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Hawaiian community settles with U.S. Army over live-fire training

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By **Environmental News Network**

Deep blue sea and lush green vegetation typify the peaceful isles of Hawaii. But unbeknownst to most visitors, the island of Oahu, is under artillery fire – from the U.S. Army. Now under an agreement signed between a local community group and the Army, the military must prepare an environmental impact statement on the effects of live-fire training in the Makua Valley.



Courtesy U.S. Army

U.S. Army Makua Military Reservation.

The agreement settles a three-year long dispute between the Army and the group, Malama Makua, which filed legal action to stop the live-fire training on environmental grounds. The settlement was reached Oct. 5 in the U.S. District Court in Hawaii.

Recognizing the potential need for increased for training as a result of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, the settlement allows the Army' 25th Infantry Division (Light) to conduct limited live-fire training during the preparation of the EIS.

They will conduct 16 exercises in the first year and nine in the second year following the settlement. If the EIS is still not complete, the Army may conduct 12 exercises in the third year. After the third year, no training would take place at the military reservation until the EIS is complete.

The Army will prepare an EIS that addresses existing and potential impacts to the unique cultural and biological resources at the military reservation, as well as potential soil, air, ground water and surface water contamination associated with live-fire training.

The Army will establish a \$50,000 technical assistance fund to enable the Waianae

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Coast community to hire independent experts to evaluate the studies to be carried out as part of the EIS process.

This technical assistance will help the public ensure that the EIS addresses community concerns and will facilitate public understanding of the potential impacts associated with live-fire training at the Makua Military Reservation.

To improve access to cultural sites and protect public safety, the Army will embark on a long-range process to clear unexploded ordnance from the reservation, beginning with an area extending over 3,000 feet towards the mountains of Farrington Highway.

The Army will establish a dialogue with the public to identify additional, high-priority areas for the clearance of unexploded ordnance. In order to address safety concerns about the transport of ammunition through coastal communities, the Army will move all explosives, grenades, mines, and artillery, anti-tank, and mortar rounds to the military reservation by helicopter when weather permits and helicopters are available.

All transport of ammunition by land will avoid peak traffic hours and times when children are traveling to and from school. The Army will allow daytime public access to the military reservation for Hawaiian cultural purposes a minimum of two days a month, with the public permitted to camp at the reservation for nighttime cultural observances a minimum of two times a year.

"Every settlement requires compromise, and both sides have come a long way to settle this case," explained Earthjustice attorney David Henkin who represented the community group Malama Makua.

"The Army has committed to preparing the comprehensive environmental impact statement the Waianae Coast community has been demanding for years and will take important, unprecedented steps to address community concerns about cultural access and the removal of unexploded ordnance. For its part, Malama Makua will not stand in the way of limited training, which will let the 25th Infantry's 18 companies meet the division training standard during this time of national crisis," said Henkin

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"We appreciate that the Army will prepare an environmental impact statement and start the process of addressing legitimate concerns of Waianae Coast residents about threats to our culture, our precious and unique native ecosystems, the safety of our children and ancestors, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the ocean we rely on to put food on the table," said Sparky Rodrigues of Malama Makua.

"We hope that today's agreement will open a new chapter in the relationship between the Army and the people of the Waianae Coast," he said, "one based on cooperation and mutual respect."

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