bureau of Land Management by the Army many years ago for military

purposes. With the closing of Fort McClellan, the Army intends to send BLM a "Notice of Intent to Relinquish" these lands. In preliminary discussions with BLM, they have indicated that these lands could be assigned or 'withdrawn' by the US Fish and Wildlife Service for wildlife management purposes. Most of these BLM lands are a part of the longleaf pine ecosystem proposed for refuge status.

Precedence and Records of Success

The reuse of military facilities as nature preserves is not new or untested. In fact, the Department of Defense has handed over many natural areas for public use. Some of these areas include acreage of Northern Virginia Meadows, Illinois prairie, California beaches, and the woods of Maine. Due to a 37% reduction in military personnel during the 1990's a drastic reduction in military lands is taking place. Over a dozen closed or closing military bases have become or are targeted to become refuges or parks. In fact, it is predicted by the USFWS that by the year 2000 over 100,000 acres will be converted for this type of use.

The Woodbridge Refuge

Located in the northern Virginia, this 580 acre tract consists of woods, marshes, and meadows which exist on a peninsula that extends into the Potomac and Occoquan Rivers. The U.S. Army had used this area as an electromagnetic and radio transmission research facility for 48 years. At present the USFWS operates this area as a National Wildlife Refuge and as a result, it is now open to the public. At this refuge over 214 species of bird have been

counted in recent years making it a popular vacation and recreational destination for bird watchers.

Midway Atoll

The Midway Atoll, which opened in August of 1996, is a dramatic example of base to refuge transfer. According to Barbara Maxfield, a spokesperson for the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge "We have the endangered monk seal and the threatened green sea turtle. We have 16 species of seabird that use the atoll for nesting, and a variety of shorebirds that winter here." Ever since the opening of this refuge, visitors and tourists have been making arrangement to see the area through a firm by the name of Oceanic Society Expeditions. Also according to Maxfield, this tourist attraction is becoming more and more popular despite initial contamination of PCBs.

Fort Ord

The former Fort Ord, California, is an Army installation located east of Monterey Bay. It occupies 27,879 acres where fences and signs warn people away from the areas of the Fort which have been contaminated by unexploded ordinance (UXO). Now, according to Steve Addington, a manager of the Fort Ord Public Lands Management Area, "The 7,200 acres that have been transferred to us are basically safe for public use." He added that, "On the remaining 8,000 acres, the unexploded ordinance is being removed."

Loring Airforce Base

Maine's Loring Airforce Base closed in 1994. Like Fort McClellan, it too has had a past involving a variety of contamination. At Loring Airforce Base jet fuel and asbestos are examples of what is now being cleaned up. Never the less, the USFWS has announced that a 4,446 acres section of Loring is being prepared for its debut as the Aroostock National Wildlife Refuge.

Alameda Naval Air Station

Scheduled to close during the Spring of 1997, the Alameda Naval Air Station is another example of a military base that is targeted for wildlife protection and tourist's enjoyment. This 900 acre refuge has an airfield where the endangered California least tern nests and the formerly used flight control tower is being planned for reuse as wildlife lookout tower. According Leorna Feeney, a California wildlife biologist who was hired to by the navy to study the area's wildlife, "It's really kind of a miracle that we have this open space in the middle of a densely populated urban area."

Skaggs Island and Mare Island

Skaggs Island and Mare Island are two more Navy installations that will be reused as National Wildlife Refuges. Skaggs Island will be flooded for the creation of a 3,000 acre wetland area and Mare Island is already high quality wildlife habitat which is home to an endangered bird known as the California

clapper rail, the endangered saltwater harvest mouse, migratory birds and waterfowl.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal

The largest gift of military property has been in Colorado where the 27,000 acre Rocky Mountain Arsenal is now managed, in part, by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Regardless of the fact this site has been contaminated by toxic waste, chemical weapons, and pesticides, 50,000 people a year take wildlife related tours of the facility. It is predicted that in the year 2007 the Rocky Mountain Arsenal will be cleaned of contamination. At that time, the whole tract will become a regular National Wildlife Refuge.

Joliet Arsenal

Approximately 40 miles southwest of Chicago and located at the confluence of the DesPlaines, Illinois, and Kankakee Rivers, the Joliet Arsenal (see Appendix) was used to produce TNT during World War II through end the Vietnam War. It is now mostly closed with only one contractor working to assemble shells for the US Army. This contract will terminate in 1998.

Although somewhere between 1,300 and 1,700 acres are remain closed and are being cleaned of contamination, the Joliet Arsenal is being planned to be reused in a number of ways. The current concept plan for redevelopment includes four (4) major components:

- 1). A National Veterans' Cemetery (982 acres)
- 2). The Midwine Tallgrass Prairie (19,063 acre)
- 3). Two industrial parks (3,000 acres)
- 4). The Will County Landfill (455 acres)

The Midwine Tallgrass Prairie will be a recreation area, similar to that which being considered by the Fort McClellan LRA for reuse of the mountain area. In the case of the Midwine Prairie, however, the primary resource is not longleaf pine trees, but instead, wildflowers.

Sudbury Training Annex and the North Port of Fort Devens

Near Boston, Massachusetts both the Sudbury Training Annex and the North Port of Fort Devens are expected to be converted to National Wildlife Refuges by the end on 1997. Similar to Fort McClellan, these areas shelter a wide variety of wild animals that can only be found in large, unfragmented tracts of land. These military bases are like so many others, in that they have been protected from development for decades making them biologically significant. In the case of the Sudbury Training Annex and the North Port of Fort Devens, plants (540 recorded species), birds (214 recorded species), box turtles, blue-spotted as well as other reptiles and amphibians are among the areas primary wildlife highlights.

Dolly Sods Wilderness Area

Dolly Sods Wilderness is a 10,215 acre tract located with in Grant, Tucker, and Randolph counties in West Virginia. It was part of the 2,181,000 acre West Virginia Maneuver Area during World War II. The area used by the Thirteenth Army Corps of the Third Army for mountain training and maneuvers, included the firing of artillery and mortars. Recorded ordinance sizes have been 105 mm, 155 mm, and 81 mm in size.

The Army "grid-searched" and decontaminated the range of unexploded ordinance following the end of operations in the area by explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) teams. Since the parcel was returned to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service for management at least 20 rounds of unexploded ordinance have been found in the area. These pieces were discovered in place. Based on this study the COE recommended a remediation project for the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area. In 1995 an Environmental Assessment for the removal project was prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE). In 1996 the COE awarded an unexploded ordinance removal contract to Human Factors Application. This firm completed a Safety Work Plan in late 1996 and it was approved in early 1997. The contractor commence contract operations on May 27, 1997.

The removal project is authorized as part of the Defense Environmental Restoration Program (DERP) as described in Section 160, Environmental Restoration of CERCLA. A goal of this program is the correction of other

environmental damage which relates an imminent and substantial endangerment to the public health or the environment.

Between 45,000 and 75,000 people utilize the Dolly Sods Wilderness area every year for hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, picnics and other back county activities. The 10,215 acre tract is managed to be in a natural, undisturbed condition. Because it is designated as a Wilderness, no motorized traffic is allowed in this area. The elevation varies from 3,200 to 4,100 feet above sea level. Terrain is rocky, rugged, steep and very much like the terrain of Fort McClellan's mountain area. The area is open to the public at all times. Local officials, individuals, organizations and others consider the reuse of Dolly Sods as a public recreational area as an excellent reuse of this land.

Jefferson Proving Ground (JPG)

The Jefferson Proving Ground is a 55,264 acre military base that was scheduled to be closed in September of 1995. It provides an excellent model for consideration by the Fort McClellan Redevelopment and Reuse Authority.

Because of this, in the Appendix of this feasibility study there is the *Jefferson Proving Ground Fish and Wildlife Management Plan* as presented by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Under the Base Closure and Realignment Act (BRAC) JPG officially closed in 1995. Under an agreement recently agreed upon by the Army and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USFWS staff will help the Army to assess and manage the base's abundance of fish and wildlife resources.

