

Subject: HAMET Update and Fort Carson Request for Limited Short Term HAMET Use

To HAMET interested parties:

Thank you for your interest in public lands within the Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) and specifically in the BLM's review of the US Army's proposal to use public lands within the RGFO for use as part of their High Altitude Mountain Environment Training (HAMET) program for helicopter pilot training. As you know, the BLM received a request from the Army for a long term Right-of-Way (ROW) authorization for a number of landing zones on public lands within the RGFO. The BLM began gathering public input into the Environmental Assessment (EA) of that request last fall. The EA is currently still in progress and there will be additional opportunities for public input. To date, we have held two public meetings and heard a substantial number of comments during the initial portion of the analysis. Currently, the Army has advised us that they intend to amend their initial Plan of Development in response to a number of the comments that they heard during the public meetings. We anticipate receiving the amended Plan of Development in the near future. Once we have received an updated proposed plan, we plan to formulate a draft range of alternatives for public review. Once finalized, these alternatives will be carried forward for further analysis during the EA process. You should be receiving notification for review on the draft range of alternatives within the next several months and we look forward to your input.

In the meantime, Fort Carson has notified us of their need for short term, temporary use of some landing zones to allow for final training for pilots with the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade that are scheduled to deploy in Afghanistan in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel beginning in late 2015. Fort Carson has expressed the importance of this short term training as a critical way to reduce the risk of fatal accidents during their deployment and to avoid potential loss of life to aviators and the troops they will be transporting.

In response to Fort Carson's request, our staff began evaluating a small number of the potential landing zones on a short term basis (October 14, 2015 – December 20, 2015). At this time Fort Carson has identified five remote landing zones where we believe there are little or no "on the ground" impacts to resources or neighboring landowners from short term use. These five landing zones include three landing zones in the Twin Mountain area (LZs 606, 510, 511) for the period of October 14, 2015 – December 20, 2015 and two landing zones in the Jack Hall Mountain (LZs 615, 616) area for the period of November 1, 2015 – December 20, 2015. These landing zones are all in western Fremont County and can be seen on the attached map. Under BLM policy, we believe that use of these sites is considered casual use and does not require any type of formal assessment or written authorization. A letter to the Army outlining the conditions for considering this as casual is available on our website.

I would like to reiterate the follow:

1. The EA for the long-term ROW is currently in progress. The EA is expected to continue into next year. The BLM had not originally anticipated the need to consider any additional casual use while the analysis of a long term ROW was in process. However, we believe that it was prudent,

given the time critical nature of Fort Carson's recent request, for the BLM to consider their limited, short-term request separately from the EA at this time.

2. We believe that there are little or no "on the ground" impacts to resources or neighboring landowners from short term use of these five landing zones and their use classifies as casual use.
3. The use of these landing zones is temporary and does NOT reflect any intent or predetermination for approval of these zones for a long-term ROW authorization. There may be potential issues on these sites that could occur under a longer term ROW that are not present under shorter term, casual use. These landing zones will continue to be evaluated under the EA for a long term right of way. No long term decision on that matter has been made at this time.
4. Aircraft will remain at least 500 feet above ground level (AGL) until over or near the landing zones. Low level flight including: Nap of the Earth (NOE), contour or terrain flights are not allowed as part of the current criteria for use of these landing zones. Use of these landing zones will only occur from 08:00 am to 10:00 pm Monday through Friday.

Again, thank you for your interest in this matter. Please feel free to view our website for more information on this matter: <http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/rgfo/planning/hamet.html>

Sincerely,

Keith Berger
Royal Gorge Field Manager