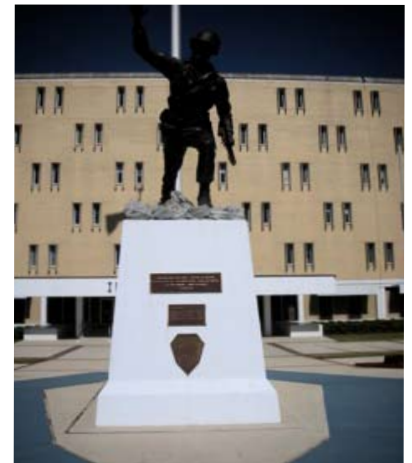



Fort Benning

JOINT LAND USE STUDY IMPLEMENTATION FOLLOW-UP



JULY 2009





REPORT PURPOSE	2
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	4
FINDINGS BY COUNTY	8
REGIONAL EFFORTS	14
APPENDIX	16

REPORT PURPOSE

In 2008, the stakeholders of the region surrounding Fort Benning completed a Joint Land Use Study (JLUS). The purpose of the JLUS is to protect the viability of the military mission without degrading public safety and quality of life, and to sustain economic development without hindering national military readiness. This summary seeks to document the efforts of local governments to incorporate the recommendations of the JLUS and to develop ongoing strategies to monitor and promote compatible land uses around the installation.

Stakeholders participating in the JLUS included: Columbus-Muscogee, Harris, Talbot, Marion, Cusseta-Chattahoochee, and Stewart Counties in Georgia; Russell County in Alabama; Fort Benning; and regional entities, such as The Valley Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, the Lee-Russell Council of Governments in Alabama, the Lower Chattahoochee Regional Development Center and the Middle Flint Regional Development Center in Georgia. (See Figure 1).

As noted during the JLUS process, the resulting report is not a binding document,

but rather an advisory set of best practices for ensuring compatible growth around the installation.