Specifically, JPG's forests, like those at Fort McClellan, have benefited thorough

the presence of controlled fire. At JPG these burns have mimicked the natural processes that create and maintain prairies. According to Major General John Longhouser, Commanding General, U.S. Army Test and Evaluation Command, "It is time to begin the process of converting this real estate to more peaceful purposes. This agreement provides the opportunity for an enhanced level of ecosystem-based management and study while the Army and the Service address long-term natural resource management."

According to "The U.S. Department of the Interior People Land and Water (June 1997, Volume 4, Number 6) "Under this agreement, the Service will be responsible for evaluating the status of fish and wildlife, and habitats on about 51,000 acres of the base during the next three years. This portion of the installation, used as a firing range while the base was active, is not well-suited for commercial or other uses because of an estimated 1.5 million rounds of unexploded ordinance." At a guaranteed level of \$250,000 per year for the next three years and renewable at that time, funding for the Service's activities will be provided by the Army, which retains ownership of the UXO contaminated portion of the base. Part of this acreage is still being used by the Air National Guard for training exercises. Through the assistance of a LRA, the remaining 4,000 acres is being converted to other private and commercial uses. At JPG, the public use of the firing range is currently limited due to the danger of UXO. However, the Army, USFWS and the Indiana State Department of Conservation are planning for future use by recreational users.

Matagorda Island

Matagorda Island is a coastal barrier island in Calhoun County, Texas.

During World War II it was used as bombing range by the Department of Defense. Known for its delicate ecosystem, Matagorda Island is protected from significant human intrusion by virtue of there being no roads connecting it to the mainland. Its isolation is thought to contribute to its attractiveness to visitors. It is also a primary factor in its unique appeal for interpretation, environmental education, and recreational use. The Island is 38 miles long and varies between 0.75 and 4.5 miles in width. The establishment of Matagorda Island as a National Wildlife Refuge began in 1989, when officials from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas General Land Office agreed to a partnership management arrangement.

Summary of Some Converted and Converting Military Bases

Bases already converted:

FORT MEADE,

Maryland

Total of 8,100 acres turned over to the Patuxent Research Refuge. Unexploded ordnance remains. Used by researchers, hikers, bikers, hunters, and birders.

THE PRESIDIO,

San Francisco

Army base encompassing 1,480 acres turned over to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Wildlife is sparse; native flora are of great interest to botanists.

FORT ORD,

California

Fort Ord Public Lands Management Area operated on 7,200 acres; 8,000 more to be cleared of contaminants. Has one of California's few remaining native grasslands and many rare plants.

JOLIET ARSENAL,

Illinois

Forest Service is turning 15,000 acres into the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. Army once made TNT here; 1,300 to 1,700 contaminated acres are being cleaned.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL,

Denver

The largest military toxic waste dump site; cleanup expected to take a decade. Wildlife thrive on the 17,000 acres of forests, lakes, and shortgrass prairie.

MIDWAY ISLAND NAVAL AIR FACILITY,

Pacific

Most of the base has been turned into the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. The 90,100 acres (88,500 are water) have become a birding destination.

Transitions:

WOODBIDGE RESEARCH FACILITY,

Virginia

The 580-acre Woodbridge Refuge is a mix of wetlands, forest and meadows.

FORT DEVENS (NORTH POST),

Massachusetts

Scenic 900 Acres, 40 miles west of Boston, will extend the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. Considered an ideal lab for students.

SUDBURY TRAINING ANNEX,

Massachusetts

Former ammunition depot will become part of the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. Notable for variety of reptiles, amphibians, and ferns.

MARE ISLAND NAVAL SHIP YARD,

California

Prime wetland habitat used by waterfowl, migratory birds, and the endangered California clapper rail and saltmarsh harvest mouse.

LORING AIR FORCE BASE,

Maine

The 4,446-acre Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge is tainted by fuel, cleaning agents, and ordnance. Wetlands support ducks, geese, osprey, and beavers.

SAVANNA ARMY DEPOT,

Illinois

The 9,000 acres house wide variety of migratory birds and bald eagles. Pristine ecosystems lie near heavily contaminated tracts.

ALAMEDA NAVAL AIR STATION

California

Includes a colony of endangered California least terns, a wetland inhabited by caspian terns, and a breakwater used by California brown pelicans.

SKAGGS ISLAND NAVAL BASE,

California

Plan to flood 3,000 acres of baylands would restore wetland and likely attract endangered birds.

Refuge Survey Results

In an informal and non-scientific survey conducted by Jacksonville State University's Environmental Policy and Information Center one hundred (100) Calhoun County residents were randomly called. They were asked the following questions regarding the mountainous region of Fort McClellan:

1. Would you approve or disapprove of a reuse that allows for hiking and wildlife observation on this section of Fort McClellan?
2. Would you approve or disapprove of a reuse that allows for regulated hunting on the mountain?
3. Would you approve or disapprove if the reuse attracts tourists to the area?
4. Would you approve or disapprove if the reuse would protect the mountain from future development?
5. Would you approve or disapprove of the US Fish and Wildlife Service operating this area as a National Wildlife Refuge?

The survey was conducted by JSU intern and professional telemarketer Dewayne Hammond. He reported that of the one hundred respondents, 70% were female and 30% were male. The overall results of the survey were as follows:

TOTAL RESPONSE (100%)

	<u>approve</u>	<u>disapprove</u>	<u>undecided</u>	<u>%</u>
1. Hiking and wildlife	93	5	1	93%
2. Regulated hunting	59	36	5	59%
3. Tourist attraction	91	8	1	91%
4. Habitat protection	82	13	5	82%
5. Nat. Wildlife Refuge	79	14	7	79%

FEMALE RESPONSE (70%)

	<u>approve</u>	<u>disapprove</u>	<u>undecided</u>	<u>%</u>
1. Hiking and wildlife	64	4	1	91%
2. Regulated hunting	35	30	5	50%
3. Tourist attraction	63	6	1	90%
4. Habitat protection	54	11	5	77%
5. Nat. Wildlife Refuge	54	11	5	77%

MALE RESPONSE (30%)

	<u>approve</u>	<u>disapprove</u>	<u>undecided</u>	<u>%</u>
1. Hiking and wildlife	29	0	1	97%
2. Regulated hunting	24	6	0	80%
3. Tourist attraction	28	2	0	93%
4. Habitat protection	28	2	0	93%
5. Nat. Wildlife Refuge	25	3	2	83%

Wildlife Refuge." This name reflects the habitat type, mountainous terrain, natural landscape, and primary longleaf pine of the proposed refuge.

Summary

In conclusion, the establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge in Calhoun County would be a substantial benefit to the area's economy as well as the ecosystem's environmental health. Especially in light of the fact that other federal agencies such as the National Park Service and National Forest Service were either unable or uninterested in participating in the reuse of Fort McClellan, it should be reported that there virtually no other alternatives involving resource protection, recreation, ecotourism, and positive national recognition.

In order to make this National Wildlife Refuge become a reality, the following must be done:

1. **LRA ENDORSEMENT** The Fort McClellan Local Reuse and Redevelopment Authority must immediately endorse the concept of establishing the mountainous region of Fort McClellan's Main Pots as a National Wildlife Refuge. Furthermore, this concept must be described in the LRA's Comprehensive Reuse Plan.
2. **PLAN DEVELOPMENT** Jacksonville State University, the USFWS, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resource Game and Fish Division and the Alabama Chapter of the Nature Conservancy should

continue to work together to develop a comprehensive business and management plan for the establishment and operation of the proposed wildlife refuge. Such a plan should be made available by April of 1998.

