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SCOPING RECORD

2

CHAPTER 1

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PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

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1.0 PROPOSED ACTION

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The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) proposes to issue a long-term Special Use Permit (SUP) to the U.S. Navy for the continued use of the Camp Keller Small Arms Range (also known as the Wool Market Firing Range), located on the De Soto Ranger District of the De Soto National Forest (Figures 1.1 and 1.2) prior to expiration of the current temporary SUP on October 31, 2004 (See Appendix A).

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Proposed Navy activities within Camp Keller include:

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Continued use of Bays 1 and 2 for small arms training; no use of Bay 3 is planned.

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This would include the following specific components:

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Construction

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Contingent on funding, the Navy would construct a bullet restriction device in Bay 1.

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Operations

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- Use of Bay 1 for small arms training using rounds no larger than 0.223-caliber.

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- Use of the eastern half Bay 2 for handgun training by the Navy.

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- Use of western half of Bay 2 for handgun training by the Air Force.

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- Use of simunitions (paintball-like munitions).

22

- Modify SUP boundary (Figure 1.2)

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The use of the M203 Grenade Launcher and 40mm Training Practice rounds would be discontinued.

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1 **Continued use of the remainder of the training area, including Area 4 for field**
2 **training evolutions.** Field training (e.g., mock ambush activities and drills). Live
3 vegetation, including trees would not be damaged at any time during training exercises.
4 No roads or paths would be cut through wooded areas. Excavation for fighting positions
5 would not be required or conducted.

6 **Identification and maintenance of all surface use only areas.** The Navy is currently
7 conducting a preliminary unexploded ordnance (UXO) assessment, to determine the
8 scope of UXO that may be present. This assessment would support future efforts by the
9 Navy and previous users to assess the entire SUP area. The goal would be to determine
10 the location of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and install fencing/post signage along
11 boundaries as necessary.

12 **Removal of UXO as conditions warrant.** Any ground penetrating UXO removal would
13 not be permitted until further environmental analysis is completed.

14 **Allow public access to the SUP area when such access does not interfere with the**
15 **Navy's authorized use of the property.** Public access would be similar to that
16 described in Item 11 of the Terms and Conditions of the current SUP. (Appendix A).

17 **Mitigation measures, including best management practices and standard operating**
18 **procedures, outlined in Section 2.1.2.1.**

19 **1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

20 The purpose of the Proposed Action is for the USFS to authorize the U.S. Navy
21 continued use of Camp Keller for a 20-year period in order to meet the U.S. Navy's
22 objective in training personnel to fulfill the U.S. Navy's overall mission for readiness.
23 The new authorization would be issued by the USFS in the form of a long term SUP.
24 Under the Proposed Action, the USFS would allow the continued use of Camp Keller for
25 the same or similar military small arms and field training activities that have occurred
26 there over the past 50+ years.

27 **Background**

28 Camp Keller has been used by the military, as a training facility, since the 1940s. Until
29 1991, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Air Force and the Forest
30 Service governed use of Forest Service lands. A Special Use Permit between the Forest
31 Service and Keesler Air Force Base (KAFB) was subsequently signed in November
32 1992. In addition, a MOU between Keesler AFB and the Naval Construction Battalion
33 Center (NCBC) Gulfport was signed in 1984 that covered a 25-year period for use of the
34 range and buildings in Bay 2. After the Air Force determined that it no longer had a
35 requirement to hold a SUP for Camp Keller, the U.S. Navy assumed responsibility for the
36 SUP, on a temporary basis.

1 Under the temporary SUP, Camp Keller is currently meeting the needs of personnel
2 combat readiness training for NCBC Gulfport. This permit allows the NCBC to utilize
3 the 2,196-acre parcel from the Forest Service. Other users of the Range may include
4 Keesler Air Force Base (KAFB), local law enforcement agencies, and other Department
5 of Defense (DoD) components. Use of the Range would be provided to these other users
6 on an “as available” basis, based on the needs of the NCBC personnel.