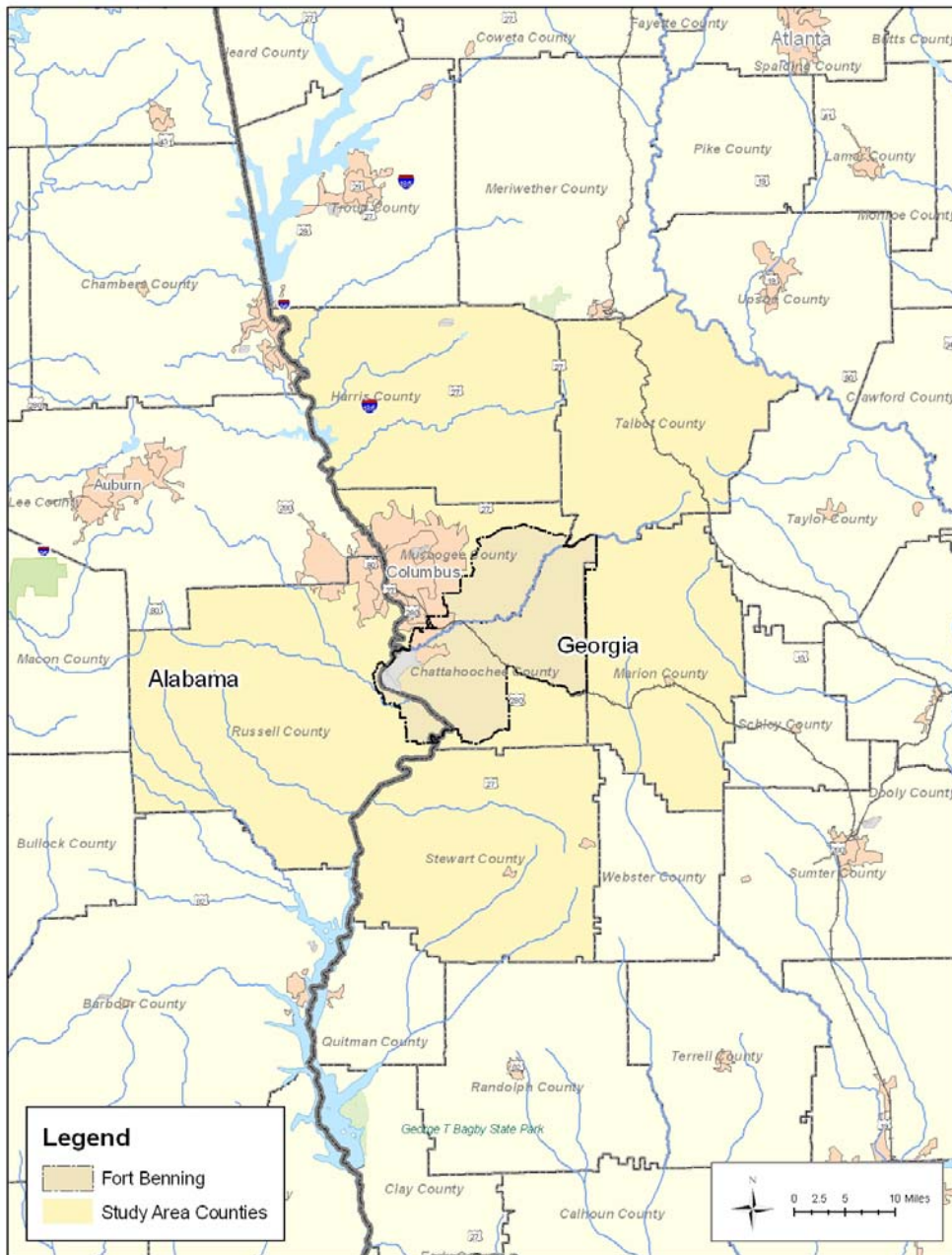
To assist in the implementation of study recommendations, the planning team conducted follow-up interviews with local government representatives approximately one year after report completion. The intent of this Implementation Summary is to:

- document actions to formalize JLUS recommendations in county comprehensive plan policies and subdivision and zoning codes, where applicable;
- determine any major obstacles to study implementation;
- highlight recent conservation efforts that reduce the risk of encroachment on military activities;
- revisit local growth trends and identify any newly emerging areas of concern; and
- establish ongoing procedures for promoting coordinated land use decisions and monitoring encroachment around Fort Benning and Lawson Army Airfield.

Fort Benning

JOINT LAND USE STUDY

FIGURE 1. REGIONAL CONTEXT



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

While local governments have not actively codified JLUS land use recommendations into their zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations, current communication procedures, growth trends, and general land use policies strongly support compatible land use planning around Fort Benning. A highly active purchase of development rights initiative conducted as part of the Army Compatible User Buffer program further supplements these local regulatory policies.

The seven participating JLUS counties practice basic measures to reduce the risk of future encroachment on lands affected by noise and aircraft safety from nearby training activity. Overall, county representatives interviewed during the follow-up process indicated political support for measures to protect the Fort Benning military mission. With the exception of Talbot County, which has a zoning ordinance re-write underway to incorporate JLUS compatibility guidelines, local jurisdictions have not revised their existing codes to reflect specific military-related impacts.

However, current land use policies in all counties, particularly in Harris, Columbus-Muscogee and Marion promote growth

patterns that are generally compatible with nearby military operations. A review of recent growth trends in communities surrounding the post also indicates relatively modest development activity, due to the broader market downturn. Unfavorable economic conditions combined with adherence to mostly low density rural land use patterns and zoning policies suggest a very low threat of encroachment in the immediate future.

Local governments in Georgia continue to consult with Fort Benning representatives on proposed rezoning and development activity within a designated 3,000-foot buffer around the installation as is mandated by state law. The Nature Conservancy, a partner in the Department of Defense's Army Compatible Use Buffer has also been active in directly purchasing or securing conservation easements on approximately 1,700 acres of land in Muscogee, Marion, and Talbot Counties.