3. **FUNDING**

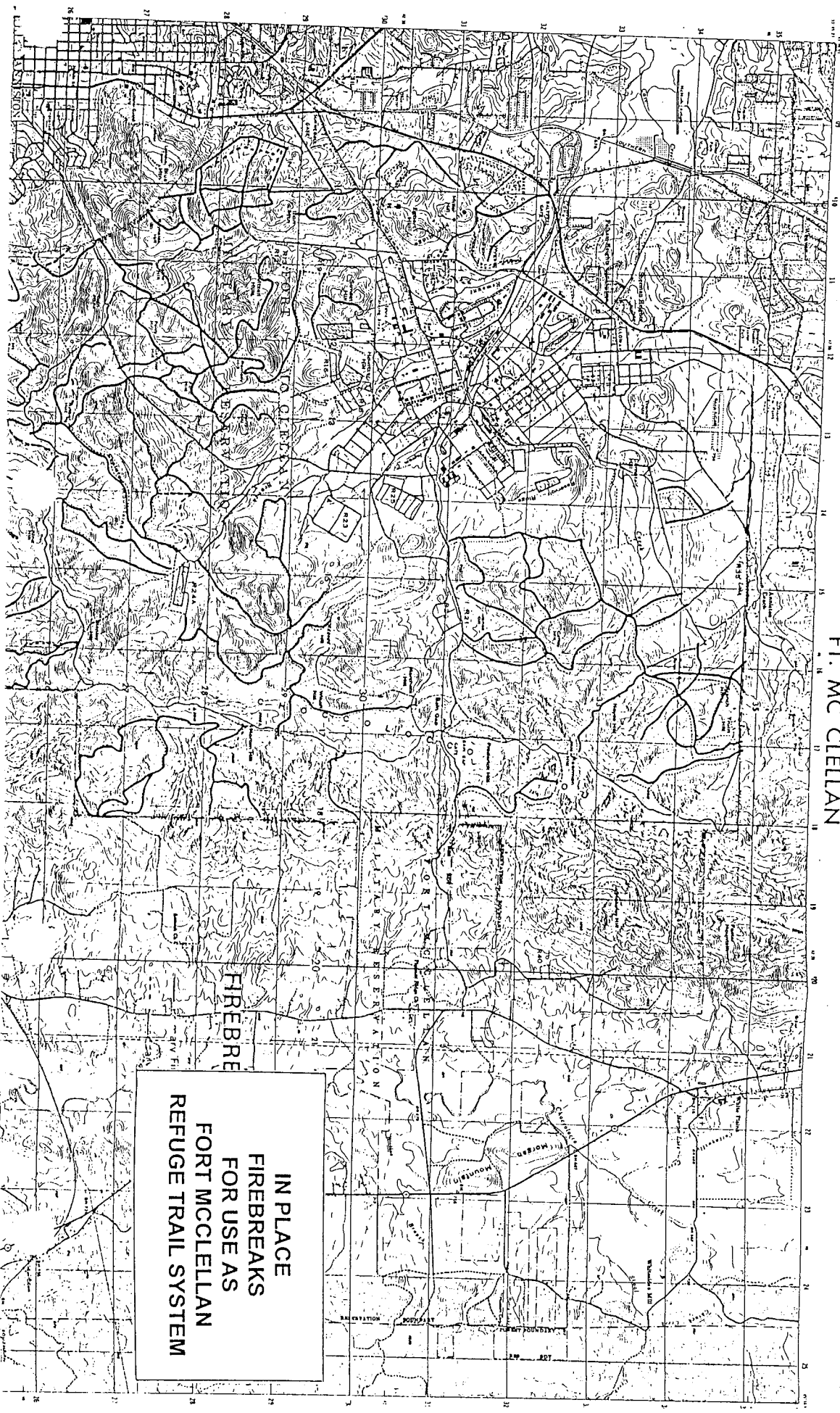
Funding for the establishment and operation of the proposed refuge should be pursued on all levels. In particular, support from the Department of Defense and congressional appropriations through the US Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service should be targeted.

4. **MORE RESEARCH**

Regional and community input should be sought out, documented and allowed to shape the refuge's comprehensive management plan.

FOR TRAINING ONLY

FT. MC CLELLAN



IN PLACE
FIREBREAKS
FOR USE AS
FORT MCCLELLAN
REFUGE TRAIL SYSTEM

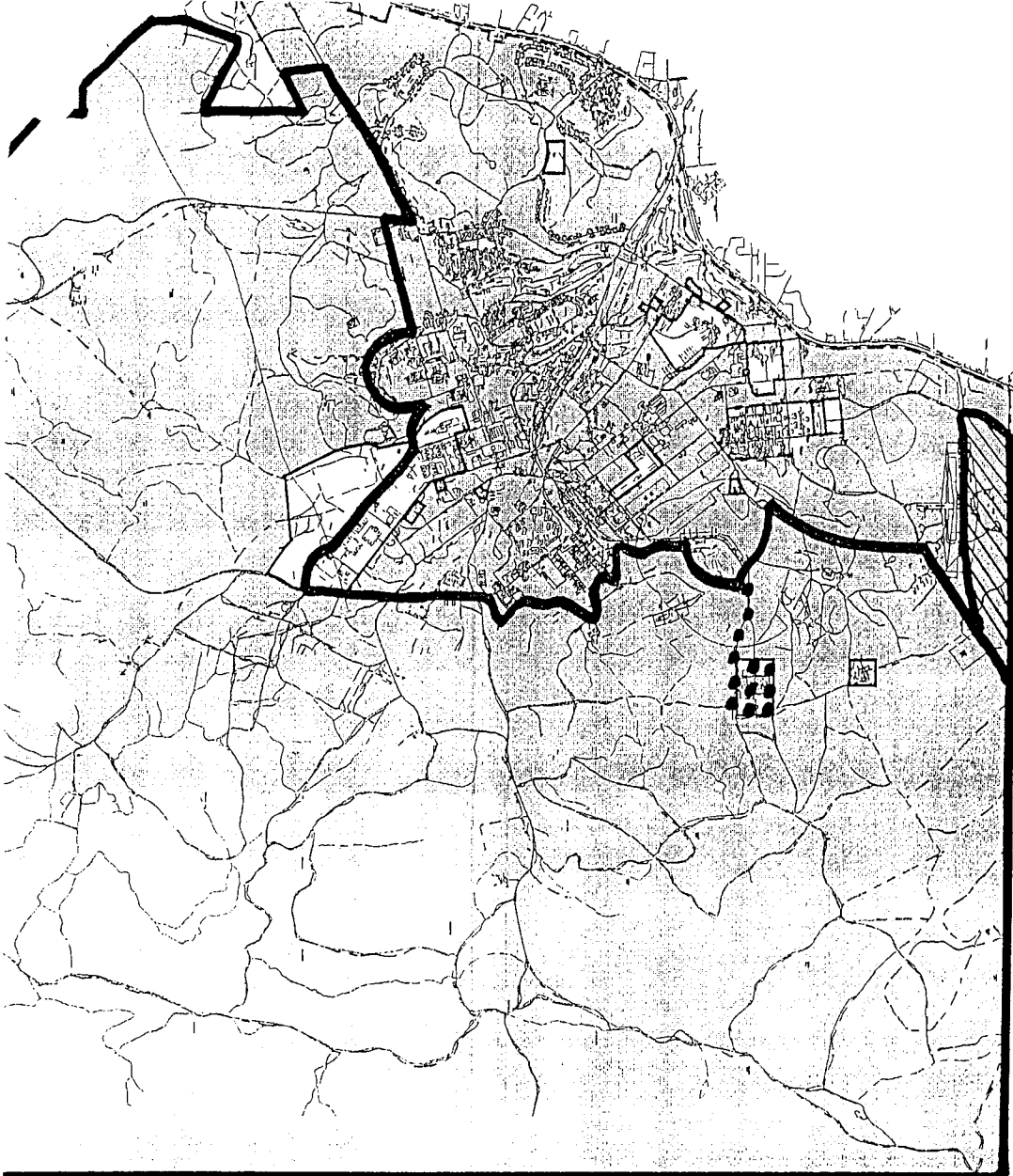
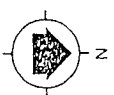
PROPOSED BOUNDARY FOR
A FORT MCCLELLAN
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

