

U.S. ARMY

Public pushes back on weapons request

Fort Carson wants to use drones, heavier weaponry at Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site

BY PETER ROPER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

TRINIAD — Army officials want to turn the page on the long fight over the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site but their request to use new weapons, such as drones, ran into the hard resentments Tuesday night that remain from the struggle that blocked the Army from expanding Pinon Canyon.

Fort Carson officials came to Trinidad State Junior College to get public comment on a planned environmental review of the 238,000-acre training area northeast of Trinidad.

It was a familiar drill for the Army and its opponents.

This time, the Army

is doing a study on the impact of expanding what it does at Pinon Canyon to include drone aircraft, helicopter gunnery, drop zones for paratroopers, electronic jamming and demolition training.

Dan Benford, Fort Carson's director of plans and training, told the Trinidad audience those weapons are common in battle in Afghanistan.

"We need to train with them realistically," he said, but the crowd included some of the organizers of the Pinon Canyon Expansion Opposition Coalition as well as Not 1 More Acre! group.

Jean Aguerre, of Not 1 More Acre!, repeated her organization's claim that Army training is destroy-

ing the prairie at Pinon Canyon and would cause dust bowl conditions. To some applause, she called for the site to be closed. So did other speakers.

"You can't train soldiers in a dust bowl," Aguerre said.

Trinidad Mayor Joe Reorda urged the people to get past the long resentments dating back to when the Army created Pinon Canyon in the 1980s through property condemnation.

"Give 'em a break," Reorda asked the audience. "How long has this been going on? Ten years? Don't you think we could forgive?"

"No," answered a woman in the audience.

Col. David Grosso, the

garrison commander at Fort Carson, listened to the criticism Tuesday but said his command would do its job. He leaves his position on May 21 and Col. Joel Harrison will replace him.

There will be another public comment meeting on the site's environmental study tonight at Otero Junior College in La Junta, beginning at 6 p.m. Not all the comments were as hard-edged as Aguerre's.

Paula Ozzello, of the Southern Colorado Environmental Council, said the arid grassland of Pinon Canyon couldn't withstand the heavier weapons that would be fired there, such as rockets fired from helicopters.

Thus far, the Army has only used small arms



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/FILE

Fort Carson soldiers confront a man posing as an Iraqi villager trying to get through a checkpoint to get medical help for his wife during a training exercise at the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site.

weapons, up to .50-caliber rounds and 40 mm training grenade rounds at Pinon Canyon.

"Leave the heavier live-fire at Fort Carson," Ozzello urged.

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EILERS HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD

Superfund label to hurt home sellers

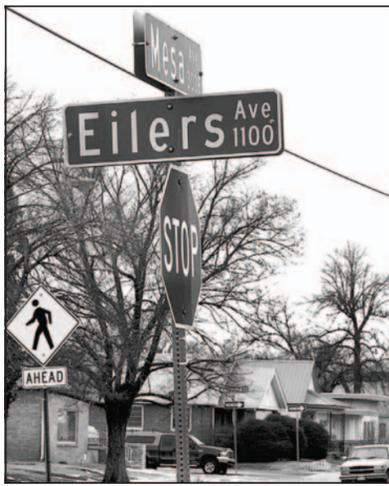
BY JEFF TUCKER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Officials from the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development said Tuesday that a Superfund cleanup can help property values once it's finished.

But the short-term options are limited for the dozens of neighbors and concerned citizens who showed up for a community meeting on the proposed designation of the Eilers Heights neighborhood as a Superfund site.

The focus of the meeting was on the Superfund designation's effects on real estate transactions in the area.

The EPA will make its official designation on Monday, and then will begin reaching out to homeowners near the former Colorado Smelter to have their property tested for lead and arsenic.



FILE PHOTO/PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

The Eilers neighborhood is a prospective Superfund site to clean up slag that has long been in the area as a result of a smelter operation years ago.

Rick Garcia, Region 8 director for HUD, said the designation will prevent the Federal Housing Administration from insuring any loans on property within the area, effectively locking property owners out of a commonly used form of financing.

Homes will be eligible for FHA-backed loans once property owners can show, with a letter from the EPA, that the site has been cleaned up to the agency's satisfaction.

But EPA officials couldn't tell the neighbors with any certainty how long the cleanup process will take or even how many properties will fall under the official boundaries of the site.

Once the designation has been made, the EPA will test areas further and further away from the smelter site until the sample results show no further need for testing.

But there's no guarantee the environmental cleanup will start on the properties first tested, depending on where the highest concentrated areas of contamination are.

Initial estimates have put the cleanup at five years, but Shawn McGrath, EPA Region 8 administrator, said Tuesday there's no certainty of how long it will take.

Garcia suggested that while FHA-backed loans won't be immediately available, the city might be able to use Community Development Block Grant funding to find some way to help.

City Council President Sandy Daff said council has been told that using CDBG money in the Eilers neighborhood on capital projects like curbs and gutter isn't the most effective use of the money because of the added costs of remediation.

But Garcia stressed it's up to council on how to spend the CDBG funds.

Daff said the city is working on other possible solutions.

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FARM WATER

Big splash for well pumping

BY CHRIS WOODKA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Farmers who use wells will pump more than three times as much water than in 2013 under augmentation plans approved last week by the state.

"I think one of the things that helped out was that there was so little pumping last year that there are no return flows to be replaced this year," said Steve Witte, Water Division 2 engineer.

The plans from the three major groundwater associations, including 1,780 wells, total nearly 102,000 acre-feet (33.2 billion gallons), compared with 32,384 acre-feet in 2013. That's also about 115 percent of the 12-year average from the three major well pumping plans.

The largest group is the Lower Arkansas Water Management Association, which plans to pump 60,756 acre-feet this year, up from 13,534 acre-feet in July.

"In District 67, below John Martin Reservoir, they are influenced by Purgatoire River flows, so that's had an effect," Witte said.

The Colorado Water Protective and Development Association plans to pump 33,000 acre-feet, while the Arkansas Groundwater Users Association has plans for 8,231 acre-feet in farm wells.

Another factor in the ample well allotments is a reduction in the state presumption of depletions, which dropped to 36.5 percent this year, from 39 percent in the past.

Surface water replace-

ment plans, primarily driven by large farm sprinkler systems also have been approved.

There are three major plans under the Rule 10 plans adopted in the 2010 consumptive use rules which prevent injury to downstream users, including Kansas.

On the Fort Lyon Canal, 161 improvements on 57 farms will require 1,000 acre-feet of replacement water. Non-Fort Lyon plans for 74 improvements on 35 farms will require 891 acre-feet. Both of the plans are administered by the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District.

A third plan, filed by LAWMA for four farms owned by GP Resources call for 836 acre-feet of replacement water.

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ELECTION/from page 1B

677 votes, followed by Davis with 551 and Melchi with 519.

Falling short were Scott Carlton with 326 votes and John Biggs

with 280.

Susan Kalman and Patti Wadlington were elected to the two open seats on the Colorado City Metropolitan Board

of Directors.

Kalman received 288 votes to Wadlington's 250. William Alan Garst received 185 votes.

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Agent Orange film at library tonight

A film and panel discussion on Agent Orange and its impact on Vietnam veterans will take place at 6:30 p.m. today in the InfoZone at the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library, 100 E. Abriendo Ave.

"Agent Orange: De-

grades of Destruction," is the work of filmmaker Damian Alvarado. A panel discussion will follow featuring veterans advocates Larry Alvarado, Max Blesch, Billy Edwards and Nick Romero.

The public is invited.

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