

Successful DoD – Tribal Partnership



YUROK TRIBE: REQUA AIR FORCE STATION

The Yurok Tribe became a partner in the Department of Defense-supported Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program (NALEMP) in 2003 in order to address impacts to tribal lands from operations performed on the Requa Air Force Station. The Department of Defense (DoD) acquired 53 acres of land for the Requa Air Force Station from a private land owner and activated the installation in June 1949. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the Requa Air Force Station operated as an Aircraft Control and Warning Station by the Tenth Air Force; the Station was determined to be excess to the Air Force because the radar functions were transferred to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The Requa Air Force Station property and facilities were reported to the General Services Administration for disposal in May 1981. Two acres were transferred to the FAA in 1981 and the remainder was transferred to the National Park Service (NPS) in 1993. In 1988, Congress enacted the Hoopa-Yurok Settlement Act which established the Yurok Reservation on lands which completely surrounded the former Requa Air Force Station. The location of the former Requa Air Force Station is central to Yurok creation stories and the cultural belief that ceremonial dances held at the property for centuries keeps the world as the Tribe knows it “in balance.” The Tribe also uses the land for deer hunting and gathering subsistence foods and related items, including spruce root, berries, alder, and medicinal plants.



Before: Investigation Area-6. Photo: USACE, Sacramento.

Communication with former land owners (the FAA and NPS) and coordination among the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service & Bureau of Indian Affairs, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the County of Del Norte made planning clean up actions complex, but all parties assisted the Tribe and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District to craft and implement mitigation activities. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provided the Yurok Environmental Department guidance on cleanup requirements. The 2003 NALEMP Cooperative Agreement (CA) funded development of a Strategic Project Implementation Plan (SPIP), a document that outlined all impacts from former military activity on tribal land, as well as a scope of work to remediate impacts from the former Requa Air Force Station.



Investigation Area-6. Photo: USACE, Sacramento.

Impacts at the site included 64 buildings and 27 family housing units, some containing asbestos; seven underground storage tanks; three above ground storage tanks, and associated piping; and soil and groundwater contamination from fuels and metals, including lead. Follow-on NALEMP CAs funded the Tribe, with assistance from contractor ATC Associates, to monitor and treat contamination in both soil and groundwater. Over 880 tons of metals- and fuel-contaminated soil was excavated and properly disposed off-site. Soil and groundwater remediation was completed through use of nineteen injection wells that treated fuel-contaminated soil and groundwater.

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NALEMP also supported training that enhanced the capacity of tribal members and employees to conduct future environmental cleanup projects. The NPS hired trained tribal members to demolish the buildings and re-contour the site to its natural state. Involvement by tribal members assured the community of the quality of remediation work and helped dispel long-standing concerns of tribal members about possible contamination. The Tribe had not been allowed access and information about military activities was minimal.

The FAA and NPS have since vacated the properties and all roads, except one access road, have been decommissioned. The Tribe's goal to have the area returned to a natural state has been accomplished. The process to put the land into trust for the Yurok Tribe began in 2012 with the conversion of two acres to trust land. The restoration of the site to its natural state highlights the potential of tribal, Federal, and state entities to collaborate and leverage results that lead to a cleaner environment.