MAXIMUM BOUNDARY
OF SUITABLE LAND

ALTERNATIVE TO CONNECT
REILLY LAKE COMPLEX

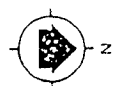
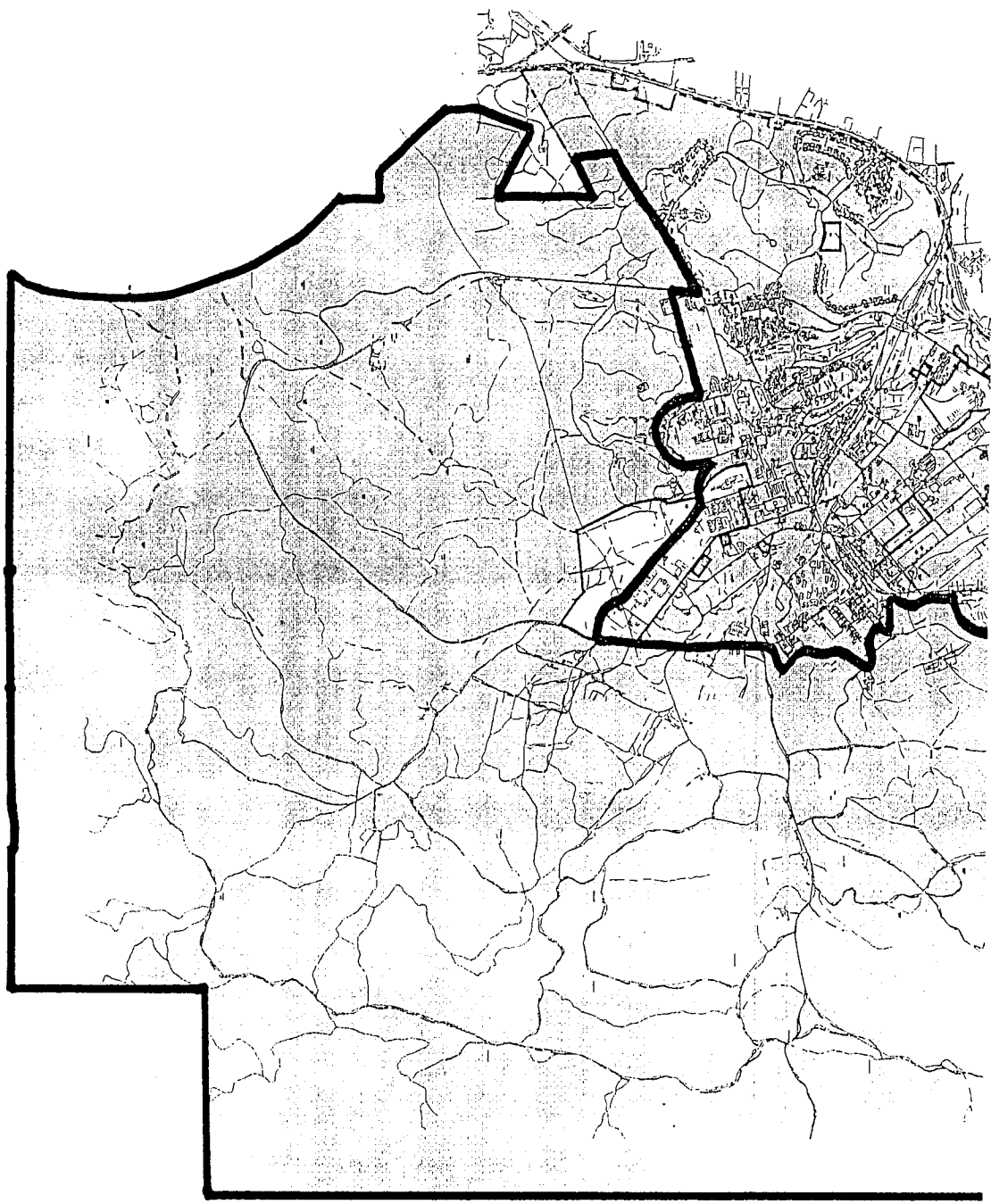
CDTF ADDITION
(IF APPLICABLE)

SOURCE
Fort McClellan #73

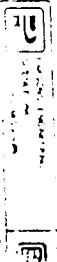


ALTERNATIVE TO CONNECT
REILLY LAKE COMPLEX

CDTF ADDITION
(IF APPLICABLE)



Scale 1:50,000



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

STUDY AND REUSE OF
FORT MCCLURE

FORT MCCLURE
REAL PROPERTY
AVAILABLE FOR

DATE: MARCH, 1997

**Examples of
National Wildlife Refuge
Support and Interest**



FOB JAMES, JR.
GOVERNOR

STATE OF ALABAMA

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE
MONTGOMERY 36130

July 24, 1997

Mr. Robert H. Richardson
Executive Director
Fort McClellan Reuse & Redevelopment
Authority of Alabama
P.O. Box 306
Anniston, Al 36202

Dear Mr. Richardson:

I have carefully followed the proposals for use of the various portions of Fort McClellan. I appreciate the responsibility that you and the local Reuse Authority have as you evaluate each request.

One of the goals of my administration is to increase the acreage for public hunting and outdoor recreation. For that reason, I am particularly interested in the future of the undeveloped portion of Fort McClellan.

I support the partnership proposal submitted by the Alabama Game and Fish Division and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage the tract. Should that proposal be implemented, it will bring national recognition and draw tourists to the site. It will also allow proper management of the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem and offer public hunting and associated recreation.

Sincerely,

Fob James, Jr.
Fob James, Jr.
Governor

Page 4A, The Anniston Star, Wednesday, Aug. 6, 1997

The Anniston Star

Speak out... On wildlife refuge at Fort McClellan



I READ in The Anniston Star your article about turning the back part of Fort McClellan into a National Wildlife Refuge. Wonderful!

With the fort closing, this area needs something as popular as a National Wildlife Refuge to attract the kind of visitors who will spend money here. Also, because we need more places for hunting. I've been glad to learn that the Alabama Game and Fish Division would help the National Wildlife Refuge people by managing the area for game species like deer and turkey. This could make 12,000 acres available for hunting.

The mountain area of Fort McClellan should be protected from development not only

because it's beneficial to us, but also because it will protect the wildlife. The mountains of Fort McClellan serve as habitat to all sorts of wildlife including the rare fox squirrel. I've noticed that while other tracts of forest are too small to have them, the big fox squirrel is almost common out there.

I support the local reuse authority's interest in turning Fort McClellan's mountain in to a National Wildlife Refuge. Keep up the good work.

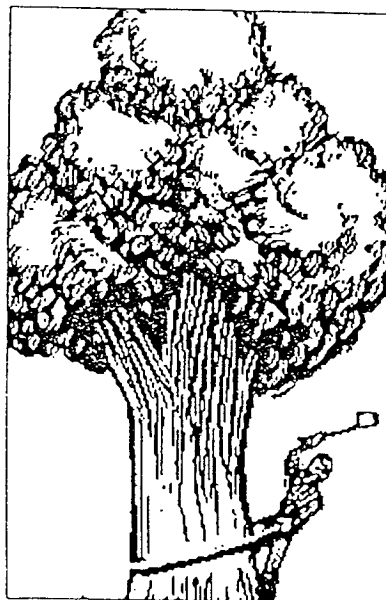
*Gary Home
Oxford*

The Anniston Star

Speak out... On saving McClellan forest

Preserve woodland

MY NAME IS Hal Miniard. I am a student at Jacksonville State University and I am very concerned about the Fort McClellan reuse issue. I think I speak on behalf of all my friends and the public of Calhoun County when I say the 12,000 acres in the wooded section of the fort should be preserved as a national wildlife refuge. This mountain is too beautiful to be developed in any other way.



I haven't lived in this area long because I am a student from Mobile, but I plan to reside here permanently in the future. I have been hunting and fishing all of my life. I also enjoy observing wonderful nature such as plant and wildlife. A national wildlife refuge would be a great opportunity for me to spend my spare time. I think it would also benefit the community by attracting visitors, both local and distant.

I have read that the major issue is the economic benefit of the area. I know that a national wildlife refuge would bring in major amounts of money to a community. For example, the lodging fee would increase greatly, the sporting goods and department stores would benefit tremendously, and the restaurant business would boom. These are just a few examples of the benefits. Just take Eufaula for instance. I would have never heard of Eufaula, Alabama, if it weren't for the refuge. There are many great advantages of having a national wildlife refuge in our community. Personally, I know I would spend the majority of my spare time there. Please consider this suggestion. Thank you.

*Hal Miniard
Jacksonville*

The Anniston Star

Speak out... On saving McClellan forest

I AM IN agreement with you in your article on keep the Fort McClellan 12,000 acres of forest forever wild! I am sorry I missed the July 2nd article, "Pining for Preservation."

After writing to our newspapers and the Fort McClellan Reuse and Redevelopment Authority what is everyone's next step??

