

Interagency cleanup of a former Army camp at Oxon Run

Bullets, munitions, and lead-contaminated soils are part of the World War I Camp Simms legacy for Oxon Run Parkway in Washington, D.C. To address this restoration challenge, a joint effort by the National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), and USDA National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) utilized restoration techniques to mitigate soil contamination and erosion in a rare and sensitive natural area. Oxon Run Parkway is a stream corridor park that contains several northern magnolia bogs and a rare wetland complex, the only such example in the national park system.

The discovery of an unexploded mortar shell during a 1994 survey for a city subway began a two-year effort by the Corps of Engineers that located and removed over two dozen unexploded ordnances. Careful coordination with National Park Service, community leaders, and local emergency preparedness organizations protected public safety and sensitive natural areas.

The National Park Service contracted the Natural Resource Conservation Service to propagate plants from seed, spores, and cuttings taken from the site. Munitions re-

moval holes were refilled with their soil, and the vegetation recovered passively. However, the restoration of larger disturbances, such as access roads and construction areas, required planting with site-collected materials grown by the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

One ongoing 1999-2000 restoration project involves an approximately 0.5-ha (1-acre) former rifle range with substantial lead-contaminated soils left from years of target practice. Bullet casings wash down slope where they are easily collected by local children, creating a primary public safety problem. Standard EPA mitigation procedures for this steep, eroded hillside would involve trucking away tons of contaminated soil, which would threaten rare plant communities. However, the EPA analysis found that the lead was tightly bound to the soil with little migration through groundwater to the adjacent creek and sensitive wetlands. It supported the NPS decisions to stabilize and revegetate the eroding area despite the proposed COE engineering solution of cement and stone terraces. A cap of coconut “bio-logs” and matting sculpted to fit tightly over the site’s topography holds down imported topsoil and cov-

ers the bullet casings (figure 1). The local rain of seeds from the surrounding native communities will contribute to the natural revegetation and stabilization of the area. In order to assist establishment of the vegetation and its ability to outcompete and shade out possible exotic species, the Natural Resource Conservation Service is growing and installing site-collected cool and warm season grasses.



Figure 1. The site at Oxon Run was stabilized with coconut "bio-logs" and matting.