Table 1 assesses local government actions relative to five general categories of JLUS recommendations:

- **Communication:** includes the sharing of information with military officials and a general awareness within the community of operations on the installation

- **Consultation:** includes formal consultation with the post regarding the potential impact of nearby land use changes and developments
- **Comprehensive Plan Policy:** includes language in the local Comprehensive Plan, such as vision statements, community objectives, and implementation measures and strategies, as well as Character Area and Future Development maps that seek to minimize development on lands near critical training areas and promote coordination with Fort Benning.
- **Land Use:** includes current land use and zoning policies, such as rural residential and agricultural districts that do not explicitly reference military operations and impacts, but limit housing density and thus achieve compatibility with Fort Benning.
- **Zoning:** includes a specific military overlay district that directly incorporates the JLUS land use compatibility recommendations and references noise contours or other planning zones around Fort Benning.

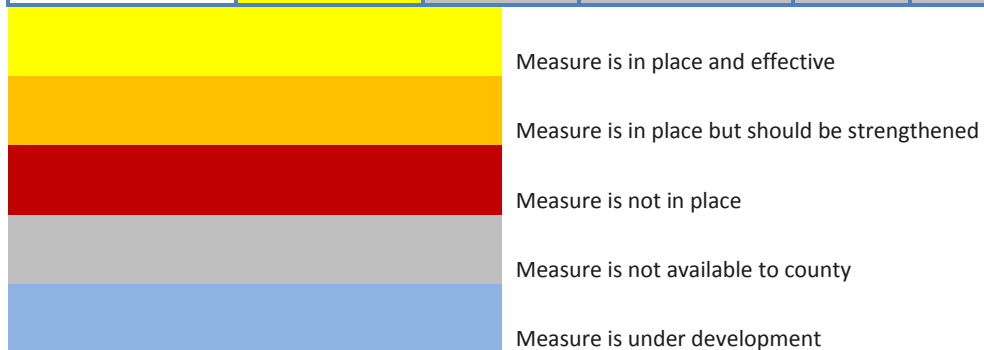
Overall, the counties have been effective in using available consultation procedures, Comprehensive Plan policy, and rural zoning to minimize growth in areas affected by noise and air safety issues from the post and airfield. The adoption of specific military overlay zoning districts, though highly effective in preventing encroachment, has not yet gained implementation momentum among the communities. As implementation continues, the planning team recommends focusing future efforts on:

- strengthening existing Comprehensive Plans as part of the update cycle to include explicit policies regarding coordination with Fort Benning and to include GIS layers for noise zones as part of Character Area and Future Development maps;
- revising zoning codes to include a specific military overlay district that incorporates JLUS compatibility standards;
- conducting additional community outreach to critical areas such as Marion County;
- strengthening the quality of feedback from Fort Benning during the state-mandated consultation process;

- developing basic zoning authority in Russell County, Alabama;
- continuing support of the Army Compatible Use Buffer;
- using GIS mapping and permit tracking to establish a growth baseline and monitor land use trends around the post; and
- emphasizing regionally-based vehicles that can support ongoing compatibility, such as the Valley Partnership and the River Valley Regional Commission

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION BY COUNTY

County	Communication	Consultation	Comprehensive Plan	Land Use	Military Zoning
Muscogee	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Cusseta-Chattahoochee	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Red
Harris	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Red
Marion	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red
Stewart	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Red
Talbot	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Light Blue
Russell	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey



FINDINGS BY COUNTY

To assess implementation actions taken to date, the planning team met with representatives from the seven participating counties and administered a JLUS Progress Survey. The intent of the survey is to gauge ongoing support for compatibility planning around Fort Benning, identify additional resources or assistance required to put recommended steps into place, and revisit growth trends and development activity since completion of the JLUS report in 2008. The supporting Appendix includes the list of stakeholders interviewed and the survey form.