Please keep the public updated!

Maybe public TV's evening news show, "For the Record," will do a series of reports too. There is also the educational channel series called, "The Alabama Experience," which could be able to film a series on the awesome, virgin, old growth beauty of plants and wildlife and waterfalls.

All these campaigns should also be given the Fort McClellan Reuse address. I am making a photocopy of my letter and sending it to them certified so I know they received it.

Even if the area is destroyed, we need records, books, films on what it looks like now. The educational channel's evening national news did a story on urban sprawl. The comment was "did we not learn anything from the horrible pollution in Los Angeles?" Well, have you seen the air in Birmingham this week? McClellan's forest may not be a rain forest but we know we must speak out to save it!

We should not allow people to drive cars/trucks in the forest but leave them in parking areas. The Ladiga Trail you spoke of, is that the old stage coach and logging road that is being opened only for bicycles and hikers?

There is not need to build in the forest. The local economy can use the income at our hotels, restaurants, bed and breakfasts, farmer's markets and similar.

We must insist the federal government go over the effort with a fine tooth comb to remove any and all explosives and other deadly materials! By the time the public was told about the incinerator at Bynum, the federal government had already made the decision to build it here.

There are empty stores, factories, homes, yet there are new ones at new locations. Are we going to allow "Paradise to be paved to put up a parking lot?"!

I appreciate someone in the media giving each of us a starting place to keep the Fort McClellan forest the way it is!

*Pat Harmon
Oxford*



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES
64 NORTH UNION STREET
POST OFFICE BOX 301456
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130-1456

FOB JAMES, JR.
GOVERNOR

JAMES D. MARTIN
COMMISSIONER

July 7, 1997

DIVISION OF GAME & FISH
CHARLES D. KELLEY
DIRECTOR

M. N. "CORKY" PUGH
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Mr. Robert H. Richardson
Executive Director
Ft. McClellan Reuse &
Redevelopment Authority of Alabama
P. O. Box 306
Anniston, Alabama 36202

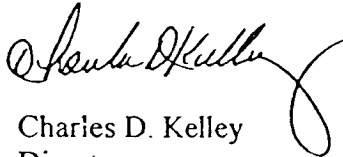
Dear Mr. Richardson:

The Alabama Game and Fish Division continues to have an interest in the undeveloped portion of Ft. McClellan. We believe it provides an ideal location to offer public outdoor recreation, including hunting, fishing, sport shooting, hiking, nature study, and related activities. The uniqueness of the long leaf pine ecosystem offers opportunities for scientific study in addition to serving as a public attraction.

I request the opportunity for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Game and Fish Division to meet informally with you, Mr. Charles Turner, and other appropriate LRA members or individuals you wish to include. Such a meeting would be a follow up to the earlier similar meeting that was attended by U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service members. It would provide the opportunity to discuss a variety of management options and to help determine the best approach to take from this point.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and the LRA.

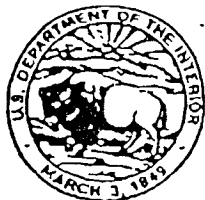
Sincerely,



Charles D. Kelley
Director

CDK:GHM/wj

cc: Tom Follrath
Bill Grabill

TO: MOODY
United States Department of the Interior *Very good*

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1875 Century Boulevard
Atlanta, Georgia 30345
December 26, 1996

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Mr. Robert H. Richardson
Executive Director
Fort McClellan Local Reuse
and Redevelopment Authority
P.O. Box 306
Anniston, Alabama 36202

Dear Mr. Richardson:

This letter is in regard to planning efforts currently underway to determine the best future uses of Ft. McClellan at Anniston, Alabama. Studies conducted by Auburn University and the Alabama Natural Heritage Commission have indicated that approximately 12,000 acres on the Main Post at Ft. McClellan contain a unique mountain longleaf pine habitat. Steep slopes and isolated ridges contain relic trees up to 250 years old and isolated old growth stands of longleaf pine that average 180 years in age. Research has documented the rapid loss of this type habitat, and it is believed that Ft. McClellan now represents the best example of a large, natural mountain longleaf pine ecosystem.

Over the last few years, the Fish and Wildlife Service has made a commitment to ecosystem management. Teams have been formed nationwide to address and promulgate ecosystem management within specific areas. The Central Gulf Coast Ecosystem Team was formed to restore and protect key habitats within the central gulf coast region, which includes Ft. McClellan. The unique mountain longleaf pine community at Ft. McClellan certainly is a key habitat which should be protected.

In view of the importance of protecting the unique mountain longleaf pine ecosystem, the Service would like to actively participate with the Local Reuse and Redevelopment Authority in formulating plans to preserve this habitat. We have coordinated with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Game and Fish Division, and our agencies agree that these lands should be preserved and made available for outdoor public use opportunities. Our agencies would develop a partnership agreement to ensure that this occurs.

The Service will work with the Department of Defense, the Local Reuse and Redevelopment Authority, and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in future plans for the protection and management of the 12,000 natural acres at Ft. McClellan. For further information and assistance, you may contact Mr. Larry Goldman at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2001 Highway 98, Suite A, P.O. Drawer 1190, Daphne, Alabama 36526, or by phone at (334)441-5181.

Sincerely yours,

Noreen K. Clough
Regional Directorcc: Mr. Charles D. Kelley, Director, Division of Game and Fish, Dept. of
Conservation and Natural Resources, 64 N. Union Street, Montgomery, AL 36130

The Longleaf Alliance

111 M. White Smith Hall
Auburn University, AL 36849-5418
E-Mail: gjerstad@forestry.auburn.edu

(334) 844-1020
(334) 844-1084 FAX

September 5, 1996

Mr. Curtis Flakes
Mobile Corps of Engineers, ATTN: CESAM-PD-EC
P.O. Box 2288
Mobile, AL 36628

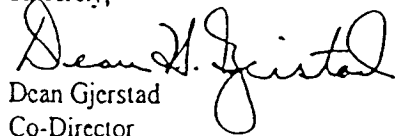
Dear Mr. Flakes:

I am responding to the Environmental Impact Statement to identify the environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with the disposal and reuse of surplus property at Fort McClellan, Alabama. As co-director of the Longleaf Alliance my objective is to encourage the maintenance of existing longleaf forests and to prevail on land managers to consider the restoration of longleaf where appropriate. The Longleaf Alliance is a partnership of private landowners, forest industries, state and federal agencies, conservation groups, universities and others interested in promoting a region wide recovery of longleaf pine forests.

Fort McClellan provides an exceptional opportunity to assist in the recovery of the unique montane longleaf pine that is distinctively different from coastal plain longleaf pine. Whereas 90+% of longleaf ecosystems are found in the coastal plain, montane longleaf is restricted to a few remnant stands primarily found in northeast Alabama. Unfortunately the remnant montane longleaf forest is being lost via the deliberate and unintentional conversion to other species. In many cases, the mature longleaf is removed and the area is replanted to loblolly pine or converted to golf courses and housing developments. In the absence of fire, unintentional conversion to hardwood is occurring. Longleaf is adapted to fire and fire is a crucial form of disturbance needed for the establishment and existence of longleaf ecosystems. Longleaf seed requires full sunlight and mineral soil to germinate and grow. Competition at this stage from other trees including hardwoods and other pine species will prevent longleaf from becoming established. In addition, numerous species of plants, invertebrates, and vertebrates are highly adapted to the longleaf ecosystem and cannot survive in other ecosystems. Thus, the conversion of montane longleaf to hardwood will result in a drastic change of the associated plant and animal community.

The US Department of Army as the manager of public lands has the distinct opportunity to restore and maintain the montane longleaf ecosystem. Your goal should in my opinion be to maintain and restore the montane longleaf ecosystem through appropriate management programs. Hopefully a portion of the surplus property that is in longleaf pine will be retained and managed to maintain the montane longleaf ecosystem. The Longleaf Alliance looks forward to working with the Department of Army in this most important effort.

