



EPA Extends Timeline For Study Of Base Gun Range Impact

By MICHAEL J. RAUSCH, Dec 21, 2022 | Photo Courtesy of U.S. Army



The US Environmental Protection Agency has extended the timeline for completion of its study on the potential impact of a proposed new machine gun range on Joint Base Cape Cod. The EPA said it anticipates completing its study early next year.

The statement was part of correspondence read during the Bourne Select Board's meeting on Tuesday, December 20. The EPA has spent much of 2022 evaluating a proposal by the Massachusetts Army National Guard to build a multi-purpose machine gun range on the base. The agency is studying the impact of the gun range on the Upper Cape Cod Water Reserve, a sole source aquifer for towns on the Upper Cape.

The EPA defined a sole source aquifer as “an aquifer which supplies at least 50 percent of the drinking water for its service area and there are no reasonably available alternative drinking water sources if the aquifer became contaminated.” The agency acknowledged that it had hoped to complete its review of the project by the end of this year. However, “additional required analysis will extend the timeline,” the EPA's statement read.

“EPA continues to evaluate this information and responses from the Massachusetts Army National Guard to EPA's technical questions related to the Sole Source Aquifer project review,” the agency's statement read.

The agency said it anticipates completing its review and issuing a determination sometime in early 2023.

Additionally, the EPA said it will hold a public hearing and a formal 30-day comment period following release of its determination. The agency said it will also release the administrative record that details the basis for its determination.

The Army National Guard has proposed an eight-lane machine gun range at Camp Edwards, the Massachusetts Army National Guard training area on JBCC. The MPMG range would be the first of its kind in Massachusetts and would be used for training and weapons qualification.

Upper Cape residents have expressed concerns about the possible environmental impact of the gun range. That includes concerns about the ammunition fired and its impacts on the local water supply and wildlife around the site. In August 2020, a draft “Finding of No Significant Impact” was released, but since then, a number of advocates have continued to oppose the project.

Among those who have expressed opposition are Massachusetts US Senators Edward J. Markey—a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee—and Elizabeth A. Warren; and Congressman William R. Keating (D-Bourne).

Town officials have questioned the need to build the gun range on an environmentally sensitive area, and suggested constructing it at Fort Devens. Base officials have countered that Fort Devens does not have the space needed to meet the Army’s standards for a gun range.

At eight firing lanes, the proposed range at Camp Edwards falls short of the Army’s standard of 10 lanes. However, base officials have argued, it is a better alternative to Fort Devens or traveling out of state to Camp Ethan Allen in Jericho, Vermont, Fort Drum in upstate New York, or Fort Dix in New Jersey.