7 The Navy analyzed the feasibility of conducting its small arms training at other locations.
8 Locations considered by the Navy included: Camp Shelby, Mississippi; Fort Chaffee,
9 Arkansas; Camp Villere, Louisiana; and Camp McCain, Mississippi. Each location was
10 determined to be infeasible due to excessive personnel travel distances, inability to
11 conduct all required training in one location, or limited Navy access to the range
12 (scheduling conflicts). Specific details regarding the evaluation of these locations is
13 provided in a memorandum from the Navy to the Forest Service, and included in
14 Appendix B.

15 Presently, Navy personnel utilize Camp Keller shooting bays 1 and 2 for target practice,
16 and utilize Area 4 for field training including mock-ambush activities and drills.
17 Weapons approved for use under the temporary SUP include: M16A2E3 Service Rifle;
18 M1911A1 Service Pistol; 0.38 cal Service Pistol; M9 Service Pistol; 12 Gauge Shotgun;
19 and M203 Grenade Launcher. Ammunition approved for use includes: 5.56 mm Ball;
20 5.56 mm Blank; 0.38 cal Ball; 9 mm Ball; 12 Gauge 00 Buckshot; and 40 mm Training
21 Practice Round. Pyrotechnics authorized for use include: Hand Grenade Simulators,
22 Booby-Trap Simulators, Ground Burst Simulators, Smoke Grenades, Smoke-pots, and
23 M-49 A1 Surface Flares.

24 The military’s active use of the Camp Keller has historically been confined to Bays 1, 2,
25 3, and Area 4 totaling approximately 80 acres in the southwest corner of the tract. Each
26 of the three bays are defined by firing safety zones, grassed areas, earthen containment
27 berms, and various support structures such as storage buildings for targets and restrooms
28 (Figure 1.2). Area 4 consists of open pine habitat and old fields and is located adjacent to
29 Bay 3. Historically, Area 4 has been used for component parts of field exercise training.
30 The balance of the 2,196 acres on Camp Keller is used as an impact and buffer area.

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1 **1.2 NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

2 The primary need for the Proposed Action is to support the USFS’s objective of
3 managing National Forest system lands for the use and enjoyment of the public under
4 multiple use and sustained yield concepts as well as ensure Navy personnel combat
5 readiness. The Proposed Action must also meet the USFS requirements for implementing
6 the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and be in accordance with the USDA
7 *Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Mississippi* (Forest
8 Plan)-USDA 1985. The Forest Plan goals include: (1) being responsive to the changing
9 conditions of land resources and changes in social and economic demands of the
10 American people, (2) providing for the safe public use of forest resources, and (3)
11 protecting and managing important historic, cultural, and natural resources of our
12 national heritage.

13 Recent world events have placed the United States (US) military center stage in the
14 defense of the US and the defense of allied nations. Therefore, it is imperative that the
15 US military forces be the best trained, prepared, and equipped military forces in the
16 world. The need to train is recognized in Section 5062 of Title 10 of the US Code
17 (USC), which directs the Department of the Navy to organize, train, and equip all Naval
18 forces for combat; the need for regular small arms training is included within this
19 directive.

20 NCBC Gulfport needs a cost-effective and efficient small arms training facility.
21 Specifically, NCBC is looking for a small arms training range location that would: 1)
22 assure necessary, unfettered access to required training facilities, 2) optimize personnel
23 training time by reducing transit time to the training facility, 3) minimize costs of
24 operating/using the training facility (e.g., personnel/equipment transports costs,
25 maintenance costs, etc.), and 4) provide facilities that can support the use of munitions
26 required for personnel qualification.

27 Personnel are transported daily to and from Camp Keller by bus for their required
28 activities. Utilization of Camp Keller by NCBC personnel does not require extensive
29 travel or overnight accommodations, thereby resulting in a cost efficient method to
30 conduct the required training activities. Other sites were considered for NCBC Gulfport
31 but eliminated from detailed analysis (See Appendix B).

