FORMERLY USED DEFENSE SITES | Avon Park Army Airfield

Proposed Plan

December 2018

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

Beginning in 1942, the government acquired approximately 218,881 acres in Highlands, Okeechobee and Polk Counties in central Florida to establish Avon Park Army Airfield. The Army used the site during World War II to train pilots and air crews. The Army constructed over 500 buildings including dormitories, administrative offices, mess halls, chapels and related infrastructure such as roads and utilities. Several practice targets were constructed for crews flying B-26s and B-17s. Two large areas were known as Position Firing Courses. Targets were placed on the ground, and aircrews flew in an oval pattern around the targets to practice hitting the targets. Expended bullets do not present an explosive hazard.

After the war ended, the military did not need the entire area. The US Air Force maintained about 106,000 acres west of the Kissimmee River and currently uses it for the Avon Park Air Force Range. The military transferred the remaining 112,771.6 acres of land east of the Kissimmee River in Okeechobee County to other entities. That land, along with a 1.04-acre area along Arbuckle Creek in Highlands County, comprises the Formerly Used Defense Site. The Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park encompasses a large portion of the former training area.

Environmental Investigations

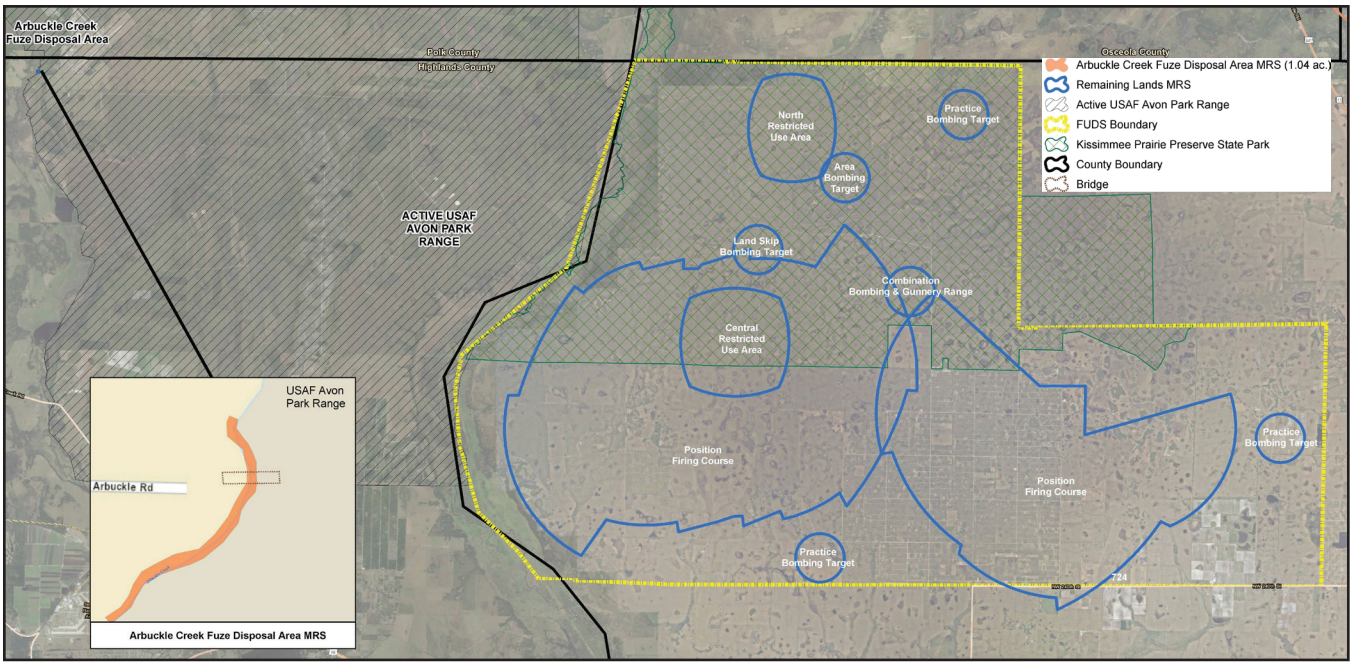
The Corps has completed a number of studies of the former Avon Park Army Airfield including a Remedial Investigation/ Feasibility Study which was finalized in June 2018. The purpose of the Remedial Investigation was to determine what munitions and munitions constituents (the metals and explosives that comprise munitions) may be present in what locations and amounts. Based on historic materials documenting the training and target locations as well as previous investigations, the Corps searched the target areas using state-of-the art equipment to identify metallic objects. Teams investigated almost 5,000 objects, of which only 2 were munitions and considered dangerous. The items with a potential hazard were bomb fuzes located in the sediment in Arbuckle Creek where fuzes were improperly disposed of by being dumped off of a bridge. Teams also located munitions debris consisting of pieces from practice munitions and bullet casings; these items do not pose a risk to people or the environment. We also collected samples from the soil, sediment, and surface water to analyze for munitions constituents. No explosives were

detected, and the levels of metals detected pose no risk to people or the environment. Risk assessments were also conducted to evaluate the potential danger to people and the environment from munitions constituents. Those evaluations concluded there is no risk to people and the environment from munitions constituents associated with the previous military use of the site.

Based on the results of the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study, the Corps divided the site into two Munitions Response Sites: Remaining Lands (59,562.28 acres), which includes all the land on the east side of the Kissimmee River, and Arbuckle Creek Fuze Disposal Area (1.04 acres). There is a potential risk from people encountering bomb fuzes within the Arbuckle Creek Fuze Disposal Area, and no unacceptable risk in Remaining Lands.

Proposed Plan

The next step in the federally mandated process the Corps follows is the Proposed Plan. It summarizes the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study and presents recommendations and alternatives. Alternatives were developed and evaluated to address the risk associated with bomb fuzes within the Arbuckle Creek Fuze Disposal Area, and the Preferred Alternative is a removal action to search for and remove any remaining bomb fuzes within the 1.04 acre area. No Action is the Preferred Alternative for Remaining Lands. Please see the Proposed Plan for further information.



Your Opinion Matters

The Corps encourages you to comment on the Proposed Plan during the public comment period. Please submit your comments no later than 5:00 p.m. on February 15, 2019, by calling (toll free) 800.710.5184, emailing FUDS.Florida@usace.army.mil, or mailing your comments to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ATTN: Frank Araico (PM-M), 701 San Marco Boulevard, Jacksonville, FL 32207. Mail postmarked by February 15, 2019, will be accepted. Public comments received during this period will be considered in the final decision-making process.

Safety First: Remember the 3Rs

While the potential is low, munitions could potentially be present within the former Avon Park Army Airfield. 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:
Okeechobee County Library
206 SW 16th Street, Okeechobee, FL
Telephone: 863.763.3536

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