



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office
2493 Portola Road, Suite B
Ventura, California 93003



IN REPLY REFER TO:
08EVEN00-2020-TA-0466

June 15, 2020

William Collins, Environmental Coordinator
Department of the Army
Army Base Realignment and Closure, Fort Ord Office
P.O. Box 5008, Building #4463 Gigling Road
Monterey, California 93944-5008

Subject: Request for Cessation of Monitoring in Environmental Services Cooperative Agreement Munitions Response Areas Under the Programmatic Biological Opinion for Cleanup and Property Transfer Actions Conducted at the Former Fort Ord, Monterey County, California (2017-F-0094)

Dear Mr. Collins:

We have reviewed your request, received in our office by electronic mail on May 15, 2020, for our approval to allow the conclusion of monitoring associated with habitat restoration to benefit federally listed species in selected munitions response areas as required by the Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO) for Cleanup and Property Transfer Actions Conducted at the Former Fort Ord, Monterey County, California (2017-F-0094) (Service 2017) and the Installation-Wide Multispecies Habitat Management Plan (HMP) (Corps 1997). We provide our response in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.). We have based our response on the FORA ESCA Remediation Program 2019 Annual Natural Resource Monitoring, Mitigation, and Management Report (FORA ESCA RP Team 2020), information presented at the April 9, 2020 annual restoration and monitoring meeting, a May 13, 2020 call, and other communications with your staff.

The Service's original biological opinion for munitions cleanup, disposal and reuse of Fort Ord (Service 1993) required the Army to develop and implement a habitat management plan to promote preservation and restoration of habitat and populations of special status species affected by Army actions, including federally listed species. The 2017 PBO supersedes previous biological opinions and continues HMP requirements that the Army restore federally listed species and their habitats to pre-cleanup conditions. Various site-specific restoration plans and monitoring protocols have been developed to support HMP implementation on former Fort Ord.

The Army is requesting Service approval to conclude monitoring in munitions response areas placed under the ownership and management of the Fort Ord Reuse Authority (FORA) via an Environmental Services Cooperative Agreement (ESCA) entered into on March 31, 2007. FORA has conducted restoration and monitoring under the PBO since receiving these lands in 2009, though the Army is responsible for reaching restoration success criteria. Success criteria for FORA Interim Action Ranges are defined in the Habitat Restoration Plan for the Interim Action Ranges (FORA ESCA RP Team 2013), and monitoring methods are described in Revisions of Protocol for Conducting Vegetation Monitoring for Compliance with the Installation-Wide Multispecies Habitat Management Plan, Former Fort Ord (Tetra Tech and EcoSystems West 2015). The FORA-ESCA program closes at the end of June 2020, after which FORA lands will be transferred to another owner.

All success criteria for restoration activities within FORA munitions response areas have been met, with the exception of percent vegetative cover at the Interim Action Ranges North Range 44 and South Range 44 small scale excavation areas (FORA ESCA RP Team 2020). However, these areas have increased in native species cover and are on a trajectory to meet the required 50 percent cover success criterion. Mean frequency graphs indicate the process of succession is well underway, with high frequencies of subshrub species and increasing frequencies of most shrub species. Based on the trajectory of recovery of native vegetation the Army has concluded that no further biological monitoring by FORA or the ESCA Remediation Program is required, and FORA's project activities should be considered successfully completed.

Following the transfer of FORA-owned lands, the Army will monitor vegetative cover at North and South Range 44 small scale excavation areas to ensure habitat recovery continues. The exact methods and timing of monitoring will be coordinated with the Service, but at minimum the Army will use aerial imagery for assessment of vegetative cover within two to five years of the last FORA-ESCA monitoring event.

The Service agrees based on monitoring data that native vegetation in North and South Range 44 small scale excavation areas is on a trajectory to recovery, and that habitat monitoring by FORA and the ESCA Remediation Program in these and other areas under FORA jurisdiction may conclude. We expect to coordinate with the Army and future landowner to determine appropriate monitoring methods to ensure that habitat restoration success criteria are fully met in the North and South Range 44 small scale excavation areas in coming years. We also would appreciate receiving notification from the Army when the subject lands are transferred following the conclusion of the FORA-ESCA program, including the entity to whom FORA lands are transferred.

William Collins

3

If you have any questions, please contact Mark Ogonowski of my staff at (805) 644-1766 ext. 53350, or by electronic mail at mark_ogonowski@fws.gov.

Sincerely,

Leilani Takano
Assistant Field Supervisor

cc: Peter Boucher, CDFW

Josh Metz, FORA

LITERATURE CITED

- [FORA ESCA RP Team] Fort Ord Reuse Authority Environmental Services Cooperative Agreement Remediation Program. 2013. Phase II Interim Action Work Plan Addendum: Habitat Restoration Plan; Interim Action Ranges Munitions Response Area, Former Fort Ord, Monterey County, California. March 26, 2013. Fort Ord Administrative Record No. ESCA-0261B.
- [FORA ESCA RP Team] Fort Ord Reuse Authority Environmental Services Cooperative Agreement Remediation Program. 2020. FORA ESCA RP 2019 annual natural resource monitoring, mitigation, and management report. Document Control Number: 09595-19-057-003. February 18, 2020. Fort Ord Administrative Record No. ESCA-0382.
- [Tetra Tech and EcoSystems West] Tetra Tech and EcoSystems West Consulting Group. 2015. Revisions of Protocol for Conducting Vegetation Monitoring for Compliance with the Installation-Wide Multispecies Habitat Management Plan, Former Fort Ord. April. Fort Ord Administrative Record No. BW-2745.
- [Corps] U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. 1997. Installation-wide multispecies habitat management plan for Former Fort Ord, California. April. Sacramento, California. Fort Ord Administrative Record No. BW-1787.
- [Service] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1993. Biological opinion for the disposal and reuse of Fort Ord, Monterey County, California (1-8-93-F-14). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, Ventura, California. Fort Ord Administrative Record No. OE-0045.
- [Service] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2017. Programmatic biological opinion for cleanup and property transfer actions conducted at the former Fort Ord, Monterey County, California. Reinitiation of formal consultation (2017-F-0094). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, Ventura, California. June 7, 2017. Fort Ord Administrative Record No. BW-2747A.