

2026 Department of War Environmental Award Nomination Narrative
Environmental Restoration – Individual: Ms. Nicole Goicochea
Defense Supply Center Columbus (DSCC) Environmental Management Division

Introduction:

Defense Supply Center Columbus, Ohio, is a 500-acre War Department facility located in Central Ohio, providing installation management and services for 27 tenants and approximately 7,670 personnel. DSCC is the headquarters for Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), Weapons Support (Columbus), with over 2,700 employees managing over 2 million items and supporting nearly 21,000 military units and federal and civil agencies. DLA Weapons Support (Columbus) maintains operational control of the installation in conjunction with DLA Installation Management – Columbus to uniquely capitalize on the synergy of state, federal and DoW organizations such as the Ohio Army National Guard Regional Training Institute; the 4th Marine Corps District, Marine Corps Recruiting Command; the Defense Finance and Accounting Service and the Veterans Administration, which are co-located on or near the site.

Ms. Nicole Goicochea is instrumental to the important Department of War mission of readiness and innovation by steering the Defense Supply Center Columbus (DSCC) to not only maintain compliance with all restoration requirements and environmental laws, but to set the standard for sustainable resource management. Ms. Goicochea expertly manages a complex portfolio of critical initiatives. She has proven instrumental in navigating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for major projects and has revitalized the Installation Environmental Restoration Program. Her leadership of the Environmental Management System (EMS) and the Natural and Cultural Resource programs has transformed the installation's approach to environmental stewardship and has set a high standard to emulate across the DLA enterprise.

Nicole's successful management of the various programs was exemplary and serves to create a model for small-scale installations that have multi-faceted missions and requirements. Through hard work, determination and innovative thinking, Nicole orchestrated the regulatory closure for 72 sites of concern. Nicole's efforts extend above and beyond environmental compliance and restoration, however, as she has also implemented innovative initiatives that created a more visually pleasing and sustainable natural environment for employees and visitors to the installation, while effectively supporting mission goals.

The following narrative provides details on her exemplary commendable work efforts through outreach and collaboration with federal, state and local regulators.

Background:

When Nicole assumed leadership, the DSCC restoration program faced a monumental challenge. Since initial investigations in the late 1980s, the program encompassed 87 solid waste management units (SWMUs) and areas of concern. Despite numerous investigations and partial cleanups over three decades, no official site closures had been granted by federal or state regulators. This left DLA with a portfolio of open, unresolved sites, with some regulatory uncertainty and preventing the full use of installation property for mission-critical activities.

In 1988, DSCC tested the integrity of its known underground storage tanks (USTs) per Ohio Bureau of Underground Storage Tank Regulations (BUSTR). Based on the information from the tank integrity tests, it was concluded that virtually all the USTs were found to have been releasing contaminants to the environment.

During a RCRA Facility Assessment completed in 1989, by AT Kearney Inc., seventy-seven (77) SWMUs and one (1) Area of Concern (AOC) were identified. It was determined that fifty-one (51) of the units did not manage hazardous waste and/or constituents; or were managed with minimal risk to the environment. Seven (7) units were suspected of having managed hazardous waste and/or constituents at some point. One (1) was a locomotive wash area. The remaining units, eighteen (18) in total, were identified as SWMU-associated tanks. Sixteen (16) of these tanks were USTs and the remaining two (2) were above ground storage tanks (ASTs).

Twelve (12) USTs were excavated, including the USTs at Sites 6, 9, 10, and 14, and were removed in 1989. In 1992, the twelve (12) excavated UST sites were chosen for further delineation of the risks associated with the detected contamination. These investigations determined that some environmental concerns were still present. For Sites 6, 9, 10, and 14, several rounds of soil, groundwater, and soil gas sampling were completed from 1989 through 2003.

Between 1992 and 2001, corrective actions were performed on these twelve (12) sites along with two (2) additional sites. Historical groundwater data has shown elevated levels of chlorinated solvents and fuel related compounds. Further soil excavation occurred at Sites 6, 9 and 14 in 1993, and at Site 10 in 1997. DSCC obtained regulatory concurrence on No Further Action (NFA) status from the BUSTR at Sites 6 (1998), 9 (2001), and 10 (2003). The UST at Site 14 was used for heating purposes and therefore was not regulated under BUSTR.

In June 2008 and 2009, US EPA Region 5 identified that although BUSTR issued no further action closure letters at the sites listed above, concerns regarding potential residual soil and groundwater contamination remained for multiple SWMU sites at DSCC, including Sites 6, 9, 10, 14, and others. Specifically, previous sampling at these sites had indicated concentrations of petroleum hydrocarbon contamination exceeding the Ohio BUSTR Category 3 Action Levels in both soil and groundwater.