Sincerely,


Dean Gjerstad
Co-Director



Alabama Environmental Council

Formerly The Alabama Conservancy

August 7, 1996

Mobile District Corps of Engineers
ATTN: CESAM-PD-EC (Mr. Curtis Flakes)
109 St. Joseph Street
Mobile, AL 36602

Dear Mr. Flakes,

I am writing on behalf of the Alabama Environmental Council to ask that several issues be addressed during the NEPA process associated with the closure of Fort McClellan. While the developed areas of the Fort should be used to enhance the economy of the local area, the undeveloped areas of the reservation, particularly the mountains, should be assessed for their special resources before closure plans are drafted.

Fort McClellan is very special because it contains one of the largest tracts of unfragmented forest in Alabama. The undeveloped lands of the Fort provide important habitat to many populations of neotropical migratory birds that need unbroken habitat. The Fort has encouraged studies of these bird populations. Moreover, the Department of Defense has a strategic plan associated with the Partners in Flight Program that promotes the identification and protection of important habitats. How will NEPA analysis evaluate the impact of reuse alternatives that fragment these forests and degrade habitat for sensitive birds?

The unbroken nature of the mountain forests of Fort McClellan has allowed fire to travel across the landscape, and this has helped to maintain one of the best examples of the mountain longleaf pine community. Plans for the continued maintenance of this community are being developed. If these lands are broken up by land use alterations then widespread controlled burning could not be practiced and the natural community would decline. How is the NEPA process going address the impacts of reuse alternatives that prevent the maintenance of the fire dependent longleaf pine natural community?

The longleaf natural community contains significant amounts of old growth, and this is part of the reason the community contains its original diversity. The Fort also contains other types of old growth such as xeric oak-hickory which contributes to the overall diversity of the area. How will the protection and management of these forests be

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evaluated in the NEPA analysis? Also, the nearby Talladega National Forest contains colonies of the federally endangered red-cockaded woodpecker which is dependent on old growth longleaf pine. The National Forest is considered important habitat for a recovery population within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's species recovery plan. The Fort contains even higher quality habitat within close proximity. How is the NEPA process going to consider the possibility of expanding the recovery population boundary to include parts of Fort McClellan?

The main post provides habitat for the federally endangered gray bat. Also, the base contains one of the largest colonies of the white fringeless orchid which is listed as a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The NEPA process should evaluate the potential effects upon these species habitat which could be produced by side-effects associated with intensive reuse alternatives such as forest fragmentation, changes in fire regime, environmental cleanup and increased human disturbance. The Fort has created an Endangered Species Management Plan, and it provides a base line for existing Department of Defense stewardship of the land on the base. The NEPA analysis should use this plan as baseline and evaluate any changes in resource protection and management that could result from reuse alternatives.

The Fort also contains many small wetlands in the mountains that are probably not on any National Wetland Inventory Maps. How will the NEPA process evaluate possible filling or discharges into these federally regulated wetlands? The undeveloped portions of the Fort contain many archeological sites that date back well into the preColumbian period. How will the NEPA process address the effects of reuse alternatives on the preservation of significant and federally protected archaeological sites?

Fort McClellan has been used for artillery training since the turn of the century. The undeveloped portions of the base are full of unexploded munitions which would have to be removed for any intensive reuse alternatives. The location and removal of these munitions would require significant earth moving activity in areas that contain steep and highly erodible slopes. Resulting erosion and eventual sedimentation onto lowlands could cause seriously negative environmental impacts, and it may be difficult to comply with the Clean Water Act, Executive Orders on Wetlands, the Endangered Species Act, and other federal laws. How is the NEPA process going to consider the effects of the survey and removal of unexploded munitions associated with unrestricted reuse alternatives?

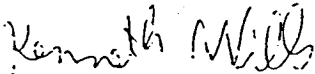
Fort McClellan currently provides opportunities for the surrounding civilian community to hunt and fish. Other opportunities such as hiking and picnicking are offered on a more limited basis. All of these opportunities provide important recreational and economic benefits to the surrounding communities. I know these values well because I

grew up in the area and used the base for hunting, fishing, and other recreational activities. As public use of the region's private lands become increasingly limited the Fort's recreational opportunities will become even more important. The Fort role as recreational green space close to substantial urban and suburban populations is important and could be greatly enhanced in the future. How will the NEPA process analyze the possible loss of this area from the region's recreational land base and loss of economic benefits associated with the recreation?

The Legacy Resource Management Program gives priority to identifying lands containing significant biological resources on closing military reservations. These lands are to be recommended for transfer to other federal land management agencies. How is the NEPA process going to meet these obligations of conserving significant ecological resources on lands to be disposed of?

We ask that the Army Corps of Engineers and other responsible parties address all of the above questions and issues in detail. This information is necessary if we are to make reuse decisions that protect the special resources of Fort McClellan. Please keep us informed throughout the NEPA process.

Sincerely,



Kenneth Wills
Natural Resource Planner and Biologist

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5414

College of Sciences and Mathematics

Department of Zoology and Wildlife Science
331 Funchess Hall

Telephone: (334) 844-4850
ATTNet: 221-4850
FAX: (334) 844-9234

Phone: 334-844-9269
Fax: 334-844-9234
E-mail: Geoffrey.Hill@ag.auburn.edu

1 August 1996

Mr. Curtis Flakes
Mobile District Corps Engin.
ATTN: CESAM-PD-EC
PO Box 2288
Moblie AL, 36628

Dear. Mr. Curtis,

I will not be able to attend the Public Scoping Meeting that will be held to discuss the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement for the disposal of Fort McClellan. Nevertheless, I wanted to convey my strongest recommendation that some means be found to preserve that the large forest tracts presently contained in Fort McClellan.

For two months in 1996, I conducted a study of the effects of forest fragmentation on nest predation of Neotropical migrant birds. I found a significant increase in the proportion of nests lost to predators as the size of forest fragments decreases. This study complements the work of Dr. Randy Webb and Eric Soehren who found decreasing numbers and diversity of breeding Neotropical migrant birds as forest size decreased.

Over the last several years, I have traveled widely throughout Alabama conducting surveys of breeding Neotropical migrant birds. I have been struck by how little remains of the once vast hardwood forests that originally blanketed the northern third of Alabama. Development, conversion of forest land to cropland, and conversion of hardwood forests to commercial pine plantations has left us with only remnant hardwood forests. We simply cannot afford to lose any more large blocks of hardwood forests.

The forested lands of Fort McClellan offer a tremendous opportunity for us to show that as a society we realize the importance of preserving what remains of the natural world. Most of the forested land on Fort McClellan has not been cut since the turn of the century and supports large populations of many species of Neotropical migrant birds that are of management concern because of continent-wide populations declines: Worm-eating Warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, Yellow-throated Vireos, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Louisiana Waterthrushes, Wood Thrushes, and Ovenbirds. Unlike most of the forested areas in nearby Talladaga National Forest, the forests on Fort McClellan are not fragmented. Fort McClellan has a larger block of unfragmented forest than even the Sipsey Wilderness in the Bankhead National Forest.

I strongly recommend that the forested portions of Fort McClellan be maintained with no development. Any road building, timber harvest, or construction of recreational facilities would negatively impact wildlife and destroy the wildness of this unique area.

Sincerely,



Dr. Geoffrey Hill, Assistant Professor



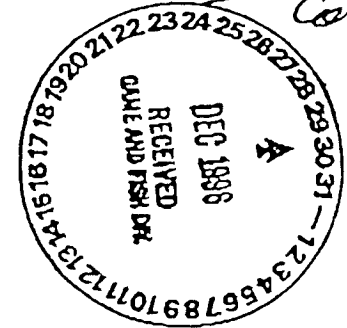
United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1875 Century Boulevard
Atlanta, Georgia 30345
December 26, 1996

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Mr. Robert H. Richardson
Executive Director
Fort McClellan Local Reuse
and Redevelopment Authority
P.O. Box 306
Anniston, Alabama 36202



Dear Mr. Richardson:

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Sincerely yours,

Noreen K. Clough
Regional Director

cc: Mr. Charles D. Kelley, Director, Division of Game and Fish, Dept. of
Conservation and Natural Resources, 64 N. Union Street, Montgomery, AL 36130

Recent Media Coverage

The Anniston Star

Alabama's largest home-owned newspaper

ENVIRONMENT

Wednesday, July 2, 1997

Reuse Authority evaluating refuge plan

Pining for preservation



Gordon Horsley, a forester at Fort McClellan, inspects a young longleaf pine on property just off Bains Gap Road. The pine stand on Fort McClellan property is the largest in the country.

