



**What is the 29 Palms Proposed
Training Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment Project?
Frequently Asked Questions
February 14, 2013**



RECORD OF DECISION (ROD) SIGNED BY SECRETARY OF THE NAVY FEBRUARY 11, 2013

1. **The ROD selects Alternative 6, the Preferred Alternative, to meet the Marine Corps Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirement.**
 - After careful consideration of the purpose and need for the proposed action, the analysis contained in the Final EIS, further consultation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and comments received on the Draft and Final EIS from Federal, State, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individual members of the public, the Department of the Navy selected Alternative 6.
 - Alternative 6, while not the best alternative from either an operational or environmental impact perspective, is the optimal alternative given both the operational and environmental impact factors considered together. This determination is based on the training value afforded by Alternative 6 and the amount of land area that will still be available and accessible to the public for recreational purposes.
 - The Department of the Navy (DoN) has submitted a withdrawal application to BLM and will submit a proposal for lands in the Alternative 6 footprint to Congress for the purposes of military training (and the shared use of 43,049 acres of these lands with the public for recreation 10 months of the year).
 - DoN will also seek to secure appropriations to pay fair market value for non-federal lands in the Alternative 6 footprint, to implement mitigation measures, and to prepare and equip the new lands for training purposes.
 - DoN will also submit an airspace proposal to the Federal Aviation Administration for establishment and modification of the Special Use Airspace required to meet the MEB exercises and MEB Building Block Training.
2. **Additional recreation acreage made available as mitigation in the ROD.**
 - The ROD recommends further mitigation for recreation impacts by including an additional 4,912 acres to a Shared Use Area available for public recreation 10 months of the year. This recommended adjustment would expand the Shared Use Area to a total of 43,049 acres.
 - By not selecting Alternative 1, the best alternative from a military training perspective, 42,803 acres in the Johnson Valley OHV area remains available to the public year round.
 - If withdrawal is approved by Congress, the Combat Center will enter into a written agreement with BLM to implement the management and control of the Shared Use Area.
 - If withdrawal is approved by Congress, the Marine Corps and BLM will establish a Resource Management Group to address all issues associated with the Shared Use Area and will implement an effective community/public outreach plan to ensure the public is given every opportunity to understand the change in land use and potential dangers.

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3. Why did the Marine Corps and the DON select Alternative 6?

- Alternative 6 was selected in the Draft EIS as the preferred alternative because it is the optimal alternative considering operational and environmental impact factors together. With slight changes in response to public comments on the Draft EIS and the Final EIS, it remains the preferred alternative.
- Alternative 6 was developed in response to public comments and was designed to preserve public access to important off-road recreation areas during periods when Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) training did not require use of those lands. It would allow for reopening 43,049 acres of the acquisition area to public recreation use for 10 months a year.
- Alternative 6 does not meet the MEB training operational requirements as well as Alternative 1, but Alternative 1 does not provide for public access to any of the training lands that would be acquired. *(From an operational perspective, Alternative 1 is the best alternative.)*
- While Alternative 5 is the environmentally preferred alternative, it is a very poor alternative from an operational perspective due to terrain restrictions that would limit training activities.

4. Is this a done deal?

- Congress and the President will have to approve the withdrawal. Any non-federal lands would be purchased at fair market value and Congress and the President will have to approve the appropriation of the funds to purchase those lands.
- The FAA will have to make a formal decision on the DoN airspace request after receiving further public comment during its own processes and EIS preparation.

**FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (FINAL EIS) WAS MADE AVAILABLE FOR
PUBLIC REVIEW ON JULY 27, 2012**

1. Major changes between the Draft EIS and the Final EIS based on further study and public comment.

- An additional mitigation measure for recreation was developed and added. A Displaced Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Study was added in response to public comments.
- Four additional special conservation measures for biological resources were added that include new Special Use Areas and discussion of a tortoise translocation plan.
- Airspace sections were revised and updated per coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration.
- An analysis of air quality impacts to sensitive receptors was added in response to public comments.
- Analyses of single-event noise and noise-generated vibrations results were undertaken and added in response to public comments.

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- Impacts from ordnance on water wells analysis was undertaken in response to public comments and added.
- Agency correspondence with the California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), California Native American Heritage Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District has been added.
- Public comments and the USMC responses to comments were added.