Columbus-Muscogee County

The unified government has not adopted new zoning ordinance language as a result of the 2008 JLUS. The county's current future land use and zoning, however, emphasize primarily Rural Estate land use patterns in the panhandle area north of the installation and within noise zones reflecting large arms weapons firing. The minimum lot size of five acres is a sufficient regulatory tool to limit density in noise affected areas and minimize incompatible residential development. The Nature Conservancy has also purchased easements on land in the county panhandle further eliminating the risk of future encroachment.

The Columbus-Muscogee County Comprehensive Plan, 2008-2028 is a strong coordinating document. The plan articulates a vision for the east panhandle as a rural community tied closely to the preservation and conservation of its rural

and natural character. The plan designates this portion of the county as a Rural Residential/Developing Suburban Area consistent with the JLUS land use recommendation to limit residential subdivisions due to noise exposure. The corridor overlay for Highway 80 further reinforces controlled growth in the panhandle, along with the county's overall policy of guiding new growth into targeted infill and redevelopment areas.

The plan also explicitly references the JLUS and recognizes the inherent conflict of increased residential development in areas of the panhandle affected by training-related noise.

The Comprehensive Plan establishes a solid framework for adopting more specific military-related zoning measures and the Planning Department indicates that implementation will become a greater focus now that guiding policies are in place.

The county indicates limited recent development activity in noise-exposed areas of the panhandle. These currently modest growth trends combined with existing land use policy and the acquisition of land for civic uses should continue to act as an effective deterrent to incompatible development on land north of the post.

The county consults with Fort Benning on rezoning and development proposals within the mandated 3,000-foot buffer, but notes that military representatives give limited feedback during the process.

The county expressed some concern that noise complaints could increase once full

Fort Benning

JOINT LAND USE STUDY

BRAC implementation accelerates the operational tempo on the post.

Overall, Columbus-Muscogee County has an effective basic foundation of communication, land use policy and resources to promote compatible planning around Fort Benning. Future implementation efforts should focus on establishing a specific Military Installation Overlay zoning district in the panhandle that could place additional requirements on the land, such as real estate disclosure or outdoor lighting control if the use is changed or significantly altered.

Cusseta-Chattahoochee County

The State of Georgia requires local planning entities to request written recommendations from the military commander regarding any rezoning activity within 3,000 feet of an installation or the Clear Zone and Accident Potential Zones Numbers I and II of a military airport. It should be noted that the Cusseta/Chattahoochee County Board of Commissioners specifically opposed the JLUS report recommendation to expand the current state-mandated 3,000-foot buffer around Fort Benning to one mile due to the high number of development parcels and existing structures within the former city limits of the Cusseta that would be affected by the increased planning boundary.

The JLUS emphasizes that each participating study partner has the authority to reject, modify, or adopt any of the individual recommendations identified in the document. The county continues to

consult with Fort Benning within the required 3,000-foot buffer.

The 2008-2030 Comprehensive Plan includes a Fort Benning Commercial character area. Its implementation measures/strategies include buffering activities from Fort Benning related activities, developing lighting guidelines for businesses next to the installation, and advising new businesses of smoke and noise impacts. The plan also recognizes the encroachment of non-compatible land uses on Fort Benning as a community issue and encourages communication with Fort Benning.

The Character Area and Future Development maps include the 3,000-foot mandated buffer around the post, but do not reflect broader noise zones related to training. While much of the land in the county is rural residential or agricultural, some future designations, such as residential and major highway commercial could conflict with noise zones.

The county seat of Cusseta, for example, anchor's most of the community's existing development and institutional uses. The county also has emerging residential areas adjacent to the installation along Riverbend Road and two subdivisions east of Cusseta. It also anticipates that the market availability of MeadWestvaco property along Manta Road southeast of the county seat and in proximity to the Red Oak Plantation subdivision will likely spur new residential development.

