

## **Fort Benning to hold public meetings to discuss land acquisition study**

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By **LILY GORDON**

Maneuver Center of Excellence officials announced in April the post had launched a study into the possibility of purchasing 82,800 acres of training land.

Col. Tom Macdonald, Fort Benning's garrison commander, recently released a map identifying areas being considered for potential acquisition to expand the amount of land suitable for training on post. Recognizing the sensitivity of this issue, the post will be looking to work with land owners primarily in Marion, Chattahoochee, Webster, Stewart and Russell counties who are willing to sell their property.

"There are so many variables we have to consider, not the least of which is our relationship with our neighbors," Macdonald said in a news release. "We will keep them informed every step of the way. That's why we've developed a new map, to let them see that we've narrowed our focus to these specific areas."

A key criterion in Fort Benning's search for land is that the tract contain a low population density. The land must also be adjacent to the installation as well as meet the post's environmental and training requirements. Officials hope to find large timberland holdings with willing sellers and agreeable topographical characteristics on which it can train its two heavy maneuver battalions and other elements of the MCoE.

A shift in war fighting capabilities in Iraq and Afghanistan — due in part to advancements and developments in technology — have made it possible for soldiers to operate over larger areas. In order to align its combat brigades' experiences while deployed with its training doctrine, Fort Benning must expand to provide a greater variety and scope of terrain for units such as the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Macdonald said last month.

The real estate and environmental study should begin this summer with an Environmental Impact Statement to follow in October 2011. The study will be conducted by several organizations including the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Once the study is complete, Army leadership will make a decision on the land purchase. The entire process could take approximately six years.

Fort Benning officials will host several public information meetings between June 14-18 to get comments and answer questions. The meetings, which are open to the public, will run from 4 to 8 p.m. and will be conducted like an open house.

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Meeting locations are as follows:

June 14: National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center

June 15: Russell County High School, Seale, Ala.

June 17: Josh Gibson Center, Buena Vista, Ga.

June 18: Richland Hotel, Richland, Ga.

For more information about the Training Land Expansion Project, call 706-545-8830 or e-mail questions and comments to [land.benning@us.army.mil](mailto:land.benning@us.army.mil).

<http://www.army.mil/-news/2010/05/28/40021-post-looks-to-gain-an-additional-82800-acres/>