

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Q&A)**  
**Draft Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) for the Extended**  
**Withdrawal and Continued Use of Public Lands for Military Purposes**  
**in Interior Alaska**  
**June 2023**

**Q-1: What is the Army proposing to do?**

**A-1:** Congress, through the Military Lands Withdrawal Act, withdrew 869,862 acres of public land and water area from public use. The withdrawn areas are currently U.S. Army Garrison Alaska training ranges: Yukon Training Area, Donnelly Training Area East, and Donnelly Training Area West. The Army has determined that there is a continuing military need for this land and is requesting that Congress extend its use of the three training areas. A legislative proposal is required to withdraw the land.

**Q-2: Why does the Army need to prepare a LEIS for the proposed land withdrawal continuation?**

**A-2:** The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Army's implementing NEPA regulations, 32 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 651, require the Army to provide an analysis of the environmental impacts that could result from implementing a proposed action, solicit relevant input from all interested parties, and make this information available to all stakeholders. Since the proposed action potentially results in significant impacts to the environment, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as opposed to an Environmental Assessment (EA), is the appropriate level of NEPA analysis to evaluate potential impacts and identify appropriate mitigation measures. The Army will present the analyses and findings of this LEIS to Congress.

**Q-3: What is a Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS), and how is it different than a standard EIS?**

**A-3:** The proposed land withdrawal extension would occur through the Military Lands Withdrawal Act, which requires that the Army submit a legislative proposal to Congress as part of its proposal. A LEIS is a detailed NEPA document in an agency's recommendation or report on a legislative proposal to Congress. A LEIS will be prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 USC §4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality Regulation Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and 32 CFR Part 651 (Environmental Analysis of Army Actions). In more general terms, the LEIS is being prepared to inform Army decision makers, federal, state, and local agencies, Alaska Native tribes, and the public of potential environmental effects resulting from the proposed action.

The primary difference between a LEIS and a standard EIS is that the decision to implement an action will be made by Congress, not the Army, and that the development of a Final LEIS is not required. In addition, the Army will not prepare a Record of

Decision at the end of the process, but rather the land withdrawal extension process will culminate in drafted legislation submitted to Congress for approval.

**Q-4: What is the Army's purpose and need for the proposed action?**

**A-4:** The purpose of the proposed action is to obtain an extension of the land withdrawal of the three training areas for 25 years or more, until such time as the Army determines it no longer needs the land for military purposes.

The proposed action is needed to ensure the Army will retain the full and continued use of the training areas to successfully execute and fulfill its mission in Alaska. Access to the withdrawn land enables the Army to produce a force trained to mobilize, deploy, fight and win anywhere in the world. Army training conditions must match or closely resemble all possible environments throughout the world, including arctic and subarctic conditions. In addition to Army training needs, the U.S. Air Force plans, conducts, and coordinates air operations in the restricted airspace over the withdrawn land. The ability to conduct air-to-air and air-to-ground operations in the same airspace ensures the effectiveness of this training. Designated Impact Areas and associated airspace within the Army land are the primary sites in Alaska for military aircraft air-to-ground training.

**Q-5: What is the current condition of the withdrawn land?**

**A-5:** The Army uses the withdrawn land to replicate real-world wartime situations in cold weather regions around the globe. Much of the acreage is undeveloped and is intensively used for military training purposes. Training actions are concentrated into several development zones. Over the past decades, there has been some minimal development in these zones aimed at enhancing military training through the creation of firing ranges, airstrips, and access roads and trails. The majority of the withdrawn land remains undeveloped and is managed for its natural resources including fish and wildlife habitat, water and air quality, and cultural resources.

**Q-6: What alternatives is the Army considering for the land withdrawal?**

**A-6:** Alternatives considered include 1) extending the land withdrawal for 25 years or more, until such time as the Army determines it no longer needs the land for military purposes, and 2) a No Action Alternative, under which the withdrawal would not be extended and lands determined suitable would be returned to the public domain and managed by the Department of the Interior. No other reasonable alternatives were raised during the scoping process that could meet the project purpose and need, as well as screening criteria that were considered for evaluation in the LEIS.

**Q-7: Does the Army have a Preferred Alternative?**

**A-7:** Yes, the Army's Preferred Alternative is to request Congress extend the land withdrawal for 25 years or more, until such time as the Army determines it no longer needs the land for military purposes.

