

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

A Draft Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) is required by the Military Lands Withdrawal Act (Public Law 99-606, 100 Stat. 3457, et seq.), dated November 6, 1986, for the continued military use of public domain lands by the U.S. Army on Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely, Alaska. The Draft and Final LEIS were prepared by U.S. Army Alaska.

The Department of the Army has determined there is a continuing military need for the use of Alaska lands now withdrawn from public use under the Military Lands Withdrawal Act and is requesting to renew the withdrawals through new legislation. U.S. Army Alaska proposes to renew its use of the Fort Wainwright Yukon Training Area (formerly known as the Fort Wainwright Maneuver Area), the Fort Greely West Training Area (formerly known as the Fort Greely Maneuver Area), and the Fort Greely East Training Area (formerly known as the Fort Greely Air Drop Zone), each greater than 5,000 acres. The Engle Act (Public Law 85-337), enacted February 28, 1958, allows the Department of Defense to apply for withdrawal of public land for defense purposes; for a withdrawal involving more than 5,000 acres, the Act requires Congressional approval.

The Military Lands Withdrawal Act requires the Army to publish a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the continued or renewed withdrawal of these lands by November 6, 1998. The Engle Act requires the Alaska Army lands withdrawal renewal be authorized by Congress through legislation because each withdrawal area covers more than 5,000 acres. The Department of Defense directed the Army to complete a Legislative Environmental Impact Statement. Since Congress has the final authority for renewing the military's use of the withdrawal lands, the Army will not issue a Record of Decision following completion and publication of the Final Legislative Environmental Impact Statement. Instead, the Department of Defense and Department of the Interior will prepare draft legislation and submit it to Congress.

U.S. Army Alaska is requesting to renew the land withdrawals under the same stipulations and conditions of the Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1986 and for the same military purposes which have been conducted over the past 15 years.

Description of Subject Lands

The parcels of land proposed for withdrawal renewal are located in the State of Alaska. Fort Jonathan Wainwright lies approximately 120 miles south of the Arctic Circle near the City of Fairbanks in interior Alaska. The installation, consisting of the Main Post, the Tanana Flats Training Area, and the Yukon Training Area, covers 915,098 acres (Figure ES.a). The Fort Wainwright Yukon Training Area is a rectangular-shaped 390 square-mile parcel covering approximately 247,952 acres. It is located 16 miles east-southeast of Fairbanks and immediately east and adjacent to Eielson Air Force Base. The Yukon Training Area lies east of the Tanana River between the Chena and Salcha Rivers and northeast of the Richardson Highway.

The other withdrawal parcels are at Fort Greely; they are the Fort Greely West and East Training Areas. Fort Greely is approximately 105 miles southeast of Fairbanks near the City of Delta Junction in interior Alaska. The installation, consisting of the Main Post, the West and East Training Areas, and three outlying training sites: Gerstle River Test Site, Black Rapids Training Area, and Whistler Creek Rock Climbing Area, covers approximately 662,000 acres (ES.a). The Fort Greely West Training Area is a 894 square-mile parcel bounded by the Richardson Highway to the east and the Little Delta River to the west. It covers approximately 571,995 acres with the Delta River flowing north through the eastern portion. The Fort Greely East Training Area is a separate 81 square-mile parcel stretching east of the Richardson Highway to Granite Creek. It covers approximately 51,590 acres.

Legislation

The Military Lands Withdrawal Act, enacted by Congress on November 6, 1986, identified the Fort Wainwright Yukon Maneuver Area (now known as the Fort Wainwright Yukon Training Area) and Fort Greely Maneuver Area (now known as the Fort Greely West Training Area) and Fort Greely Air Drop Zone (now known as the Fort Greely East Training Area) as lands withdrawn from public use until November 6, 2001. Subject to valid existing rights, these lands are withdrawn from all forms of appropriation under the public land laws (including the mining law and the mineral leasing and the geothermal leasing laws), under An Act to Provide for the Admission of the State of Alaska into the Union approved July 7, 1958 (Public Law 85-508) and under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (Public Law 92-203).

The Act reserves these lands for use by the Secretary of the Army for military maneuvering, training, equipment development and testing, as well as other defense-related purposes. The Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of the Army manage the lands subject to conditions and restrictions necessary to permit military use. The Secretary of the Interior can issue a lease, easement, right-of-way, or other authorization for nonmilitary use of these lands with the concurrence of the Secretary of the Army. Hunting, fishing, and trapping on these lands is permitted in accordance with the provisions of Military Reservations and Facilities: Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping (Section 2671 of Title 10, United States Code).