FORT McCLELLAN — Proposals to designate the fort's longleaf pine forests a natural preserve are moving forward. The eventual aim is to establish a national wildlife refuge on the site, although difficulties with obtaining the land and money for the project remain.

A feasibility study, due at the end of July, will evaluate proposals from both the state and federal governments to manage what environmentalists call the best existing example of a mountain longleaf pine forest.

"The longleaf pine ecosystem is considered endangered and of high priority when it comes to conservation," said Pete Conroy, director of Jacksonville State University's Environmental Policy and Information Center.

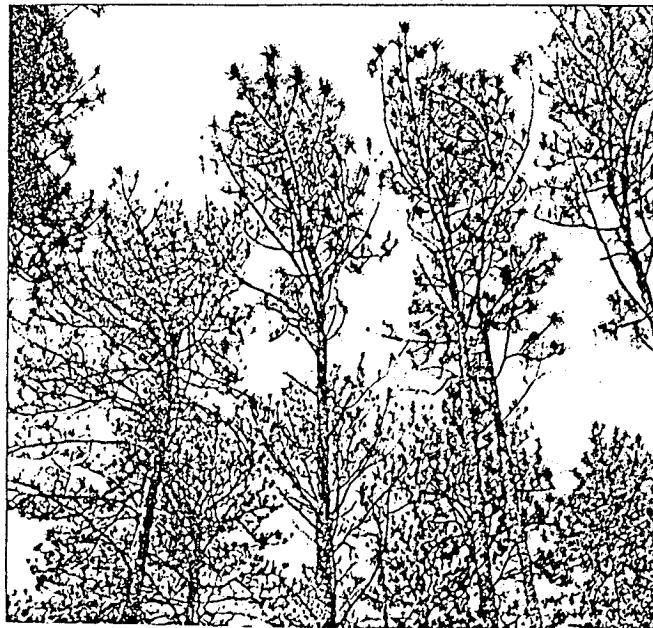
What's unclear is whether and when the Army will release the land those pines stand on and how the state and federal agencies will fund the concept. The most promising funding option is the Army itself, which Tuesday gave a similar base-turned-preserve in southeast Indiana \$250,000 a year for three years for operations.

Conroy is working on the feasibility study for the Fort McClellan Reuse and Redevelopment Authority to examine the chances of protecting about 12,000 acres, mainly on Choocolocco Mountain.

"The only question is who will manage it," said

Richardson, the fort reuse authority's executive director. "The concept, at least in value, is entirely consistent with the plan."

The main post at Fort McClellan includes not only longleaf pines but fringeless orchids and other rare plants. Longleaf pine is habitat for red-shouldered hawks, although none is



Pines at fort may become part of national refuge

From Page 1

the fort.

The forest has been preserved because of periodic fires set off by artillery shelling and other Army

of an area that otherwise wouldn't be used," Conroy said.

The details of any possible partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the state con-

it will be available because we must," the reuse authority's Richardson said.

The other uncertainty is funding. Larry Goldman, the state's

See Pine

The Birmingham News OUTDOORS

Sunday, June 1, 1997



Mike Bolton

The hunting is good, but watch those land mines

Although Fort McClellen is set to close in 1999, that doesn't mean it won't be involved in at least one more battle.

Both state and private entities are scrambling to present the Army with reasons why they would be best to take possession of the fort, which boasts an estimated 14,000 to 16,000 acres of forest.

Two of those applicants are state agencies. Both Game and Fish and the Alabama Forestry Commission want the fort and say they will make it available for public hunting.

State Forester Tim Boyce says possession of the fort, which joins the Choccolocco State Forest, which in turn joins the Talladega National Forest, would add to an existing forest corridor across east-central Alabama.

Boyce said the Alabama Forestry Commission would make the fort property available to multi-use outdoor recreation. The 14,000 to 16,000 acres would be a natural to add to the existing Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area, he said.

Since making the application, Boyce said, his agency has learned that the money from any timber sold from the property would go to the federal government rather than his agency. He acknowledges that makes possession of the property less desirable.

Game and Fish, in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, also has applied to take over the fort. Game and Fish also would make it available for multi-use outdoor recreation, including camping, hiking, bird-watching and hunting.

Chief of Wildlife Gary Moody said the state would have several options if it were granted the property. With Choccolocco WMA already containing 45,000 acres, it might be possible to make two separate WMAs, or add part of Choccolocco WMA property to the fort property to make two large WMAs.

The Alabama Forestry Commission and Game and Fish also are considering combining their requests, both Boyce and Moody said.

"The Army is looking for someone to take over the fort who has a good outreach program to a large number of people and we know we have that," Moody said.

One of the drawbacks, Moody and Boyce said, is that the land possibly has unexploded ordnance and that would have to be addressed.

The public's riches

A FEW miles northeast of Anniston, there is a horseshoe-shaped mountain range called the Choccolocco. On its 1,800-foot shoulders stands a rare and beautiful forest landscape. A stand of longleaf pines, with some trees more than 300 years old, rises from the meadowy slopes.

This Shangri-La has been shielded for decades because it was part of a U.S. Army post, Fort McClellan. But the post will close in three years, throwing the future of this breathtaking ecosystem into doubt.

Preserving this land could help Alabama start to rectify one of its biggest natural resource problems: It has precious little timberland set aside for the public to enjoy. In fact, the state trails the South in how much of its forests is publicly owned. It's 5 percent in Alabama. Compared to 11 percent in Mississippi and 16 percent in Florida.

What's wrong with leaving the timberland solely in private hands?

Private owners generally look to the bottom line to make decisions about managing their holdings, particularly corporations, which own a third of all private forest land in Alabama. In the past, corporations and many individuals have decided that the best use for trees in Alabama is to cut them down in large quantities, mash them up for pulp and plant new generations of fast-growers, usually pines.

In the ideal forest economy, pulp would be just one of many important uses for wood. But this state decided to

overachieve in that department, focusing on producing more pulp-grade trees — and grinding them down to 2-inch bits — than anyone else in the nation.

Decades of following such practices, however, have changed the look of the state's forests. The majestic longleaf pines that were cut down years ago haven't been allowed to return because there are other kinds of trees that could be raised faster for profit. Fire hampered timber production, so it was stamped out, too, leaving behind a forest that has more underbrush and junk trees than it has ever known.

Sadly, even some of the publicly owned land has been managed the same way. Log trucks often venture into the national forests and the state-owned land in Alabama. That's because the U.S. Forest Service and agencies such as the Department of Corrections are managing the land for profit, too.

The Forest Service, for instance, falls under the Department of Agriculture rather than the Department of the Interior. Thus, it's not surprising that while the national forests are set aside, they are also dedicated to timber production. That usually means planting fast-growing loblolly pines, applying fertilizer and herbicide, and clearcutting — just like the paper companies. During the last five years, the Forest Service has sold \$24.5 million worth of trees from the state's national forests.

The state is hardly any better. Agen-

cies and universities that own land cash in the timber when they need a little extra money — which is often.

How can Alabama change its course on the forest? The state could increase the amount of woodlands held in public hands in several ways:

■ It could take advantage of opportunities to set aside land, as in the case of Fort McClellan. The Army post, in particular, would be well-suited for public use. Its mountainous slopes would discourage logging and other development in some areas.

Part of the land would have to be set aside for the U.S. Army Reserve and the National Guard, and part for safety reasons, because of unexploded ammunition. Once those needs are accounted for, however, there are still several thousand acres of unspoiled wilderness that Alabama could protect simply as scenery or as a place for people to hunt, hike and fish. Setting aside this land could extend other public holdings, such as the Talladega National Forest.

The bad news is there's not much time to press for such uses. Proposals on the fort's future have to be submitted by the end of this year. Then a state-appointed commission will draw up a plan for McClellan during 1997. Citizens would have to act quickly.

■ Universities could carve out some of their holdings for research purposes. Most of the research conducted now aims to find new ways to grow and cut trees more quickly. But almost no one is looking at the consequences of the way Alabama has managed its forests.