During the follow-up interview, the county did not cite any significant new issues

related to JLUS implementation or growth trends. Continued residential development south of the post, however, could place new housing units in areas exposed to noise.

Overall, Cusseta-Chattahoochee County has basic communication and consultation practices in place to coordinate with Fort Benning. The county, however, has not established a strong land use policy or regulatory framework to limit residential development in close proximity to the installation.

As part of future implementation efforts, the county should periodically revisit the JLUS to assess the applicability of recommended tools, especially low density residential zoning in noise zones and continue to pursue general communication and policy coordination strategies with Fort Benning. A critical foundational step in implementing JLUS recommendations would be to include noise zones from the post as part of new Character Area and Future Development maps created for the 2013 plan update.

Harris County

The county has not adopted new zoning ordinance language as a result of the 2008 JLUS. The current future land use and zoning, however, emphasize primarily Agriculture and Developing Suburban Area/Rural Residential land use patterns north of the installation and within noise zones reflecting large arms weapons firing. The minimum lot size of two acres would

restrict density in noise affected areas and minimize incompatible residential development.

The county indicates that growth prospects in this portion of the county affected by noise remain limited. Much of Harris County's development activity has gravitated to the northwest near the Kia Plant and along the I-185 corridor.

The 2009-2030 Comprehensive Plan notes the growth at Fort Benning due to Base Realignment and Closure, but does not contain explicit statements, community objectives, and implementation measures and strategies recognizing noise or other operational impacts related to training activity.

The county consults with Fort Benning on rezoning and development proposals within the mandated 3,000-foot buffer, but notes that only six parcels fall within the area. The county cites strong ongoing communication with Fort Benning and effectively used the consultation process to evaluate a proposed 600-foot cell tower near the installation, which was later withdrawn.

Overall, Harris County has an effective basic foundation of communication, land use policy and resources to promote compatible planning around Fort Benning. Future implementation efforts should focus on establishing a specific Military Installation Overlay zoning district in the southeastern part of the county that could

Fort Benning

JOINT LAND USE STUDY

place additional requirements on the land, such as real estate disclosure or outdoor lighting control if the use is changed or significantly altered. The county should also develop specific Comprehensive Plan statements regarding coordination with Fort Benning as part of its next regular update and include noise zones from the post as part of new Character Area and Future Development maps.

Marion County

Of the seven participating JLUS counties, Marion County has the most severe compatibility issues due to high noise exposure from large arms weapons firing.

The county has not adopted new zoning ordinance language as a result of the 2008 JLUS. The current future land use and zoning, however, emphasize primarily agricultural land use patterns east of the installation and within noise zones. Planning policy actively maintains a minimum lot size of five acres that restricts density in noise affected areas and thus minimizes incompatible residential development.

The Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) has also been highly effective in Marion County. The Nature Conservancy has acquired approximately 800 acres of land in the high noise zones east of the post. Combined with static growth trends in these areas and the county's strong policy commitment to preserve its rural character

away from established communities, the risk of increasing encroachment east of Fort Benning is very limited. The county is aware of the mandatory consultation process with the US Army and complies when proposals trigger the process.

As was noted during the JLUS, however, existing housing units in very high noise zones create ongoing conflicts. The county notes that continued outreach by Fort Benning, particularly from senior leadership, would further build community relations and increase awareness. The county also indicates that political support for additional measures such as real estate disclosure could emerge if land use conflicts and complaints arise during future training operations.

The Comprehensive Plan is a strong example of a coordinating document that recognizes noise, dust and other impacts generated by training activities and uses noise zones as the basis for specific land use mapping. The plan calls for minimum lot sizes in noise zones that are significantly larger than lots allowed in other areas of the county and notes that of the ±1700 parcels in high noise zones, the average parcel size is ±45 acres. Policy further states that, at a minimum, the county should stipulate that prior to transactions in this area, property owners must document that they have provided the prospective buyer formal, written notice of the probability that the property can be expected to

experience certain, specified impacts as a result of activities on Fort Benning.