Background of Military Activity

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, aviation played an increasingly important role in Fairbanks' development. Fairbanks' location in the Interior and lack of roads throughout Alaska made the airplane an attractive mode of transportation. Heavy machinery, food, mail, and passengers were flown regularly from Fairbanks to hundreds of Interior mining camps (Cashen 1971, Robe 1970). It was Fairbanks' status as an aviation hub that compelled Colonel Henry H. Arnold to recommend that it be considered as the site for an airbase in 1934 (Cloe and Monaghan 1984).

Between the World Wars, the military realized the need for an airfield in Alaska. In 1928, a joint Army/Navy plan established a defensive triangle in the Pacific Ocean to defend the continental United States from an attack from Japan. Plan Orange designated Hawaii, Panama, and Alaska as the limits of the triangle. The Air Corps' inexperience in the Arctic played an important role in the drive for an Alaskan airbase. This was underscored in 1929 when Colonel Ben C. Eielson disappeared in a winter storm while flying a rescue mission in the Bering Sea. Aviators from Alaska, Canada, and Russia joined in the search for Colonel Eielson. When assistance was requested from the Air Corps, they responded that they did not have anyone, except Colonel Eielson, who was experienced in Arctic flying.

Citing Alaska's strategic location and the need for a cold weather airfield, Alaska Delegate Anthony J. Dimond introduced the Dimond Bill in 1934. The bill called for construction of an Alaskan airfield. Eventually, in August 1939, a site was selected, and work began on the new Ladd Field. The garrison was activated on April 14, 1940. Later that year, the Cold Weather Station was also activated. The ever-urgent need for cold weather research and development called for expansion to 558 people by 1944.

During World War II, there was a major expansion of facilities at Ladd Field. The mission of Ladd Field as the North American terminus of the Alaska-Siberia Lend-Lease route was its best known contribution to the war effort. It was here, from 1942 to 1945, that the Soviet Union received United States' lend-lease aircraft. Soviet pilots received training in U.S. aircraft at Ladd Field before flying them across Siberia to the Eastern Front. Almost 8,000 aircraft were delivered over this route during the three-year period it was in operation.

Relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated rapidly after World War II. In response, Ladd Field was maintained, and the Strategic Air Command (SAC) established. SAC organized its first operational unit at Ladd Field in 1946 to begin developing a system of polar navigation (White 1994). Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, various SAC missions were carried out from Ladd Field.

The Army's mission at Ladd Field included anti-aircraft and ground defense, cold weather training, and emergency preparedness for nuclear attack. Anti-aircraft Artillery (AAA) batteries were installed around Fairbanks in the early 1950s to support its defense mission. To support the dual service missions, a major construction program was initiated at Ladd Field in the early 1950s.

With the creation of Ladd Air Force Base (AFB) in 1947, the War Department designated Big Delta, an inactive World War II airfield, as an Army post. An Arctic training center was established, and cold weather testing and training became the focus of activities at Big Delta. Many new facilities were constructed in the 1950s, and the military's first nuclear power plant was part of this program. After numerous name changes, the post was designated Fort Greely for Army Brigadier General Adolphus Greely in 1955 (Anchorage Daily News 1972).

Ladd AFB was transferred to the Army and renamed Fort Wainwright in 1961. This allowed the Army to enhance its cold weather testing and training program in Alaska. An example of this expansion was the establishment of the Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory (CRREL) that same year. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, military resources were directed towards the war in Vietnam. Arctic training was again emphasized in the 1970s, with exercises being conducted annually. With the activation of the 6th Infantry Division (Light) at Fort Wainwright in 1986, a major construction program was undertaken to build support facilities.

After the closure of Clark Air Base in the Philippines in 1992, the Air Force's COPE THUNDER, a Major Flying Exercise, was moved to Alaska. Through cooperation with the Army, the Air Force improved existing training areas on Fort

Wainwright and Fort Greely. These improvements include mock enemy air bases and a variety of equipment designed for aircrew training.

In April 1997, the Air Force's Military Operations Areas (MOA) Environmental Impact Statement was completed and corresponding airspace action approved by the Federal Aviation Administration. The new infrastructure provided Military Operations Areas connecting the training areas on Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely to support the Air Force mission in Alaska.