32 The SUP boundary would be expanded from 2,196 acres to 2,482 acres in order to
33 accommodate the relocation of State Highway 67, provide a prominent boundary along
34 existing roads for the placement of warning signs and notices, and provide for safe usage
35 of weaponry currently being used on the Range.

1 A bullet restriction device is planned for future implementation in Bay 1. Past and current
2 usage of Bay 1 allows fired rounds to travel beyond the target area and impact within
3 the surface danger zone. A restriction device would stop a large percentage of rounds
4 immediately behind the target area, thus allowing bullets to be collected and removed
5 from the site. The specific type device needed has not yet been determined, however, to
6 address the environmental concerns and impacts associated with a structure, an earthen
7 berm would be analyzed. This structure would be constructed contingent upon requested
8 funding.

9 **1.3 LOCATION OF CAMP KELLER**

10 Camp Keller is located in the De Soto National Forest, in an interior area of Harrison
11 County (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Camp Keller is located within Sections 2, 3, 10, 11, 14,
12 and 15, Township 6 South, and Range 10 West of the St. Stephens Meridian. Please see
13 Figures 1.1-1.2 attached.

14 **1.4 SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

15 The Forest Plan established the desired conditions through land management direction.
16 This includes forest-wide management requirements and management area prescriptions,
17 with their corresponding directions, standards, and guidelines. The following documents
18 are incorporated by reference.

19 Forest-wide standards and guides (Forest Plan pages 4-11 through 4-13), and Analysis
20 Area Not Suitable 2 prescriptions for Management Area 2 (Forest Plan pages 4-95
21 through 4-96).

- 22 • Forest Plan Amendments #2 and #6 are also incorporated by reference. These
23 amendments incorporate the management requirements and mitigation
24 measures from the Record of Decision for the FEIS for the Suppression of the
25 Southern Pine Beetle and for Vegetation Management in the Coastal
26 Plain/Piedmont.
- 27 • The Biological Opinion for the Draft Gopher Tortoise Habitat Management
28 Plan.
- 29 • Management Indicator Species Population and Habitat Trends Report dated
30 March 8, 2002.
- 31 • Signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. Department
32 of Agriculture, Forest Service, the Mississippi Department of Archives and
33 History, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation concerning the
34 management of heritage resources on the National Forest in Mississippi.
- 35 • FSM WO Amendment 2000-96-5 concerning noxious weed management.

- Area-wide EA and Decision for Cogongrass Eradication would be used as the basis for making decisions relative to cogongrass management at the Camp Keller Small Arms Firing Range.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) would present a site-specific Proposed Action and alternatives to meet the desired condition of the Forest Plan. The EA would display the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental effects of the Proposed Action and alternatives.

1.5 APPLICABLE REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS AND COORDINATION

The EA would be prepared to satisfy the environmental review requirements set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (Public Law 91-190) and the President’s Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508). These regulations require federal agencies to analyze the potential environmental impacts of Proposed Actions and alternatives and to use these analyses in making decisions on a Proposed Action. The CEQ was instituted to oversee federal policy in this process. The CEQ regulations declare that an EA is required to accomplish the following objectives:

- Briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI);
- Aid in agencies’ compliance with NEPA when an EIS is not necessary; and facilitate preparation of an EIS, when necessary.

Chapter 1950 of the Forest Service Manual (FSM) and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook, contains Forest Service policy and procedures for implementing the NEPA in compliance with the CEQ regulations. The Forest Service and applicable CEQ regulations would be used to prepare this EA for the Proposed Action at Camp Keller.

A Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) would be prepared if the decision-maker determines that no significant environmental impacts would result from the Proposed Action, of issuing a long term special use permit, after considering the EA. The decision to issue a DN/FONSI would be made after the EA has been prepared and in view of the nature and degree of potential impacts.