2. What does the Final EIS show about the impacts to the environment of the proposed action?

- As analyzed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) guidelines, the Final EIS shows that the alternatives studied would have less than significant impacts on air quality (except for Alternative 3), socio economics (except for Alternative 3 cumulative impacts), public health and safety, visual resources, transportation (except for Alternative 3), noise, geological resources and water resources (except for Alternative 3).
- As analyzed under NEPA and CEQ guidelines, the Final EIS shows that the alternatives studied would have significant impacts on land use, recreation (except Alternative 3), airspace management and cultural and biological resources.
- The Marine Corps continues consultation with the FAA on airspace configurations and use that would sufficiently support MEB and MEB-building block training while allowing for effective overall management of the national air space.
- For all Alternatives, the direct and indirect environmental impacts to cultural resources are less than significant. However, when cumulative environmental impacts were assessed (which includes known other projects) the environmental impacts to Cultural Resources became significant under all alternatives
- The Marine Corps is proposing mitigation measures for five resource areas, as appropriate to the Alternative, including special conservation measures developed in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for impacts to biological resources, especially the desert tortoise.
- The Marine Corps and US FWS have completed formal consultation under the Endangered Species Act regarding effects to the threatened Desert tortoise. In its Biological Opinion (BO) of the proposed actions dated July 17, 2012 the USFWS concluded the proposed action was not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the desert tortoise, nor destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat. The BO also identifies specific avoidance, minimization and conservation measures, as well as required terms and conditions.

3. What is the significance of impacts to resources like recreation, species and habitat, use of airspace, land use, transportation, health, etc.?

- The two tables on the following pages show a comparison of the impacts by resource type and alternative, both as direct and indirect effects (first table) and as cumulative effects (second table).

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SUMMARY OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES						
ALTERNATIVE	1	2	3	4	5	6 (PREFERRED)
CHANGE IN CONDITIONS						
LAND ACQUIRED (ACRES)	201,657	134,863	198,580	201,657	180,353	167,971
SHARED USE AREA	No	No	No	YES – ON 180,353 ACRES	YES – ON ALL	YES, ON 43,049 ACRES
UNDERTAKE MEB BUILDING BLOCK TRAINING IN NEW AREAS	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	YES, ON 103,618 ACRES
CHANGE IN PERSONNEL	70	65	59	77	77	77
RESOURCE AREA IMPACTS						
LAND USE	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
RECREATION	SI	SI	LSI	SI	SI	SI
SOCIOECONOMICS	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
VISUAL RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
TRANSPORTATION	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI
AIRSPACE MANAGEMENT	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
AIR QUALITY	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI
NOISE *	---	---	---	---	---	---
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
CULTURAL RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
GEOLOGICAL RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
WATER RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI

NOTES: SI = SIGNIFICANT IMPACT; LSI = LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT; NI = NO IMPACT.

*THE NOISE SECTIONS OF THIS EIS DESCRIBE ONLY THE POTENTIAL CHANGES IN NOISE LEVELS UNDER EACH ALTERNATIVE. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANY NOISE-RELATED IMPACTS IS ASSESSED AS A FUNCTION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES THAT MAY BE AFFECTED BY NOISE (E.G., BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES, LAND USE, ETC). THEREFORE, NOISE-RELATED IMPACTS ARE ASSESSED AS APPROPRIATE IN THE RELEVANT IMPACT SECTIONS FOR THOSE OTHER RESOURCES.

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SUMMARY OF CUMULATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS						
ALTERNATIVE	1	2	3	4	5	6 (PREFERRED)
CHANGE IN CONDITIONS						
LAND ACQUIRED (ACRES)	201,657	134,863	198,580	201,657	180,353	167,971
SHARED USE AREA	No	No	No	YES – ON 180,353 ACRES	YES - ALL	YES – ON 43,049 ACRES
MEB BUILDING BLOCK TRAINING	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	YES – ON 103,618 ACRES
CHANGE IN PERSONNEL	70	65	59	77	77	77
RESOURCE AREA IMPACTS						
LAND USE	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
RECREATION	SI	SI	NI	SI	SI	SI
SOCIOECONOMICS	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI
PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
VISUAL RESOURCES	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	LSI
TRANSPORTATION	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI
AIRSPACE MANAGEMENT	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI
AIR QUALITY	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI
NOISE*	---	---	---	---	---	---
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
CULTURAL RESOURCES	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
GEOLOGICAL RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
WATER RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI

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MARINE CORPS REQUIREMENTS DRIVE THE 29 PALMS LAND/AIRSPACE STUDY

1. What is the training requirement driving the project?

- Marines must train as they fight to prepare for the certainty and uncertainty of combat. Realistic training is for the safety of the Marines put in harm's way.
- Lessons learned from combat in the 1990s and operations over the last decade, and the addition of new weapons systems, and changes in Marine Corps doctrine led to the establishment of an enduring requirement for Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) sustained (48-72 hours), combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training.
- A Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) training exercise requires sustained, continuous offensive action (combined arms, live fire and maneuver), with three battalions moving abreast—in three different corridors—and with, at a minimum, two battalions converging on a single objective. The MEB includes a Ground Combat Element, an Air Combat Element, a Command Element and a Logistics Combat Element.
- The MEB elements constitute about 15,000 personnel. The Marine Corps is the first responder force for national security, its crisis reaction force. The Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) is the middleweight deployment force for the Marine Corps that is prized both for its decisive combat power and its lightweight agility.
- “Combined-arms” means that ground-based and airborne weapons systems, including direct and indirect fire, will be used in the training exercise.