In the post Cold War period, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC 95) program identified Fort Greely for realignment. Approximately 1,800 acres of Main Post may be transferred under appropriate BRAC procedures (see Figure ES.a). Fort Greely realignment is scheduled for completion in July 2001. This realignment process does not affect the lands of this withdrawal renewal.

Selection of Preferred Alternative

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires a detailed statement of impacts associated with major Federal actions and decisions. A Record of Decision is prepared to document the alternative selected for implementation based on the analysis in the Environmental Impact Statement. Since Congress has the final authority for renewing the military's use of the withdrawal lands, the Army will not issue a Record of Decision following completion and publication of the Final Legislative Environmental Impact Statement. Instead, the Department of Defense and Department of the Interior will select a Preferred Alternative and prepare draft legislation and submit it to Congress. The draft legislation will contain their recommendation based on this Legislative Environmental Impact Statement. Congress will act on the draft legislation.

The National Environmental Policy Act also requires that all reasonable alternatives for Federal actions be analyzed. With the input received during the scoping process, the Army examined all possible actions to build an effective and reasonable range of alternatives. The Army and Air Force considered alternatives as reasonable if they could be implemented without impairing their ability to complete their military mission in Alaska. Since Army and Air Force needs require renewal of the existing withdrawals in their entirety, the range of alternatives to be examined in this Legislative Environmental Impact Statement was refined to include only those alternatives that included the entire lands now withdrawn.

Possible alternatives were reviewed and considered to determine the viability of the military achieving their missions in Alaska. Two alternatives were considered in detail in this LEIS; others were considered and eliminated from further study for varying reasons.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

1. Deny Withdrawal Renewal (No Action Alternative).
2. Approve Withdrawal Renewal for Fifty Years (Preferred Alternative).

Alternatives Eliminated from Further Study

The following alternatives were considered and eliminated from further study in this Legislative Environmental Impact Statement.

1. **Renew Withdrawal for Varying Lengths of Renewal Periods.** The scope of actions would remain virtually the same in comparing renewals for 15, 25, 50, or 100 year increments. Management and use of these withdrawal lands by the military would remain the same under each time period. The 50-year withdrawal is the preferred selection.
2. **Partial Land Withdrawal.** Present Army and Air Force training and testing needs require the use of all existing military lands to fulfill their mission in Alaska (see Figure ES.a). Therefore, the Army and Air Force eliminated this alternative from further study.
3. **Relinquish Beaver Creek-South Fork Area in the Fort Wainwright Yukon Training Area to Alaska State Parks.** The State of Alaska Division of Parks has requested the Army relinquish jurisdiction to 13,440 acres in the Beaver Creek-South Fork area on the Fort Wainwright Yukon Training Area. This acreage was designated as part of the Chena River State Recreation Area by the State legislature, but is not under its jurisdiction. However, the Air Force has a critical need for the use of the Beaver Creek Valley as the preferred entry route for maneuvering and attacking tactical targets on the Stuart Creek Impact Area, as well as serving as a buffer zone. Therefore, due to the significant impacts to military training and the importance of this area's training infrastructure in achieving combat readiness, the Army and Air Force eliminated this alternative from further study.

4. Bureau of Land Management Retain Authorization for Mineral Extraction. This alternative would allow the Bureau of Land Management the right to grant use of the withdrawal lands for mineral extraction without Army concurrence. It is possible that conflicts between military and mineral use might occur. Military use of the withdrawal lands would be compromised if the Army could not control the use of its training lands. The Army eliminated this alternative from further study.

5. Acquiring Alternate Training Lands. Since military training and testing has occurred on these withdrawal lands for nearly 50 years with portions dedicated as High Hazard Impact Areas, it is likely that complete cleanup and decontamination would be extremely expensive and technologically challenging. It therefore seemed unreasonable and impractical to propose to relocate military training and testing activities to other public lands and to commit resources at these alternate sites as new High Hazard Impact Areas. In addition, acquiring other public lands in Alaska for use by the military could be cost prohibitive.

6. Acquiring Additional Training Lands. U.S. Army Alaska determined acquiring additional land will not be considered in this withdrawal action. Larger training lands would allow the Air Force to fully utilize all weapon systems while training and increase the Army's ability to conduct joint training by utilizing linked training areas. However, additional land acquisition falls outside the scope of this withdrawal renewal action.

Major Conclusions: Discussion of Two Alternatives Considered in Detail

The two alternatives considered in detail are discussed below.

1. The No Action Alternative would occur if Congress does not grant the requested withdrawal renewal. The lands would no longer be available for military use after November 5, 2001.