**Q-8: What is the schedule for completion of the LEIS?**

**A-8:** The entire LEIS process is expected to take approximately two years. The process started with the publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* (September 24, 2021), which marked the beginning of the 30-day scoping period. Virtual public scoping meetings were held during the scoping period, which occurred in October 2021.

The Draft LEIS is anticipated to be published in spring 2023. Additional public meetings will be held for the communities of Delta Junction and Fairbanks/North Pole during the public comment period for the Draft LEIS. Meetings will be held in-person, unless public health guidance changes. Dates and times for the public meetings will be advertised in local area newspapers. Public comments on the Draft LEIS will be submitted as part of the legislative proposal. In accordance with 40 CFR § 1506.8 a final LEIS is not required for the legislative EIS process.

**Q-9: When will the land withdrawal extension go into effect?**

**A-9:** The land withdrawal extension is planned to be implemented prior to the expiration date of the current withdrawal period in November 2026 to ensure seamless continuation of training activities and facilitate long-term planning and management of the withdrawn land.

**Q-10: Will the Army coordinate with other agencies on this project?**

**A-10:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has agreed to participate as a cooperating agency for the preparation of the LEIS and is actively participating in the development and review.

Throughout development of the LEIS, the Army will coordinate with appropriate federal, state, and local agencies, Alaska Native tribes, Alaska Native tribal organizations, and the public about the proposed land withdrawal extension. Agency involvement activities include formal meetings with agency representatives during the scoping period and active consideration of agency comments on the Draft LEIS.

**Q-11: How is public input included in the LEIS process?**

**A-11:** One of the Army's goals as part of the LEIS development is to engage and educate the public about this project. The Army desires to understand the communities' interests and concerns regarding this project and has prepared a Public Involvement Plan to ensure all members of the public have full opportunity to review and comment on the proposed action and alternatives.

**Q-12: How can I get involved?**

**A-12:** There are two primary opportunities during the LEIS process where the public can get involved and provide comments. The first opportunity occurred after the NOI was published in the *Federal Register*, during a 30-day scoping period where the public was

able to learn about the proposed action and provide comments. The Army hosted a virtual public scoping meeting during the scoping period and advertised it in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Delta Wind, and Anchorage Daily News. Comments received during the public scoping meeting helped inform and develop the LEIS analysis.

The second opportunity for public comment comes when the Draft LEIS is published in Spring 2023. Notices announcing the availability of the Draft LEIS will be published in the *Federal Register* and in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Delta Wind, and Anchorage Daily News. An additional set of public meetings will be publicized and held in person in Fairbanks and Delta Junction. The public meeting in Delta Junction will also serve as a public hearing for BLM's finding of potential impacts to subsistence uses. Comments received during the Draft LEIS review period will be appended to the Draft LEIS and made available to the public through the project website.

**Q-13: Is project information available online?**

**A-13:** You can learn more about the project by visiting the Army's NEPA website at <https://home.army.mil/alaska/index.php/fort-wainwright/NEPA>. The website provides links to project materials, project schedule, project updates, and provides methods of submitting comments during the public comment period.

**Q-14: Can I access information about the project if I don't have a computer?**

**A-14:** Project information and LEIS documents will be available at the following information repositories:

**Fairbanks:** Noel Wien Public Library, 1215 Cowles St., Fairbanks, AK

**Delta Junction:** Delta Community Library, 2291 Deborah St., Delta Junction, AK

**North Pole:** North Pole Branch Library, 656 NPHS Blvd., North Pole, AK

**Anchorage:** Anchorage Public Library, 3600 Denali St., Anchorage, AK

In the event the repositories are closed, copies of the Draft LEIS may be provided upon request. Information can be requested from the Public Affairs Office; see contact information below.

**Q-15: Does public opinion really matter?**

**A-15:** Public participation is a key component of the NEPA process. One of the goals of the NEPA process is to promote informed and engaged public and agency involvement. The Army invites and encourages the public to participate throughout the LEIS preparation process.