2. What do you mean by “Marines must train as they fight?”

- Training is mission rehearsal. To meet training requirements, Marines must train under conditions that closely approximate those of the battlefield.
- By training as they fight, Marines become proficient in tactics, techniques and procedures, both as individuals and as units. This training concept is as essential for success in military operations as it is in nearly all other team activities.
- Marines will instinctively do as they are trained. Because Marines are equipped and deployed to combat as a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), they must train to the MAGTF training standards before deployment.
- Marines need to train as a MAGTF to succeed. Doing less will jeopardize their safety and degrade mission readiness. A Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), one type of MAGTF of about 15,000 Marines, is the Marine Corps' primary contingency response force.
- A MEB must train realistically, with all elements – ground combat, air combat, logistics and command – involved in the sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training exercise.

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3. Why the new requirement?

- The end of the Cold War brought the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) forward as the premier force to respond to global crises. This resulted from a number of studies and analyses undertaken over a period of years to adjust Marine Corps war-fighting and training doctrine so that it could meet its role in the nation's national security and national military strategies in this new era.
- A Marine Corps study, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), concluded that a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) had to train as an integrated combat team – without the use of distributed or representational forces – to replicate the conditions of actual combat. The Marine Requirements Oversight Council (MROC), a body constituted of the senior Marine Corps general officers, concurred with this requirement and approved the MEB training requirement.

4. Who established the requirement?

- The Marine Corps' Training and Education Command (TECOM), the Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), with the concurrence of the Marine Requirements Oversight Council (MROC), established the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirement after careful study of doctrine, lessons learned from recent combat operations and an evaluation of new and foreseeable weapons systems and platforms.

5. Will USMC requirements change within the near future?

- No, Marine Corps training requirements are based on enduring doctrine and meeting the Marine Corps role in the National Military Strategy. These are unlikely to change in the near term.
- The reduction of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan will not eliminate the requirement for MEB training.

6. Are there plans for additional acquisitions after this one?

- Although the Marine Corps does not currently foresee other acquisition requests, it will continually study training requirements shaped by emerging developments in doctrine and systems.

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POTENTIAL TRAINING LANDS RESPOND TO TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

- 1. What is driving the request for new land and airspace for Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) training?**
 - A Marine Corps study, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) concluded that there is no current Department of Defense range that provides space sufficient to meet the MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirement.
 - After a lengthy review of a number of options to meet sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training, the Marine Requirements Oversight Council (MROC) authorized a study of potential land acquisition and the establishment of corresponding Special Use Airspace, or modification of current Special Use Airspace, as a means to meet this vital Marine Corps training requirement under Marine Corps Strategy 21, the Marine Corps' foundational strategy document.

- 2. Why is the study of lands focused on the area near the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms, California?**
 - The CNA study concluded that the U.S. Southwest range complex provided the best training area for a MEB, and that an expanded Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) was the best location to meet the training requirement.
 - MCAGCC is the "center of excellence" for Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) training, so it is important to ensure the capability at MCAGCC to achieve sustained, combined-arms, live fire and maneuver MEB training and to enhance such training for other large-scale MAGTFs.
 - More than 90 percent of the Marines deploying to combat receive their final training at MCAGCC, and any additional lands acquired to meet the MEB training requirement would also provide additional training capability to meet the full range of current and foreseeable Marine Corps training, including for individual and unit Building Block Training leading up to MEB training.
 - Additional land and associated airspace would allow the Marine Corps to utilize current *and* planned weapons and systems in training.

- 3. Why can't Marines use the National Training Center at Fort Irwin; in other words, why not share training lands with the Army?**
 - Although the Army and the Marine Corps often serve side-by-side and execute similar missions, they have different training requirements. As a result, NTC does not have ranges capable of supporting MEB-level sustained, combined-arms live-fire and maneuver training.

- 4. Doesn't the Marine Corps have enough land at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)?**
 - No, the maneuver and training areas at MCAGCC are insufficient to meet Marine Corps training requirements for sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training.

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- MCAGCC cannot accommodate all the units that currently need to train.
- Only 40 percent of MCAGCC is available for this type of combined-arms, live-fire and mechanized maneuver training. The remaining 60 percent of the land supports safety buffers, area for infrastructure, natural resources protection, or is otherwise unavailable due to terrain restrictions.
- Marines will continue to be good stewards of the environment, particularly of the natural and cultural resources placed under their control.

5. Who establishes the land-use restrictions that limit training?

- Some of the guidelines to protect human health and safety, or natural or cultural resources are internal USMC guidelines and requirements.
- Other restrictions are from resource agencies such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- The terrain restrictions preclude, in many places, the type of training the Marine Corps needs to conduct.