U.S. EPA Region 5 requested further delineation of residual soil and groundwater contamination at Sites 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14, and 17, as well as potential impacts to Mason Run sediments. A preliminary investigation into the sites listed above, conducted in 2010, indicated that Sites 6, 9, 10, 14, and Mason Run required additional investigation. The sites were further investigated in 2010, and the data was presented in the 2011 Current Condition Report (CCR). The CCR reported that elevated levels of petroleum hydrocarbons were detected in soil at Sites 6, 9, 10, and 14, and in groundwater at Sites 6, 9, and 10 (AECOM, 2011). The 2010 investigation noted that Polyaromatic Hydrocarbons (PAH) and arsenic were detected above industrial soil screening levels in shallow sediments at Mason Run.

In July 2016 US EPA informed DLA that the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) would take the lead in oversight of the DSCC restoration sites. Recognizing the value of a

supplemental site investigation, the Ohio EPA endorsed DLA's decision to program funds for a contract.

A supplemental site investigation (SSI) was conducted at Sites 6, 9, 10, 14, and Mason Run to further delineate soil, groundwater, and/or sediment contamination. The first phase of fieldwork was performed in March and April 2017 and included installation of new groundwater monitoring wells at the sites, groundwater sampling at new and existing monitoring wells, subsurface soil sampling, and sediment sampling at Mason Run. The second phase carried out in October through December of 2018 included additional activities at Sites 6 and 14 to identify potential contaminant migration, per reports from the first phase of activities. The Final SSI Report was published in June 2019.

The Ohio EPA notified DLA that all 87 sites remained classified as active under its jurisdiction. This determination was based on the absence of official closure reports from either the US EPA or the Ohio EPA. Consequently, the agency mandated that a full Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) be completed. When Nicole assumed leadership, she developed a strategy, collaborated with federal and state regulators, and obtained regulatory closure for 72 of these sites.

Purpose and Goals:

The framework for the collaborative implementation of the DSCC Environmental Restoration Program was established under CERCLA by the 2019 Technical Memorandum between the Ohio EPA and DLA. It sets forth the following objectives:

- Request no further action status determinations for sites that no longer carry risk to human health and the environment
- Fully delineate remaining sites
- Institute land use controls where appropriate
- Communicate effectively with regulators, the public, and stakeholders

Summary of Accomplishments (FY24-FY25):

Landmark Achievement:

Demonstrating unparalleled dedication and strategic excellence, Ms. Goicochea has accomplished a monumental achievement in DSCC's restoration program, setting a precedence and standard for future program managers. By systematically dismantling decades-old environmental challenges, the program not only met, but exceeded the ambitious goals outlined in the 2019 Technical Memorandum with (Ohio EPA) and DLA. Her efforts have culminated in the successful closure of seventy-two (72) sites, ending over 30 years of regulatory gridlock and setting a new standard for environmental stewardship and inter-agency collaboration.

Shattering Expectations: Closing 72 Long-Standing Sites:

In a historic accomplishment during the period of Oct 1, 2023, to Sept 30, 2025, Ms. Goicochea facilitated the closure of seventy-two (72) sites, many of which had remained open for more than three decades. Achieving the closure of 72 sites, this landmark success was driven by a meticulously planned strategy. The approach relied on two key documents: a comprehensive No Further Action Request Report for 70 sites, and a separate Remedial Investigation (RI) Report

that successfully closed the remaining two. This colossal undertaking required Nicole to compile and synthesize vast amounts of historical data, conduct rigorous sampling to account for seasonal variability, and present an irrefutable case for closure to the Ohio EPA. This effort significantly reduces long-term environmental liabilities and allows re-use of property, which is essential for evolving mission requirements and objectives, marking a major step forward for the installation.

Accelerating Progress on Complex Sites:

Building on this momentum, Ms. Goicochea is now focused on resolving the fifteen (15) remaining open sites. In response to an Ohio EPA data request, Nicole directed further investigation and sampling at all six locations in 2025. The findings were presented in a March 2026 draft Remedial Investigation Report (RIR) Addendum one, which anticipates No Further Action (NFA) for two (2) of the sites. For four (4) sites, a Feasibility Study (FS) is planned to evaluate the need for land use controls (LUCs), establishing a clear and strategic path to final closure. The anticipated nine (9) remaining sites are planned for additional investigation as part of Addendum two, which has been awarded.

Pioneering Proactive Stakeholder Engagement:

At the heart of this success is a revolutionary approach to stakeholder communication, spearheaded by Ms. Goicochea. She instituted highly effective quarterly partnering meetings with the Ohio EPA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), DLA headquarters and multiple contractors. These sessions have transformed the dynamic from centric reactive problem-solving to proactive partnership solutions, allowing the team to streamline efforts, anticipate and neutralize potential roadblocks, and secure critical, timely requests and input from regulators. Ms. Goicochea's persistent and positive engagement has cultivated an environment of trust and collaboration, proving to be the foundational element that has enabled the entire program's accelerated historic accomplishment and streamlined responses to active and potential project execution challenges.