

FACT SHEET

APVR-PW-ENV
WRENTMORE/428-2807
13 May 1992

1. **SUBJECT:** Eagle River Flats (ERF) Update
2. **BACKGROUND:** Eagle River Flats (ERF) has served as the primary ordnance impact area for Fort Richardson since 1949. Ordnance fired into ERF included 0.50 caliber and M-60 machine gun rounds, 40mm/90mm recoilless rifle rounds, M203 grenades, antitank rockets and incendiary munitions, and various calibers of artillery and mortar rounds. The artillery and mortar rounds included munitions containing white phosphorus (WP).
ERF is a major staging area for a variety of waterfowl during spring and fall migrations. Waterfowl counts during fall of 1990, found 1,460 swans, 2,450 geese, 2,355 ducks, 52 sandhill cranes, and 27 bald eagles. Several thousand shorebirds commonly use the Eagle River Flats.
Each year since counting began in August 1982, approximately 1500-2000 waterfowl have died on the flats. In January 1991, researchers from the U.S. Army Cold Regions Research and Engineering Lab (CRREL) determined that residual or unoxidized white phosphorus was the probable cause of the mortality. In February of 1990 the Division Commander, MG Fields, suspended all firing activities in the ERF impact range.
3. **FACTS BEARING ON THE SUBJECT:** Preliminary analysis by the U.S Army Environmental Hygiene Agency concluded that potential health risks associated with consuming waterfowl taken in areas near the ERF are minimal.
CRREL analyzed over 300 duck gizzards taken from areas near ERF and has found no evidence of WP.
The closure of ERF apparently did not have an impact on waterfowl mortality. A possible explanation was advanced that the unoxidized WP was being consumed by waterfowl from the sediments and this was responsible for the mortalities.
Based on the findings of the CRREL 1991 final report coupled with the observation that lack of firing in the flats apparently had no effect on reducing waterfowl mortality, Major General Samuel Ebbesen, directed that an environmental assessment (EA) be prepared to evaluate the resumption of firing during the winter months only and with a heavy ice cover. Firing was to exclude white phosphorus munitions.
The EA went through the appropriate public review process and was signed along with the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), on 2 Jan 92.
Based upon CRREL'S findings regarding ice conditions firing began in the flats on 2 Jun 92 and continued to 27 Mar 92. No problems were encountered..
4. **ACTION TAKEN.** FY 92 field work began in early May 1992. Studies included evaluating the feasibility and effectiveness of remedial alternatives; determining annual waterfowl mortality rates; determine spacial and vertical distribution of WP in the waterfowl use areas and employment of hazing techniques to keep birds from feeding in heavily contaminated areas.
5. **ACTIONS REQUIRED.** Continue to provide logistical and technical support for the study and continue to play a leading role on the Eagle River Flats Task Force and in administration of the project.

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