Agencies contacted regarding regulatory compliance and coordination for the Proposed Action at Camp Keller include: the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region IV; the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ); the State of Mississippi Clearinghouse; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); and the Mississippi State Department of Archives and History, State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

1.6 DECISION TO BE MADE

1 Based on the analysis documented in the EA, the Forest Supervisor (Responsible
2 Official), Gerald R. Farmer, would decide:

- 3 • Whether or not to issue a long term (20 year) SUP to the U.S. Navy for
4 implementation;
- 5 • Whether or not the associated activities should be done; and
- 6 • What management requirements, mitigation measures and monitoring are
7 necessary to protect other resources and to achieve other resource goals,
8 objectives, and desired future conditions?

9 **1.7 SCOPING AND ISSUES**

10 Individuals and organizations that could be affected by or interested in the Proposed
11 Action have been identified. An initial scoping notice was sent on March 4, 1998 to 37
12 individuals or organizations that expressed interest in military and Forest Service
13 practices as well as adjacent landowners. The scoping notice and letter informs the
14 reader of the Proposed Action and gives an opportunity to identify issues that may need
15 to be addressed in formulating alternatives and evaluating effects. One letter from the
16 public was received during this scoping process. Several governmental agencies were
17 also contacted to solicit comments on the Proposed Action. A second scoping notice is
18 now being sent to 244 additional individuals and organizations to update project status
19 due to new information since the last scoping notice.

20 Interdisciplinary (ID) Team meetings for this EA were held on the following dates: June
21 3, 1998, February 18, 1999, January 25, 2001, August 23, 2001, February 18, 2004, and
22 June 3, 2004. The ID Team consisted of both Forest Service and Navy representatives. A
23 complete list of attendance/minutes for all meetings is included in the project file.

24 **1.8 RELEVANT ISSUES**

25 Based on the internal scoping process, the following list of preliminary relevant
26 issues was developed:

- 27 1. Proposed, Endangered, Threatened, or Sensitive (PETS) plant and animal
28 species, or their habitats, may potentially be negatively affected.
- 29 2. The project may potentially impact human health through effects on water
30 quality.
- 31 3. The project may potentially impact human safety.

32 **1.9 OTHER ISSUES**

33 After careful analysis, the ID Team determined that the following issues would not have
34 a meaningful impact on the quality of the human environment. Following the CEQ
35 regulations (1500.4(c)(g), we discuss these issues only briefly here, to emphasize the
36 issues most useful to the decision maker and the public.

- 1 1. Noise. No firing would occur between the hours of 10:00 pm and 6:00 am.
- 2 2. Air Quality. Little or no airborne emissions are associated with live firing lead
- 3 ammunition that would have any adverse effects on air quality.
- 4 3. Heritage Resources. No ground disturbing activities are proposed that would
- 5 potentially impact heritage resources. There are no known heritage resources
- 6 within the range area. If heritage resources are discovered during
- 7 implementation, the project will stop and the resources will be evaluated for
- 8 the National Register eligibility. For those that are eligible, a determination of
- 9 (a) no effect; (b) no adverse effect; or (c) adverse effect will be made. Where
- 10 the project will impact an eligible site, mitigation requirements and costs will
- 11 be prepared in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer
- 12 (SHPO). Should the decision be made to carry out the project, these
- 13 mitigation measures will be carried out in consultation with the
- 14 SHPO/Advisory Council for Historic Preservation before the project
- 15 proceeds.
- 16 4. Civil Rights and Environmental Justice. The Proposed Action would be
- 17 implemented entirely within the boundaries of Camp Keller and would not
- 18 have any social or economic impacts on any low income and/or minority
- 19 groups.
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CHAPTER 2

3

ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

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2.0 HISTORY OF THE FORMULATION OF THE ALTERNATIVES

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The Proposed Action was selected based on the potential to meet the purpose, need and objectives of the DoN's combat readiness requirements. Facilities within close proximity to NCBC facilities in Gulfport, MS were evaluated for consideration. Objectives and selection criteria used in identifying alternatives include:

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- Facility capability to support the type of training conducted by NCBC personnel;

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- Facility capability to provide access for approximately 3,000 persons to train for a period of three days to two weeks during the course of a calendar year; and

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Ability of personnel to be transported round-trip to the facility from NCBC on a daily basis, to eliminate costs associated with overnight accommodations without increasing training time from current training schedules.

