



## FACT SHEET

AFVR-DE-PSE/Env Res Br  
William Gossweiler/862-0188  
30 January 1989

1. SUBJECT: Current Status of Eagle River Flats Investigation

2. FACTS:

a. Eagle River Flats, a 2500-acre wetland, is Fort Richardson's only impact area for heavy artillery training. It was established about 40 years ago and has been used continuously ever since. The area is also an important staging ground for waterfowl during spring and fall migrations.

b. In late summer and fall of 1981 Army biologist, Allen Bennett, discovered what he considered an unusually high number of duck carcasses in a sector of the Eagle River Flats.

c. Between 1982 and 1985 a number of random ground searches were carried out on the Eagle River Flats by the Army, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The discovery of abnormally high numbers of dead waterfowl during these searches (total of 642) led biologists to suspect that there was a potentially serious problem at hand.

d. Also in 1985, Fort Richardson requested and received assistance from the Army Environmental Hygiene Agency (AEHA) which analyzed water and sediment samples taken from a number of sites inside and outside the Eagle River Flats. Results from these tests, received in 1986, were inconclusive.

e. In 1987 a decision was made by all agencies previously involved in the Eagle River Flats waterfowl matter to approach the problem in a more organized scientific manner. It was obvious that although some important information had been obtained from the prior investigations, the situation warranted a much heavier effort. An interagency task force was, therefore, established to investigate the Eagle River Flats waterfowl mortality problem. It consisted of representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Army (Army), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC).

f. The basic goals of the investigation were to determine if a waterfowl die-off was still occurring and, if so, identify the causative agent(s) and recommend mitigating actions.

g. 1988 field season objectives of the task force investigation were to determine if a waterfowl die-off was still occurring, inventory all the living fauna utilizing the Eagle River Flats area, and document and collect dead birds for laboratory analysis. All three of these objectives were successfully met in 1988. Army and USFWS wildlife biologists conducted over 30 systematic ground searches along with some aerial surveys during this field season.

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h. Approximately 80 of the bird carcasses collected between 1983 and 1989 were sent to labs in the continental U.S. for analysis. Early findings ruled out disease, trauma, concussion and direct injury from fragments as causative agents. Preliminary results from recent chemical analysis have tentatively eliminated heavy metals and organic compounds such as DDT and PCBs as contributing factors. Due to limited budgets and monetary constraints, only the most routine chemical analysis could be performed to date.

i. In an effort to resolve the problem as expeditiously as possible, the U.S. Army Garrison, Alaska requested and has received a substantial amount of funding for the Eagle River Flats study along with technical and administrative assistance from the U.S. Army Toxic and Hazardous Materials Agency. This funding will enable the study to proceed at a faster and more comprehensive level, in allowing the Army to contract a "top notch" environmental firm which will work closely with the task force.

### 3. ACTION TAKEN.

a. The Army has been an active member of the investigative task force and has contributed significantly toward the entire effort.

b. Flexibility and concern for the resources was clearly demonstrated last fall when the Army "shut down" scheduled firing activities for nearly three weeks in October, which is normally one of the most active training periods, while trumpeter and tundra swans gathered on the Flats before heading south. Furthermore, this cease fire will occur annually when swans are present in large concentrations in accordance with current Army policy.

c. The Garrison Commander has been providing the task force with all information currently available regarding the chemical composition of munitions being fired into Eagle River Flats.

d. The Command has succeeded in obtaining funding from the Department of the Army to continue the investigation at an efficient, high quality level.

### 4. ACTION REQUIRED.

a. Ensure administration of the contract is carried out in a smooth and timely manner.

b. Modify training schedules to accommodate the study.

c. Assist contractor in securing necessary access to the targeted sample sites.

d. Make every effort to ensure that any additional funding determined to be necessary or crucial to the success of the study is adequately budgeted for and requested.

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e. As a member of the interagency task force, continue to play a key role in the investigation. We, like our civilian neighbors, are committed to the conservation of natural resources and preservation of the environment.

  
RUFF