The University of Alabama, even though it has no forestry school, is well-positioned to provide the land for such research. UA has about 35,000 acres of timberland and could devote a part of it for that purpose, perhaps coordinating with Auburn University's forestry school.

■ Congress could set aside more land as wilderness areas. A good example of such an effort is Dugger Mountain, located in the Talladega National Forest. U.S. Rep. Glen Browder has supported setting aside 14,000 acres of the mountain as wilderness, which would ban logging, mining and roads but would allow hunting, fishing, hiking, and bike and horseback riding.

■ The Forever Wild program could increase public ownership. The state program uses oil and gas interest income to purchase land and set it aside for public use. The constitutional amendment that created Forever Wild in 1992 set it up for 20 years, but Legislators could extend it even further.

In the case of Forever Wild, more than 60 percent of Alabamians supported the amendment at the polls. That vote indicates that the public might support a similar call to set aside land for recreation or simply to preserve Alabama's beautiful forest heritage.

We owe it to future generations to heed that call.

Tuesday: Promise of a new economy

ALABAMA
FOREST
CUT SHORT

Second in a series

Subject: GREENLines Issue #323
Date: Tue, 25 Feb 1997 00:24:08 -0500
From: Roger Featherstone <rfeather@clark.net>
Reply-To: rfeather@clark.net
To: actgreen@envirolink.org

GREENLines, Tues. Feb. 25, 1997, from GREEN,
the Grassroots Environmental Effectiveness Network,
A project of Defenders of Wildlife.
(202)789-2844x288 or email rfeather@clark.net

COST QUERY: A lawsuit filed last week by activist Pat Wolff seeks information from USDA about how much the Animal Damage Control program spent to kill wildlife on ranches owned by ABC's Sam Donaldson and Rep. Joe Skeen (R-NM), AP reports. "The public wildlife is being killed at taxpayer expense, and we should be able to know about it," said Wolff. "What is being killed on behalf of these two men and what is it costing?" Donaldson and Skeen own ranches in Lincoln Co. NM; Donaldson said last August that he has sought help from ADC to kill predators of his sheep.

PINE PLANS?: The fate of 5,000 acres of mountain longleaf pine, "almost unique" to an Alabama Army base, is uncertain as Fort McClellan is scheduled to close in 1998, the Atlanta Journal Constitution reports. Wildfires set "by shooting off guns and flares" have preserved the longleaf pines, which have largely vanished from similar sites where fire was suppressed, the paper says. Proposals for reuse of the base could include residential developments but unexploded ordnance may end up saving the pines.

GRAZING THREAT: The group Forest Guardians has filed suit against the Forest Service to end grazing that is harming the endangered spokedace on the Prescott NF in Arizona, AP reports. The Fish and Wildlife Service has raised concerns about the grazing, but their advice was ignored, says the Guardians' John Horning. "Fish and Wildlife determined that their grazing plan would jeopardize the spokedace, and so rather than do what Fish and Wildlife told it to do, which was to remove cows . . . the Forest Service just withdrew their consultation," Horning said.

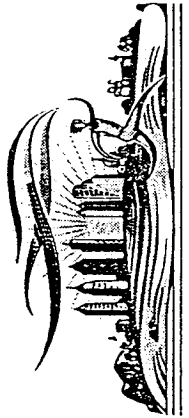
LAW DAZE: Lawmakers are back in Washington after the week long Presidents Day recess, with budget hearings and one major floor vote planned, Greenwire reports from several sources. The Senate will vote today on releasing \$385 million in international family planning funds; later this week, the Senate Energy committee may take up legislation to site a nuclear waste disposal site in Nevada. Two "workshops" will be held by Sen. Larry Craig (R-ID) on his bill to roll back federal protections for public forests; Transportation Committees in both houses will begin hearings on the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA).

HCPS: The first ever national conference to assess ESA Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) will be held May 17-18 in Washington DC at the Georgetown University Law Center, the National Wildlife Federation says. NWF is sponsoring the event to look at the "proliferation" of HCPs and how activists can influence them. NWF and National Audubon will sponsor an Endangered Species lobby training session May 19: for conference information contact Bill Howard at (202)797-5485, email noint7@nwf.org; for lobby details call Todd Tucci at (202)861-2242, email ttucci@audubon.org.

=====

GREEN

GrassRoots Environmental Effectiveness Network
A project of Defenders of Wildlife
1101 14th St. NW, Suite 1400, Washington, DC 20005



Redeemed by Army's fire

Fate of rare pine in doubt as fort set to close in '99

By Sam Hodges

NEWHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

Anniston, Ala.

As ironies go, this one is big and green. Weapons of destruction have helped preserve thousands of acres of rare longleaf pine here at Fort McClellan.

Longleaf not only tolerates fire, it requires fire to suppress competition from hardwoods and faster-growing pines.

Elsewhere in the Appalachians, Smokey the Bear has done a number on longleaf. But recruits training at Fort McClellan have, through shooting off guns and flares, set enough wildfires to preserve the trees and the rare plants that grow under them.

The oldest of Fort McClellan's longleaf pines predate the United States. Scientists have identified whole stands with an average age of 180 years. Definitions of "old growth" vary, but this is as close to old growth as Southern pine gets, especially in a mountain setting.

With Fort McClellan scheduled to close in 1999, the fate of these trees is in doubt. Residential development — posh houses with a view — is one possibility. That would mean fire suppression and slow death to the longleaf.

Government agencies, urged on by scientists, hope to preserve the acreage for hunting, hiking, education and research. Again, the Army — having innocently blasted away for so long — may prove the saving grace.

"Some of the worst unexploded ordnance is lodged in that mountain range," said Rob Richardson, executive director of the Fort McClellan Reuse and Redevelopment Authority. "It's the funniest thing, but man-made pollution of the environment could end up protecting the longleaf pine."

Longleaf pine is renowned for how long it lives and how straight it grows. It's known, too, for producing outstanding lumber. The longleaf pine ecosystem, home to the red-cockaded woodpecker and other endangered critters, encompasses an amazing variety of fire-tolerant grasses and wildflowers.

Forest ecologists estimate that the South once had 90 million acres of longleaf. Now there are about 4 million acres. Most of that is in coastal plain areas such as Mobile.

Mountain longleaf, once common on dry, fire-prone slopes of the southern Appalachians, is now almost unique to the Fort McClellan acreage, and some even better stands on private lands just to the south.

"In Georgia, they've essentially lost it all due to

earlier settlement by Europeans, and [timber] harvesting and fire suppression," said Nellie Maceina, an Auburn University graduate student whose forestry master's thesis is on the Fort McClellan longleaf stands.

Those stands cover perhaps 5,000 acres on the south and west slopes of Choccolocco Mountain. They were — and probably still are — too remote for cost-effective logging. And they have had just enough fire, from lightning strikes and Army mayhem.

What fire means to longleaf, Fort McClellan has meant to the Anniston economy. For decades, it has been a crucial employer and supporter of local business.

In 1995, Congress approved the recommendation of a base-closing commission that Fort McClellan (among many other military facilities) be phased out. Though the target date is 1999, Rob Richardson of the reuse authority predicts the actual closing will be pushed back two years.

Already, there have been three main proposals for what to do with the property, featuring different mixes of industrial, commercial, residential and civic development. No decision by the reuse authority (which will most likely have the final say) is imminent.

Most of the base will definitely find a new use. Richardson does not rule out residential development of Choccolocco Mountain.

"No one has stepped forward and said, 'We're going to put housing units there,' but it's an option we're looking at."

As for infrastructure costs — roads and utility lines — Richardson acknowledges they would be expensive but not prohibitively so. He points out that fancy homes already are in place on other slopes around Anniston.

But he also says that removal of unexploded ordnance represents another major — and perhaps prohibitive — cost. In recent years, the Army has accidentally set fires in the longleaf with flares, tracer rounds and smoke grenades. Through World War II, the area was an artillery range.

"They used to fire into the face of Choccolocco Mountain," said Ron Levy, environmental director at Fort McClellan.

The area is considered safe to hike and hunt in, but it is believed that a number of unexploded shells are buried there, anywhere from 1 to 30 feet down. Levy's office has done an archival search, trying to determine how much was fired and where, and is gearing up for an estimate of the cost of finding and removing the unexploded ordnance, should the decision be to develop.

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