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NEWS

WVU to research Unexploded Ordnance at WWII Firing Range

Morgantown, WV, April 23, 2006: During World War II, the United States Army used an area within the Monongahela National Forest to prepare troops for combat in the mountains of Italy. The Bennett Department of Chemistry and the Forensic and Investigative Sciences Program in West Virginia University's Eberly College of Arts and Sciences are collaborating with the West Virginia Water Research Institute and WVU's Division of Plant and Soil Sciences to develop an approach for locating unexploded ordnance.

With a contract totaling over \$368,000, the research team will develop an environmental forensic approach to locating the unexploded ordnance (UXO) from WWII training exercises within the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area of the Monongahela National Forest in Randolph and Grant Counties, W. Va., located between Canaan Valley and Seneca Rocks. The Dolly Sods site is situated in heavily vegetated, rugged terrain with UXO potentially buried at various depths and consisting of various calibers.

Dr. Paul Ziemkiewicz, director of the West Virginia Water Research Institute explained the project as a "collaborative research program bringing together water research, forensic chemistry, and soils analysis to develop search and protection protocols for unexploded ordnance."

As Dr. Suzanne Bell, director WVU's Forensic and Investigative Science Program and assistant professor of chemistry, explained, "The environmental forensics approach offers a way to trace concentrations of contaminants and decomposition products back to source areas. As propellants and explosives leach from UXO and explosives into the ground, they may be absorbed into soils, migrate to the surface and into groundwater, and be taken up by vegetation. Our environmental forensics approach couples physical analysis of soil, water, and biota with computer modeling tools of the surface and subsurface environments to determine the chemical and biological fate and transport of these contaminants."

The research results will be used to design simplified and accurate methods of UXO removal for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection Division of Land Restoration.

The principal investigators for this project are Dr. Suzanne Bell, director of WVU's Forensic Science Program and assistant professor in the C. Eugene Bennett Department of Chemistry, Dr. Louis McDonald, associate professor in WVU's Environmental Soil Chemistry Division of Plant and Soil Sciences, and Dr. John Quaranta and Jen Fulton of the Water Research Institute.

The project is funded by the National Environmental Education and Training Center (NEETC). For more information, please contact Dr. Suzanne Bell at Suzanne.Bell@mail.wvu.edu.

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