

DECISION DOCUMENT



December 2019

DEFENSE ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION PROGRAM FOR FORMERLY USED DEFENSE SITES

Across the country, the Department of Defense acquired properties, often during times of war, to use for military training, testing and demonstrations. When no longer needed, many of these properties were cleaned up according to the best practices available at the time and then transferred to other owners such as private individuals or other government entities. These Formerly Used Defense Sites can range from privately owned farms to National Parks. They also include residential, industrial and educational properties. The Department of Defense is committed to protecting people and the environment and improving public safety by cleaning up these sites if hazards from the former military operations remain. The Defense Environmental Restoration Program for Formerly Used Defense Sites was established to evaluate and, if necessary, to remediate Formerly Used Defense Sites. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) manages the program on behalf of the Department of Defense.

Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, also known as Superfund, in 1980 and the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act in 1986. These laws give the Corps the authority for certain cleanup activities and dictate the process we must follow. The Corps conducts investigations to determine the potential risk to people and the environment from the military's use of the property. Public involvement and community participation are important components of the process. We partner with stakeholders throughout the process, including congressional representatives, state and local governments, regulatory and environmental agencies, and affected property owners.

BACKGROUND

During World War II, air crews assigned to the Sarasota Army Airfield used Passage Key for a strafing and skip bombing range. There were two banks of six targets each, facing north and south, about 500 feet apart. Crews trained with machine guns, practice and, possibly, live bombs. The targets are now completely under water.

The Passage Key Air-to-Ground Gunnery Range Formerly Used Defense Site in Manatee County comprises 13,147 acres most of which is the water around Passage Key in Tampa Bay. The US Fish and Wildlife Service owns the island and manages it as the Passage Key National Wildlife Refuge. It is not open to the public.

ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS

The Corps has completed a number of studies of the island, and while no munitions were identified during our previous investigations, in 1998, three bombs were found in the water near the island, and one was found on the island. Therefore, to ensure the public's safety, the Corps conducted a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study, completed in 2018, that involved a number of steps designed to identify the target locations and to determine if anything remains from the military's training. Crews used metal detectors on paths (called transects) and grids (square or



FORMERLY USED DEFENSE SITES | Passage Key Air-to-Ground Gunnery Range

rectangular areas of various sizes) to map metallic objects in the water and on land. Technicians analyzed the data to identify potential target locations and selected metallic objects for the team to dig up. The crews found expended ammunition and pieces from munitions; these types of items are referred to as munitions debris, and they do not pose an explosive hazard. The teams also identified munitions in the water which included two bomb fuzes, a rocket and a 37 millimeter projectile. No munitions were found on land.

The Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study evaluated the risk to people and the environment from potential munitions and the metals and explosives that comprise munitions, known as munitions constituents. The Corps divided the site into two Munitions Response Sites: Remaining Waters (12,498 acres) and Air-to-Ground Target (649 acres). The data indicate there is no risk from munitions constituents in either area. There is a low potential risk from people encountering munitions in the Air-to-Ground Target, and no unacceptable risk in Remaining Waters.



DECISION DOCUMENT

The Corps presented the Preferred Alternatives at a public meeting in November 2018. Following a public comment period, the Corps prepared Decision Documents to present the Accepted Alternative for the two Munitions Response Sites. The Selected Alternative for the Air-to-Ground Target is Land Use Controls which could include information about the former Air-to-Ground Gunnery Range where information about the Passage Key Wildlife Refuge is posted, signs at public boat ramps and/or a Notice to Mariners. No Action is the Selected Alternative for Remaining Waters. Please see the Decision Documents and Proposed Plan for further information.

SAFETY FIRST: REMEMBER THE 3Rs

While the potential is low, munitions could potentially be present on Passage Key and in the water. These could be dangerous and may not be easily recognizable. Never touch, move or disturb something you think may be a munition. Remember the 3Rs.

RECOGNIZE - The item you found could be dangerous.

RETREAT - Do not touch it in any way, and leave the area.

REPORT - Call 911 immediately.

RECOGNIZE **RETREAT** **REPORT**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit:

Project documents can be viewed at:
Island Library
5701 Mariana Drive, Holmes Beach, FL 34217
Telephone: 941.778.6341

Contact:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District
Toll-Free 800.710.5184
FUDS.Florida@usace.army.mil
www.saj.usace.army.mil

US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