**Q-16: How do I submit comments or who can I contact if I have additional questions about the project?**

**A-16:** Anyone wishing to comment on the proposed action can submit their comments through:

- The project website at <https://home.army.mil/alaska/index.php/fort-wainwright/NEPA>,
- By sending an email to [usarmy.wainwright.id-pacific.mbx.lwe-leis@army.mil](mailto:usarmy.wainwright.id-pacific.mbx.lwe-leis@army.mil),
- By mailing a letter to:
  - Directorate of Public Works  
Attn: AMIM-AKP-E (M. Sprau)  
1046 Marks Road #4500  
Fort Wainwright, AK 99703-4500
- Or verbally during the public meetings.

Requests for further information may be sent to: Grant Sattler, Public Affairs Office AMIM-AKG-PA (Sattler) 1060 Gaffney Road #5900, Fort Wainwright, AK 99703–5900 telephone (907) 353–6701 email: [alan.g.sattler.civ@army.mil](mailto:alan.g.sattler.civ@army.mil).

**Q-17: What specific environmental resources and concerns are addressed in the LEIS?**

**A-17:** The LEIS evaluates environmental resource areas that may be affected by the proposed action. The resources analyzed include recreational uses of the withdrawn land, subsistence uses, land use, public health and safety, socioeconomic, airspace, air quality, noise, soil, water resources, biological resources, wildland fire, cultural resources, traffic and transportation, and hazardous materials. The LEIS also identifies measures that would reduce or eliminate adverse impacts. The BLM’s analysis of impacts to subsistence uses as defined by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act are presented in Appendix 7 of the LEIS.

**Q-18: What are the anticipated environmental impacts?**

**A-18:** Under the No Action Alternative, significant impacts include economic impacts to the cities of Delta Junction and Fairbanks. In addition, the Army anticipates minor, moderate, or beneficial impacts to other resources. Under the proposed action, there would be no change to training. There will be ongoing potential minor to moderate adverse impacts to biological resources, subsistence uses, cultural resources, water resources, land use, air quality, airspace, noise, and hazardous materials. The intensity of possible impacts would be reduced to the degree possible by implementation of avoidance and minimization measures.

**Q-19: Will the land withdrawal continuation affect access to the land?**

**A-19:** No, implementation of the proposed action will not change access to the land relative to current management.

**Q-20: What is a Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Section 810 Subsistence Analysis?**

**A-20:** Section 810 of ANILCA requires that an evaluation of subsistence uses and needs be completed to “withdraw, reserve, lease, or otherwise permit the use,

occupancy or disposition of public lands.” Federal subsistence regulations do not apply to military training lands, as specified in 50 CFR § 100.3(d), but because changes in management of the withdrawn lands would affect federal lands subject to ANILCA, BLM is required to prepare a subsistence analysis under Section 810.

Under federal subsistence regulations, which apply only to federal public lands, rural residents are eligible to engage in subsistence practices allowed under ANILCA. The entirety of the FNSB is designated a non-rural area under federal subsistence regulations, meaning that FNSB residents are not qualified to participate in federal subsistence harvest. As such, much of the population living adjacent to the withdrawn lands would remain ineligible for participation in federal subsistence harvest under ANILCA, regardless of the status of the withdrawn lands. There are other nearby rural communities outside of the FNSB (Figure 3.17-1) that include residents who are federally qualified subsistence users and who may participate in subsistence under ANILCA on any federal public lands (including federal lands within the FNSB), pursuant to existing federal harvest regulations for Alaska Department of Fish and Game Game Management Units (GMUs) 20A, 20B, and 20D. Federal subsistence regulations under ANILCA do not apply to the withdrawn lands because the lands are currently withdrawn from the public domain for military training purposes under PL 106-65. Return of the lands to federal public domain would make federal subsistence regulations applicable to the lands, which could result in additional opportunity for federally qualified rural residents in the region, reduce travel distances for subsistence users in GMU 20D, and potentially relieve subsistence pressure on other federal lands.

**Q-21: What are the findings of the Section 810 evaluation?**

**A-21:** Relative to the No Action Alternative, the proposed action would have both positive and negative effects, but not significant reductions on abundance and availability of subsistence species. Relative to the No Action Alternative, the proposed action may result in significant reductions in access to subsistence resources for communities in GMU 20D, including Dot Lake, Dry Creek, Healy Creek, and Delta Junction area communities.