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**The Piñon Canyon War**

At Fort Carson [here] south of Colorado Springs, the U.S. Army occupies 236,800 acres of El Paso County’s scenic high-prairie Piñon Canyon, which it uses for large-scale, force-on-force mechanized brigade combat exercises involving tanks and armored units. Since 2006 the Army, along with their “partner” The Nature Conservancy (the real estate branch of Goldman Sachs) has been grasping to acquire at least 418,000 acres more.

The land the Army covets is private property, mainly ranches, between the towns of La Junta, Trinidad, and Walsenburg. The proposed annexation would create a contiguous Army-owned area of 650,000 acres, more than 1,000 square miles. In fact, the Army has stated in the past that they wish to seize 7 million acres (more than 10,000 square miles) through eminent domain.

The family ranchers who own that land are adamantly opposed. The land seizure would devastate the local economy as well as destroy the land with mortars, bombs, and other munitions. The residents formed a group called Not One More Acre! to fight the Piñon Canyon expansion.
Their combined efforts were enough to gain a congressionally ordered reprieve in 2007, when Reps. Marilyn Musgrave (R-Colo.) and John Salazar (D-Colo.) pushed through a one-year congressional ban on funding for eminent domain acquisitions or expansion activities in Piñon Canyon. In 2008 Congress extended the ban through the end of fiscal 2009.

Not One More Acre! also sued the U.S. Army over its 2007 “transitional” environmental assessment. The plaintiffs were victorious when in September 2009 U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch’s ruled that the Army’s EA was “severely inadequate”:

**Ranchers: Ruling topples Army dominoes on Pinon Canyon**

by Peter Roper, the Pueblo Chieftan, September 10, 2009 [here]

… Not One More Acre! filed its lawsuit over that study, saying it failed to meet the federal requirements in many areas, including looking at training alternatives.

Matsch agreed in his ruling Tuesday. He sharply rejected the Army’s analysis and process, pointing out that Army reports produced during the lawsuit - but not made available to the general public previously - demonstrated the Army was aware of extensive environmental damage at Pinon Canyon from previous and more-limited training maneuvers.

The judge said the Army’s own land management analysis in 2006 said the Army could only use Pinon Canyon about five months of the year if the grasslands were to recover afterward. Even so, the 2007 impact study said that adequate mitigation plans were in place to support even a year-round training schedule.

“That conclusion is inconsistent and irreconcilable with the Army’s analysis in 2006,” Matsch wrote. …

The Army thumbed its military nose at the Judge. Last Thursday, the Army released a 43-page report defending and reasserting the original “proposed action” to ramp up training at Pinon Canyon, ignoring the substance of the ruling and contending that a full environmental impact study is not needed.

**Army stands its ground at Pinon Canyon**

by Peter Roper, the Pueblo Chieftan, January 23, 2011 [here]

It was 16 months ago that U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch handed the Army a legal setback in its plan to ramp up training at the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site.

But a lull in the legal battle over expansion of the site apparently is over.

Matsch ruled the Army’s environmental impact study was clearly inadequate and that evidence demonstrated the Army’s past failures to protect the prairie grasslands that make up the 238,000-acre training range.

Ranchers and other opponents of the Army’s nearly five-year campaign to expand Pinon Canyon celebrated the ruling, seeing it as a formidable roadblock against a heavier and
more damaging training schedule that the Army sought to use as justification for wanting more land around the 238,000-acre training area northeast of Trinidad.

On Thursday, the Army released a new Pinon Canyon Environmental Assessment to answer to Matsch’s ruling. The 43-page report defends and reasserts the original “proposed action” to ramp up training at Pinon Canyon.

And surprisingly, given the sternness of Matsch’s criticism of the 2007 environmental study, the new report argues that whatever damage occurs from heavier training at Pinon Canyon, the Army will follow environmental safeguards in repairing and protecting the land.

Further, the report says, a full environmental impact study is not needed. …

For the opponents who took the Army to court in 2008, the new assessment boils down to the Army defying Matsch’s ruling and insisting it will determine what the historical levels of training have been and whether the training range is being damaged by heavier use.

“Neither acts of Congress nor the federal judiciary have deterred the Army from moving ahead with its plans,” said Jean Aguerre, president of the Not 1 More Acre! group that won the lawsuit in 2009. She was referring to Matsch’s ruling as well as a formal ban on the Army spending money to expand Pinon Canyon — money that Congress has renewed each year since 2008.

“The Pentagon continues to defy every level of democracy while holding an entire region and its people hostage,” Aguerre said in a statement Friday. …

Army maneuvers have caused at least two major fires in the last three years at Fort Carson, the fatal Fort Carson Fire (9,600 acres, 2008) [here] and the Quarry Fire (6,328 acres, 2009) [here] ignited by C-4 detonations.

Goldman Sachs, the investment banking giant that caused the worldwide Great Recession in 2009, which we still suffer under, has been complicit in the land takeover through its real estate broker, The Nature Conservancy:

Conservancy group denies role in aiding Pinon Canyon plan

by Peter Roper, the Pueblo Chieftan, November 6, 2009 [here]

Ranchers opposed to the Army’s planned expansion of the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site are charging The Nature Conservancy environmental group with being the Army’s silent partner, based on past and continuing agreements with Fort Carson to establish conservation easements around both the Mountain Post and the 238,000-acre Pinon Canyon training range.

Using documents obtained by Freedom of Information Act requests, the Not 1 More Acre! group released two Army reports Thursday showing a 2002 cooperative agreement with The Nature Conservancy to acquire easements around both installations - as well as a hefty 2006 confidential report called “Pinon Vision” that outlines step-by-step how the Army intended to acquire up to 1.1 million acres around the training range by 2017.
A key part of that expansion plans called for an 80,000-acre conservation zone along the Purgatoire River and the report says, “Based on preliminary discussions with the Nature Conservancy, there is a good possibility that the Conservancy will manage this buffer with appropriate recognition of Army requirements.”

Mack Louden, a board member of the rancher group, said opponents of the expansion have been suspicious of the conservation group’s role in the Army planning during the nearly four-year battle over expanding Pinon Canyon.

“They’ve been silent on the expansion issue and now it seems like they’ve been working against us all this time,” Louden said Thursday. …

TNC/Goldman Sachs is attempting to purchase “conservation easements” that remove ranchers and cattle from “buffer areas” around Fort Carson, and just coincidentally properties that are slated for eminent domain takeover by the Army. It is not environmental protection but windfall profits that TNC/Goldman Sachs seeks.

Lately the Army has been buzzing ranches with low-flying V-22 Osprey flights to both intimidate residents and frighten cattle, reducing cattle weight gain and inflicting economic pressure on ranchers.

Shock and Awe is not just for Iraqis and Afghans. It’s a tactic the Army uses on American citizens right here at home.
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- Alabama Forest Owners’ Association
- American Policy Center
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- Bush Fire Front
- California Forestry Association
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