Gerstle River Arctic Test Site, Alaska

November 2022

Background

DoD uses and manages operational ranges to support national security objectives and maintain the high state of operational readiness essential to its mission requirements. The Department conducts non-regulatory, proactive, and comprehensive operational range assessments (ORAs) to support the long-term sustainability of these ranges while protecting human health and the environment. The purpose of an ORA is to determine if there is a release or substantial threat of a release of munitions constituents (MC) from an operational range to an off-range area that exceeds an applicable regulatory standard or creates a potential unacceptable risk to human health or the environment.

The Army ORA effort was developed to address DoD requirements detailed in DoD Directive 4715.11 (10 May 2004) and DoD Instruction 4715.14 (15 November 2018). The overall objective of the ORA is to assess operational ranges/range complexes to determine if an off-range MC release or substantial threat of an off-range MC release exists; if an off-range MC release exists, does it exceed an applicable regulatory reporting standard; and if an MC release or substantial threat of a release exists, determine whether it creates a potentially unacceptable risk to off-range human health or the environment. Army ORAs assess potential off-range migration of MC along surface water system and groundwater migration pathways.

Installation Overview

Gerstle River Arctic Test Site is comprised of 20,792.28 acres of land located approximately three miles south of Alaska Route 2 in central interior Alaska. The installation is located approximately 29 miles southeast of Delta Junction, Alaska and 130 miles southeast of Fairbanks, Alaska. The Gerstle River bounds the installation to the southeast. The western portion of the installation extends into the foothills of

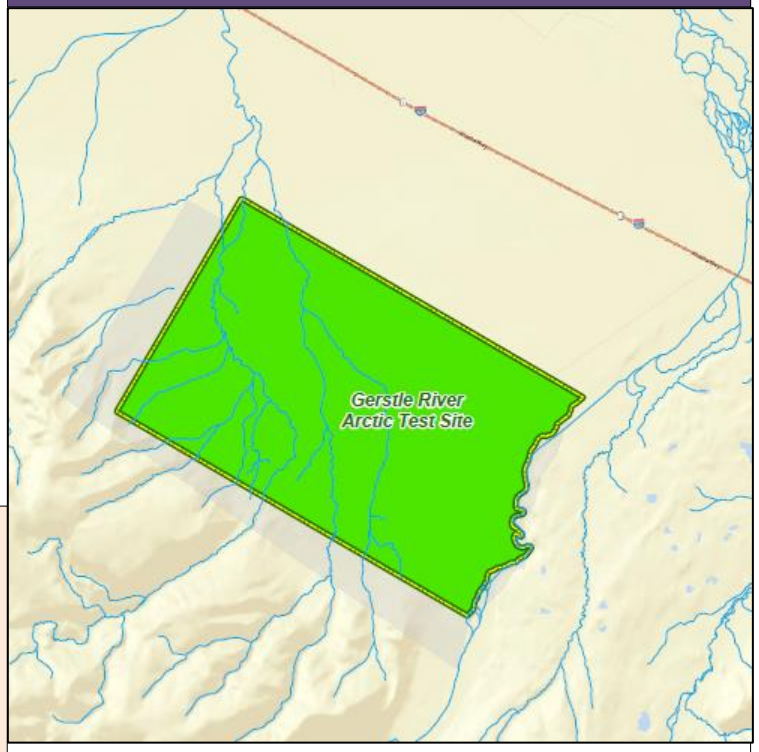
Operational Range Assessment Findings (11/2022)

Based on updated data, no off-range MC release or substantial threat of off-range MC release currently exists. Therefore, there is no risk to off-range receptors. The operational ranges remain categorized as Unlikely.

Next Steps

Gerstle River Arctic Test Site's operational range should be included in the FY23-27 cycle of ORAs to meet DoD Policy (DoDI 4715.14) re-assessment requirements.

Map of Range/Range Area



the Granite Mountain section of the Alaska Range. The area surrounding Gerstle River Arctic Test Site is rural, with a few agricultural lands scattered to the northeast of installation near Alaska Route 2.

Gerstle River Arctic Test Site was established in the 1950s and was used until the mid-1960s as a munitions test site for ordnance and chemical operations, field trials, and engineering analysis on agents and munitions. Chemical and high explosive munitions were tested between 1954 and 1962, and between 1962 and 1967, through static detonation firing.

In 1967, at the conclusion of testing, disposal areas were created near each of the individual test grids for decontaminated test items. After chemical and biological munitions testing ceased at the Gerstle River Arctic Test Site in 1967, various cleanup operations occurred between 1968 and 1971. The last known use of the area was as a biathlon course, primarily used in the 1980s and 1990s. Munitions use on the biathlon course was limited to small arms. Training occurred approximately three to four times per year for classes of approximately 50 shooters. Interviews conducted during the Phase I assessment indicated that training at the site stopped in approximately 1995.

After munitions testing ceased at Gerstle River Arctic Test Site, the area was used for biathlon course and as a Forward Arming and Refueling Point for aviation units (EA 2008). Currently, the installation is used as a training site for maneuver and training of light forces for the U.S. Army Garrison (USAG) Alaska.

Previous Assessment Overview

The initial 2008 qualitative assessment for Gerstle River Arctic Test Site consisted of collecting, evaluating, and presenting available data to establish if there is an interaction between the on-range sources of MCOC and off-range receptors (source/receptor interaction).

During the Phase I assessment, Gerstle River Arctic Test Site included a total of one operational range, a maneuver training area totaling 20,589.60 acres. Although historical munitions use was identified, the source-pathway-receptor interaction was determined to be Unlikely.

During the 2015 Periodic Review no additional munitions use had occurred since the Phase I, and no changes to potential migration pathways were identified. As a result, the range at Gerstle River Arctic Test Site was categorized as Unlikely.

ORA Basic Assessment (2022)

The evaluation of updated data gathered during the Basic Assessment indicate that the one operational range at Gerstle River Arctic Test Site remains Unlikely to have potential MCOC migrate off-range and adversely affect human or ecological receptors. Currently, the installation is used for non-live-fire maneuver training, recreation activities, hunting and firewood sales. Historical source areas are limited or there are no potential migration pathways (i.e., Blueberry Lake). This information is consistent with the CSMs developed and the conclusions reached during previous ORAs conducted at the site in 2008 and 2015.

For more information on Gerstle River Arctic Test Site, contact USAG Alaska Public Affairs Office at (970) 353-6700.
For more information on the DoD Operational Range Assessment Program visit https://www.denix.osd.mil/orap/home/