

First-in-state machine gun range proposed for Camp Edwards

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August 26, 2020 Aug Posted at 12:35 PM Updated at 12:35 PM

Environmental assessment finds no significant impacts.

JOINT BASE CAPE COD — An eight-lane machine gun range that would be the first in the state is being planned for Camp Edwards, the Massachusetts Army National Guard training area at Joint Base Cape Cod.

The proposal, contained in a 100-page environmental assessment prepared for the Guard and an accompanying draft finding of no significant impacts, calls for clearing 170 acres of forest and disturbing about 199 acres of land.

More than 5,000 acres would be required to accommodate the operation, since it would include the area where projectiles fired on the range would land, based on types of weapons and ammunition used.

The range would be used for training of military personnel and weapons qualification.

Anticipated weapons used include several types of machine guns, 12-gauge shotguns, grenade launchers and pistols.

Potential noise impacts on neighbors would be “varied,” according to a report on noise. The area of most intense noise, peaking above 130 decibels, would be contained within the base, but some noise could affect “multiple neighborhoods as well as an elementary school” located to the east of the range.

The National Guard would notify neighbors of coming training events, particularly for use of .50-caliber weapons.

So-called “firebreaks” are planned around the perimeter to reduce wildfire hazard.

“Range use at Camp Edwards introduces significant wildfire hazard into unmanaged and high-risk fuels conditions, through the use of tracers and ammunition,” the report says. Tracers are forms of ammunition that include a pyrotechnic charge to show trajectory.

The report notes that Camp Edwards already has a campwide firebreak and management plan and integrated wildland fire management plan in place.

Currently soldiers and units must travel to train at Camp Ethan Allen in Jericho, Vermont, which is 270 miles away.

“Camp Edwards’ primary mission is to prepare soldiers for combat missions overseas as well as missions to serve and protect the homeland stateside,” says the report published by the Massachusetts National Guard. “As Camp Edwards serves as the primary (Army National Guard) training site for Massachusetts, the proposed action is also needed to ensure the continued and long-term viability of Camp Edwards as a training center.”

The use of the Camp Edwards property would increase by nearly 19% as a result of military personnel using the range.

The Army National Guard is the federal decision-maker on the proposed machine gun range.

The ongoing National Environmental Policy Act process is intended “to provide the Army’s planners and decision-makers with a meaningful review of environmental considerations,” notes the report. “The analysis set forth in this Environmental Assessment allows the decision-makers to carefully balance the protection of these environmental resources while fulfilling the Army’s essential roles, including national defense and the Massachusetts Army National Guard’s mission to provide adequate training facilities in support of the military mission.”

Both environmental staff and military personnel within the Guard “were consulted and provided guidance on the development of the Environmental Assessment,” the report states.

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