

## Corps scopes out endangered species at Kentucky Army National Guard training facility

Katie Newton, public affairs

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Louisville District has been working closely with the Kentucky Army National Guard (KYARNG) at the Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center in Muhlenberg County to identify and protect habitats of any endangered species found at the site.

KYARNG requested support from the Louisville District to perform a Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species investigation of the center where hundreds of National Guard Soldiers train each year. It is the largest Army National Guard training facility in Kentucky and encompasses approximately 11,400 acres. Most of the training facility has been mined in the past; however, the area still provides aquatic and terrestrial habitats for many state and federally protected plant and animal species.

"They looked to us for the expertise to identify and conclusively determine whether threatened or endangered species are present on the site," said Glen Beckham, Louisville District project manager.

"KYARNG asked me for assistance during the semi-annual Kentucky Tier 2 Meeting, a meeting that allows the Army to meet face-to-face with its regulators," said Beckham. He quickly set up a meeting between the KYARNG and several leaders from the Louisville District to discuss the path forward.

USACE employees suited up—binoculars in hand—to take a closer look. Led by Ecologist Mike Turner, a four-person environmental team conducted multiple visits to the site between July and September 2012 to evaluate the property and gather data.

A Great Egret was observed by the team in wetland areas of the property on several occasions. The large white heron is listed by the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission as threatened, and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources reports it as endangered.

"Protecting the Great Egret as a part of Kentucky's natural heritage also serves to protect at least three other endangered species that use the same habitat and are likely to be present on the training facility,"

said Turner. "Protecting its habitat—wetlands — also provides recreational hunting and fishing opportunities for the trainees."

Potential bat habitat was also located in several areas including habitat for the grey bat, which is a federally-listed endangered species.

"Sink holes were found in an unmined portion of the facility and are likely interconnected through wet cave passages, which could serve as bat habitat," said Turner. "This habitat has been destroyed on almost all of the facility and the identified sink holes are the only opportunity to protect cave resources, including the bat and many other cave dwellers, on the facility."

Based on these findings, USACE completed a Threatened & Endangered Species (T&E) Management Plan in December which provided detailed management recommendations for eleven species including nine birds, one snake, and one bat documented on the training facility. Conservation and habitat restoration recommendations were made for the other 55 listed species that could potentially be found on the facility. The T&E management plan is designed to recommend a number of species-specific investigations to conclusively determine whether threatened or endangered bats, butterflies or other species are present on the site.

"All of our recommendations take the KYARNG training mission into full consideration as the primary purpose of the facility," said Turner.

That understanding helped forge a great working relationship between the two organizations. "Working with USACE was like working with someone in our own office," said Ricky French, natural resource manager. "The group knew the mission, the roles to achieve the mission and the path forward to achieve those goals."

The \$100,000 investigation included completing the field work and a threatened and endangered species management plan by the end of the year.

"This was a substantial achievement on a very tight schedule," said Beckham. "The project delivery team and our plan-



Jesse Helton

*The Barred Owl was observed several times during a threatened and endangered species survey at the Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center in Kentucky in August 2012. This owl is a predator of the Long-eared Owl, which is protected. Habitat management techniques that benefit the Long-eared Owl while discouraging predation from Barred Owls may be developed in future studies.*

ning section have really provided outstanding service with minimal direction," said Beckham.

"Kentucky National Guard is a great partner to work with and we really appreciate the opportunities we have received from them to work together," said Beckham.

The process went so well that the KYARNG anticipates contracting the Corps to conduct a wetlands delineation survey. It is expected to start in late spring 2013 following approval and funding by the KYARNG.

"Previous wetland surveys of the facility are of questionable value as relates to wetlands regulated under the provisions of the Clean Water Act," said Turner. "The survey by Louisville District staff will correct this deficiency and allow the Kentucky Army National Guard to focus on areas needing protection and to train in areas that are not of such concern."