These lands, in conjunction with the recently approved Military Operations Areas, provide a unique training opportunity. The loss of these training lands would severely reduce combat readiness for military units worldwide.

If the military land withdrawals are not renewed, jurisdiction of the non-contaminated land would revert to the Bureau of Land Management. The State has already selected these lands in accordance with Alaska National Interest

Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (Public Law 96-487) for recreation, mineral rights, wildlife, forestry, agriculture, transportation, and settlement values.

Non-military activities will have impacts as well. Increased activity will bolster the economy, but could be detrimental to the environment. For example, mining activities could potentially impact habitat and affect water quality.

However, interior Alaska holds promise for many activities, with or without the subject military lands.

2. The Preferred Alternative would renew the existing military withdrawals for 50 years until November 6, 2051. The permitting legislation may include mitigation direction as well. As is presently the case, these lands would be reserved for use by the Secretary of the Army for military maneuvering, training, equipment development and testing, and other defense-related purposes.

During the withdrawal period, the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of the Army would manage the lands subject to conditions and restrictions necessary to permit the military use of these lands. The Secretary of the Army would close any road, trail, or portion of the lands to public use if necessary for public safety, military operations, or national security. The Secretary of the Interior would issue a lease, easement, right-of-way, or other authorization for nonmilitary use of these lands with the concurrence of the Secretary of the Army. Hunting, fishing, and trapping on these lands would be permitted in accordance with the provisions of Military Reservations and Facilities: Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping (Section 2671 of title 10, USC).

These military lands are a major component of the military operation in Alaska. The U.S. Army Alaska Mission Statement states: "Provide trained and equipped forces to deploy rapidly in support of worldwide joint military operations, crisis response, and peacetime engagements; maintain quality of life and force projection platform; and serve as the Army Component Command to Alaskan Command (ALCOM)."

The goals of Army training are 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 the Arctic and Subarctic.

Northern regions make up roughly 45% of North America and 65% of the Eurasian land mass. A theater of military operations in a northern region presents unique tactical challenges. During the winter, low temperatures, frozen

ground, snow, ice, and long periods of darkness hinder all military operations. During the summer, extensive overland movement is difficult because permafrost prevents drainage and extensive swampy areas result (Richmond 1991). The need for special Arctic warfare skills continues to be essential in the face of changes in warfare technology (Swinzoe 1993). Arctic testing of Army material assures it is suitable for operations and maintenance by the typical soldier under the severe conditions that exist in the natural environment during Arctic warfare.

Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely Training Areas offer mass areas suitable for artillery and mortar indirect fire weapons, aerial gunnery, small arms, platoon to brigade exercises, road marches, and bivouacs. These Army lands also offer the military unique training opportunities for glacier training, mountaineering, river rafting, technical climbing, and ice bridge construction.

Fort Greely provides a natural year-round mountainous and cold regions testing environment that cannot be duplicated by a manmade cold chamber. Fort Greely is suitable for testing weapon systems requiring large amounts of surface area and airspace or where visibility is important. The vast extent of the Fort Greely West Training Area provides the necessary Impact Area and Buffer Zone to permit testing of long and medium-range weapon systems, artillery, and rockets. Air drops of personnel and equipment, including large resupply missions, are essential to modern day warfare. The Fort Greely East Training Area is superior to other test sites in terrain, wind currents, accessibility, and ability to retrieve equipment and supplies. It has desirable ground cover, snow conditions, and weather, and is comparatively snowdrift free due to little or no vegetation, typical of Arctic desert areas in northern regions of the world. The Granite Mountains and Donnelly Dome shield the Donnelly Drop Zone from severe wind conditions that could interfere with air drop tests.

Major units located at Fort Greely are the Cold Regions Test Center and the Northern Warfare Training Center. Its lands are used for testing and evaluating weapons and equipment under conditions of extreme cold, and training forces for military action in Arctic and Subarctic regions.

The Cold Regions Test Center is responsible for testing vehicles, weapon systems, clothing, and individual equipment under conditions of extreme cold. The Center is charged with (1) planning, conducting, and reporting on environmental phases of development tests; and (2) providing advice and guidance on test and evaluation matters to material producers, other armed services, and private industry. The Cold Regions Test Center is the only Department of the Army facility that tests outside at temperatures below freezing.

All military equipment should be designed and tested to a Basic Cold (-5°F to -25°F) level and occasionally Severe Cold (below -50°F) levels.