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2.1 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

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2.1.1 No-Action Alternative

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Under the No Action alternative, U.S Navy training activities would continue at Camp Keller until the temporary Special Use Permit (SUP) expires on October 31, 2004. Upon expiration of the temporary SUP, all training activities at Camp Keller would cease. Cessation of training activities could drastically affect the readiness of NCBC personnel. As required by the terms and conditions of the temporary SUP, the Navy would be required to immediately remove all facility improvements except those owned by USFS, and restore the site to preoperational conditions within six months. Impacts associated with clean-up operations resulting from closure of Camp Keller would be conducted in accordance with the DoD Range Rule, DoD Ammunition and Explosives Safety Standard 6055, and Air Force Manual 91-201.

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1 The Range Rule establishes a comprehensive process for identifying, evaluating, and
2 addressing military munitions and other constituents on closed ranges on active
3 installations; transferred ranges (which primarily include Formerly Used Defense
4 Sites)(FUDS); and transferring ranges (which include primarily Base Realignment and
5 Closure sites). The Range Rule process is meant to ensure public safety, and the safety
6 of response personnel, while addressing human health and environmental concerns. The
7 proposed evaluation process consists of: (1) identifying all closed, transferred, and
8 transferring military ranges; (2) conducting a range assessment and implementing an
9 accelerated response; (3) evaluating the response action and conducting a site-specific
10 range evaluation, if necessary; (4) conducting recurring reviews; and (5) closing out the
11 range response action. Since Camp Keller is an open and active range, the Range Rule
12 does not apply here.

13 **2.1.2 Proposed Action**

14 The USFS proposes to issue a long-term SUP to the U.S. Navy for the continued use of
15 the Camp Keller Small Arms Range (also known as the Wool Market Firing Range),
16 prior to expiration of the current temporary SUP. Additional details of this alternative
17 are described in Section 1.0. Requirements of the SUP for operation of the Camp Keller
18 Range would include the following:

19 **2.1.2.1 Mitigation**

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21 Mitigation measures are defined as actions taken to avoid, minimize, reduce, or eliminate
22 adverse effects of implementing the Proposed Action or alternative actions. Listed below
23 is a preliminary summary of site-specific applications of the most important mitigation
24 measures:

25 **Wildlife, including PETS species**

26 Gopher tortoise burrows shall be designated on the ground prior to training activity.
27 Mechanical equipment must stay at least 25 feet away from gopher tortoise burrows,
28 except existing woods roads and trails can be utilized if their use does not cause damage
29 to burrows.

30 31 **Human Health and Safety**

32
33 Range operations shall be conducted in accordance with the “Terms and Conditions”
34 specified in the long term SUP.

35 36 **Soil and Water**

37 Areas affected by ground disturbing activities would be rewaterbarred (if necessary),
38 disked, fertilized, and seeded according to the following specifications:

39 Seeding Season: March 1 – June 1

40 Grass Species (Seeding Rate): Switchgrass (Alamo, 3 lbs PLS/ac)

1 Big bluestem (Rountree, 5 lbs PLS/ac)
2 Little bluestem (Aldous, 5 lbs PLS/ac)
3 Fertilizer and Rate/ac: 0-20-20, 300 lbs/ac or 13-13-13, 300 lbs/ac
4

5 **2.1.2.2 Monitoring**
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7 **A monitoring plan would be developed for surface and ground water quality.**
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9 **2.2 Alternative Range Sites.**

10 Alternative ranges considered by the Navy are discussed in a letter from the US Navy to
11 the USFS and provided in Appendix B. The study indicated continued use of Camp
12 Keller as the only reasonable alternative due to mission requirements and cost
13 effectiveness.

14