Overall, Marion County has an effective basic foundation of communication, land use policy and resources to promote compatible planning around Fort Benning. Future implementation efforts should focus on establishing a specific Military Installation Overlay zoning district east of the post that could place additional requirements on the land, such as real estate disclosure or outdoor lighting control if the use is changed or significantly altered. Fort Benning should also emphasize continued outreach to the Marion County community.

Stewart County

Stewart County has relatively minor compatibility issues related to noise from Lawson Army Airfield. Aviation overall is a small component of those operational impacts affecting surrounding communities.

Stewart County has not adopted new zoning ordinance language as a result of the 2008 JLUS. Growth in the county, however, remains very modest. The city cores of Richland and Lumpkin feature the highest concentration of employment, institutional, and cultural uses. Residential lots have spread along major road corridors and near the unincorporated area of the Omaha community. Most of the existing development patterns result from

individual land owners subdividing lots off of larger acreage, spreading households across the landscape.

Given the historically very low growth rates and the predominance of rural, agricultural, and conservation land use patterns, the county has a low risk of generating future encroachment. The River Valley Regional Commission (formerly the Lower Chattahoochee RDC) indicates that the county complies with the state-mandated consultation process, when required.

The Comprehensive Plan notes the growth at Fort Benning due to Base Realignment and Closure, but does not contain explicit statements, community objectives, and implementation measures and strategies recognizing noise, air safety or other operational impacts related to training activity.

Overall, Stewart County has basic communication and consultation practices in place to coordinate with Fort Benning. The county, however, has not established a strong land use policy or regulatory framework to limit residential development in close proximity to the installation and airfield impacts.

As part of future implementation efforts, the county should periodically revisit the JLUS to assess the applicability of recommended tools, especially low density residential zoning in noise zones and continue to pursue general communication

Fort Benning

JOINT LAND USE STUDY

and policy coordination strategies with Fort Benning. Given its limited planning capacity, the county will also likely require ongoing technical support from the River Valley Regional Commission.

Talbot County

The River Valley Regional Commission is currently in the process of incorporating JLUS land use compatibility recommendations into the zoning code for Talbot County. The code should be fully revised by the Fall of 2009. The county indicates political support for new regulatory provisions to limit residential density in noise affected areas to the northeast of the post.

The county indicates limited development activity near the post. However, as noted during the JLUS study, existing housing in the Box Springs community generates some conflicts with noise from the firing of large caliber weapons. The county also indicates developer interest in a large Planned Unit Development in southern Box Springs, which could introduce more residential units in noise affected areas.

The county notes good overall communication with Fort Benning and complies with the state-mandated consultation process.

The Comprehensive Plan does not contain explicit statements, community objectives,

and implementation measures and strategies recognizing BRAC-related growth or noise and other operational impacts related to training activity.

Overall, Talbot County has basic communication and consultation practices in place to coordinate with Fort Benning. The revised zoning code will establish a strong land use policy or regulatory framework to limit residential development in close proximity to the installation.

As part of future implementation efforts, the county should include JLUS recommendations and noise zone map layers as part of its Comprehensive Plan update.

The county should also emphasize clustering and conservation subdivision design within any Planned Unit Developments in Box Springs as a method of siting houses farther away from noise impacts.

Phenix City/Russell County

Phenix City does not experience noise or air safety issues related to training activity on Fort Benning, but portions of unincorporated Russell County are exposed to aviation noise and air safety risks associated with Lawson Army Airfield operations. Overall, aviation affects a relatively small portion of the county.