Fort Greely's climate provides Cold (-25°F to -50°F) level testing from October through March. This winter season allows a longer period for repetitive, rigorous testing to ensure all components have been adequately and properly assessed (CRTC 1997).

The Northern Warfare Training Center is responsible for training military forces for action in Arctic and Subarctic regions. The Center trains individuals and units in Arctic and mountaineering skills. The Center conducts high-altitude search and rescue missions, tests and evaluates mountaineering techniques and equipment, and trains and equips the Military Mountaineering Team of the U.S. Army Mountain Team. Instruction in winter skills include snowshoe movement, all-terrain skiing, route selection, risk management, and shelter construction. Summer skills instruction include technical climbing, fixed rope installations, glacier travel, stream crossing, route selection, and risk management.

Fort Wainwright Yukon Training Area is a year-round accessible training area for military units. The area is suitable for indirect fire weapons, aerial gunnery, small arms, road marches, bivouacs, and platoon to brigade live fire exercises. In addition, Fort Wainwright's Stuart Creek Impact Area (R2205) is the only Impact Area in Alaska that allows continued year-round use that is not restricted by fire indices. Except for Major Flying Exercises, the majority of military training is conducted in the Fort Wainwright Yukon Training Area.

While the Army has need for the size and unique qualities of the renewal lands, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) is also a major user of Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely. As U.S. Air Forces-Alaska, the 11th Air Force plans, conducts, and coordinates air operations in accordance with tasks assigned by the Commander, Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). Key to the effectiveness of training is the ability to conduct air-to-air and air-to-ground operations in the same airspace.

The Department of Defense has identified Stuart Creek and Fort Greely's Oklahoma/Delta Creek Impact Areas as the primary sites for military aircraft air-to-ground training. With the recent additional Military Operations Areas, tactical operations are also conducted in and around Fort Greely West Training Area (USAF 1992, USAF 1995). The military has invested approximately \$100 million in range and infrastructure improvements.

USAF currently has an estimated \$50 million worth of electronic and target equipment on Army withdrawn lands in Alaska supporting Air Force and joint

training. For successful accomplishment of the mission of “maintaining a level of readiness necessary for successful completion of military operations”, Eleventh Air Force units use, on a daily basis, the special use airspace in Alaska to hone their warfighting ability. Air assets of the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps take advantage of PACAF’s COPE THUNDER exercise program, staging out of Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks and Elmendorf Air Force Base near Anchorage. Air assets of all services also participate in the NORTHERN EDGE exercise program, sharpening tactical level skills in a joint training environment.

Alaska stands out as one of the very few places left where all conditions to conduct large-scale joint operations can be satisfied. The U.S. Alaskan Command (ALCOM) mission of “command, control, and coordinate joint and combined operations as a subordinate unified command in Alaska ...” requires the opportunities offered by the combined and synergistic effect of Alaska’s Military Operations Areas, Restricted Areas, and withdrawn lands. As the Department of Defense’s premier large-scale joint and combined training opportunity, the NORTHERN EDGE exercise program provides participating units with virtually all the features desired for full scale Joint Task Force training exercises and rehearsals. The ability to concurrently employ air and ground conventional weapons in combination with large scale maneuver makes Alaska a prime choice for joint training operations.

Issues

Concerns and comments presented during the scoping process by agencies and the public helped to identify potential issues. Potential issues were determined to be significant if they fell within the scope of the proposed action, they suggested different actions or mitigation, and they influenced the decision on the proposed action. Impact analysis was completed for each significant issue to determine the environmental consequences of the Preferred and No Action alternatives. The significant issues analyzed in this Legislative Environmental Impact Statement are:

Access: Conflicts of public use of the withdrawal lands and its airspace for recreational activities. This issue will not be resolved in this LEIS.

Air Quality: Impacts on air quality due to military use, particularly vehicle emissions and ice fog.

Contamination: Impacts of ammunition contamination on land and water resources from military training and testing.

Noise: Impacts of increased noise levels due to military use.

Submerged Lands: Impacts on water quality of submerged lands (property below the mean high level water mark) due to military use, and jurisdiction of submerged lands on the withdrawal properties, particularly the Delta River. The jurisdiction of submerged lands on the withdrawal properties will not be resolved in this LEIS.

Wildlife: Impacts on wildlife and their habitat due to military use, particularly moose, caribou, and bison.

Only a limited number of studies for many resources have been conducted by the military or Federal and State agencies. In many instances, comparative data were incomplete and/or unavailable. Thus, the ability to conduct quantitative evaluations was limited. Where data were available, site specific references are included within the individual resource sections.

Figure ES.a

General Locations

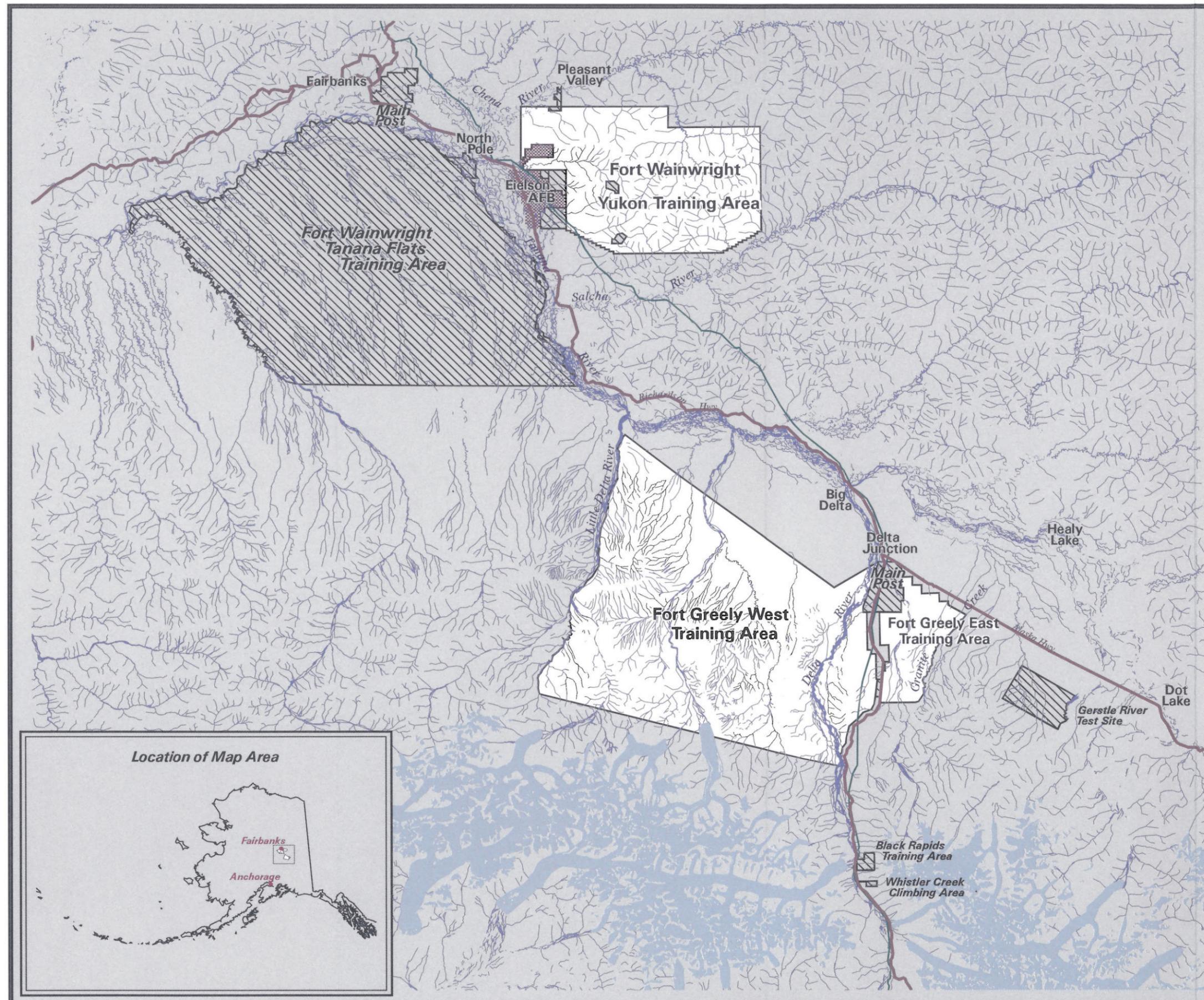
Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely

Legend

-  PL99-606 Withdrawal Boundary
-  Other Military Withdrawal Boundaries
-  Adjacent Military Installations
-  Trans-Alaska Pipeline
-  Road
-  Stream
-  Glacier

SCALE 1 : 750,000
5 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 Kilometers
5 0 5 10 15 20 Miles

Sources:
U.S. Army Alaska
U.S.G.S. 7.5 Minute Quadrangles



Location of Map Area