Phenix City governs land use through a zoning process, which includes an extra-territorial five mile area of the county. This area does not encompass military-related impacts. Russell County, in contrast, lacks the authority to administer a zoning code. The county must lobby the local legislative committee of the Alabama state legislature to adopt local policies such as land use and zoning. The process is currently structured to require the formation of a Planning Commission, responsible for making zoning recommendations to the County Commission and overseeing the adoption of a Comprehensive Plan, and a Board of Adjustment, responsible for hearing appeals to any zoning decisions or administrative interpretations.

Russell County is currently in the Request for Proposal stage seeking professional consulting assistance in developing a Comprehensive Plan.

Unlike the State of Georgia, Alabama does not require consultation with military representatives for proposed developments in proximity to an installation. The county indicates that it does not currently engage in a collaborative advisory review of development actions with Fort Benning.

Most of the county's growth is focused in the Fort Mitchell area and along Highway 165 corridor and thus lies to the west of

noise and air safety zones. These growth trends do not pose a severe risk of encroachment given the limited geographic area exposed to impacts.

Overall, Russell County lacks basic communication and consultation practices to coordinate with Fort Benning and the land use policy framework to limit residential development in close proximity to the installation.

Future implementation efforts should focus on laying the policy groundwork for compatible zoning by incorporating JLUS recommendations and noise zone map layers as part of its Comprehensive Plan process.

REGIONAL EFFORTS

Stakeholders interviewed during the implementation follow-up process consistently emphasized the value of regional collaboration as a means to promote compatible land use patterns around Fort Benning.

The Valley Partnership, the sponsoring entity of the 2008 Joint Land Use Study, can continue to play a critical role by publicizing information on the link between the military mission and regional well-being and functioning as a forum for ongoing dialogue about development near the installation.

Fort Benning

JOINT LAND USE STUDY

As an option that Valley Partnership could create an ongoing JLUS Partnership that meets on a bi-annual basis to review mission activity, development trends and any emerging compatibility issues.

Similarly, the newly consolidated Lower Chattahoochee Regional Development Center and the Middle Flint Regional Development Center can serve as a regional mapping and data clearinghouse and ensure that Comprehensive Plan updates and other major planning documents reflect noise and other operational impacts from the post. The River Valley Regional Commission could be tasked with providing technical support for Partnership activities and advancing collaboration efforts on a land use policy basis.

(Note: as of July 1, 2009, The Lower Chattahoochee RDC and the Middle Flint RDC have merged into the River Valley Regional Commission and now serve a 16 county region that includes Harris, Talbot, Columbus-Muscogee, Cusseta-Chattahoochee, Stewart, Georgetown-Quitman, Randolph, Clay, Crisp, Dooly, Macon, Marion, Schley, Sumter, Taylor and Webster. The Commission's land use and planning functions remain unchanged).

Cities, counties, and regional entities can also complement the efforts of non-profit groups, such as The Nature Conservancy that seek to purchase conservation easements on environmentally sensitive

lands and/or properties exposed to military operational impacts as identified in Fort Benning's Army Compatible Use Buffer program. Local governments can assist such efforts by using policies to guide growth away from high impact areas, thus reducing development pressure and making easements a more attractive option for property owners or by directly participating as a funding partner in the purchase of development rights.

Fort Benning, regional entities, and surrounding communities can jointly participate in efforts to monitor encroachment by tracking building permits or other quantifiable indicators of development and population inside noise zones and accident potential zones off of the post. Data such as building permits establish an effective baseline against which officials can measure land use conflicts and identify any emerging encroachment risks in the years ahead.

STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS

Paul Higginbotham, Building & Zoning, Talbot County

Steve White, Building Code & Zoning Administrator, Marion County

Will Johnson, Planning Department, Columbus-Muscogee County

Walt Rosso, County Commissioner, Cusseta-Chattahoochee County

Becky Gray, Zoning, Harris County

Gil Griffith, Chief Building Official, Phenix City

Larry Kite, County Engineer Russell County

Patti Cullen, Executive Director, River Valley Regional Commission

Brant Slay, The Nature Conservancy