6. Why study such a large amount of land and why study these particular areas?

- The alternatives the Marine Corps has examined range from the smallest amount of land that would meet minimum requirements for sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training, to ones that could meet 100 percent of the requirement.
- To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, the Department of the Navy and Marine Corps team developed and studied a range of reasonable alternatives that could meet MEB training requirements, as well as studying a No Action Alternative. The recently completed Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) analyzed the potential impacts of the project on lands to the west, south and east of the base. (Analysis that led to the selection of the alternatives to be studied showed that lands to the north cannot support MEB training.) From the study of the operational and environmental impacts of these analyses, the Final EIS reaffirmed that the preferred alternative chosen in the Draft EIS was Alternative 6, the optimal alternative considering operational and environmental impact factors together.
- Over 22,000 public comments on the Draft EIS were evaluated in preparation of the Final EIS. The Department of the Navy has reviewed the Final EIS and the almost 1,000 comments received on it, along with cost and mission training requirements in preparing a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD has determined what lands will be proposed to Congress for addition to MCAGCC.
- After public comments during the project EIS scoping period and operational analysis, some lands from the original study areas were released from the withdrawal request. Approximately 33,000 acres of public, federal lands were relinquished from the EIS study areas originally segregated by the Bureau of Land Management from further development. Further study had shown that some of those lands would not provide sufficient training value. Other lands were released to more closely align with terrain features, to minimize

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conflicts with occupied private parcels, and in response to public comments. A total of approximately 60,000 acres (federal, state and privately owned lands) were removed from the EIS west, east and south study areas. Approximately 379,000 acres were studied in preparation of the Draft EIS.

7. Given that the nation is trying to downsize the number of troops deployed to operations overseas, do you really need this land?

- The Secretary of the Navy observed that, despite downsizing of the force, the Marine Corps continues to have a requirement to have the capability of putting two brigades across the beach in a contested environment.
- As the nation's requirements to prepare Marines for overseas deployments are reduced, training tempos and exercises at installations like MCAGCC may decrease, but sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training will still be required.
- MCAGCC is likely to be the premier service-level training facility for Marines in the future, with a large volume of training activity.
- Because MCAGCC is the premier service-level training facility for the Marine Corps, large-scale MAGTF combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training, such as for a MEB, is a logical extension of the type of training that has gone on at MCAGCC for decades.
- Marines are the first to fight for our nation and they must always be prepared to deploy immediately. Providing the land and airspace sufficient to meet the MEB training requirement would play an important role in helping the Marine Corps to fulfill this training requirement.
- With the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) designated as the premier force to respond to global crises, sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training will remain a critical Marine Corps training requirement.

8. I thought the military was giving up land because of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process; why are you seeking more?

- The potential MCAGCC land acquisition was studied because there is currently no location where the Marine Corps can sufficiently conduct the sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training it needs to best prepare Marines for deployment to combat. BRAC is a process that seeks to "right-size" our nation's military basing; working to ensure that MCAGCC can meet MEB training requirements is part of that right-sizing effort.
- BRAC closures result when an installation is in excess to military requirements.

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POTENTIAL SPECIAL USE AIRSPACE RESPONDS TO TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

1. Why is the Marine Corps studying the establishment or modification of Special Use Airspace?

- Advanced weapons systems now provide military forces with greater capabilities for detecting and countering enemy threats at greater distances. This has required that range and airspace areas be expanded, where necessary and feasible, to enable these forces to train in an environment that is more representative of realistic combat conditions. For that reason, the Marine Corps requires corresponding training airspace to support MEB training.
- A restricted area is used to contain the effects of ground-based and airborne weapons systems to ensure public safety. Military Operations Areas (MOAs) provide airspace where attack maneuver and other activities can be carried out, but no live fire occurs in a MOA. Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA), which normally overlays an MOA (at altitudes above 18,000 feet) is like an MOA in that it allows non-military aircraft to be vectored through at the discretion of the local air traffic control authority.
- A Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) is a combined-arms force known as a Marine Air Ground Task Force. The Marines deploy to combat as a combined-arms unit, which includes air and ground combat elements (along with command and logistics elements).
- To ensure that MEB training requirements are fulfilled, both training lands and training Special Use Airspace must be sufficient to meet requirements for sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver and provide sufficient buffer for public safety.

2. How will this airspace decision be made?

- In preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), both land and airspace issues and resource impacts were evaluated through the analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), as the civil aviation authority, was an important cooperating agency in the project EIS.
- Throughout the EIS process, the FAA cooperated with the Department of the Navy during study of alternatives to establish, expand or modify Special Use Airspace. With the FAA's cooperation and expertise, the Department of the Navy was able to prepare an EIS that should provide significant analysis and information to support subsequent FAA decision making.
- The DoN will submit an airspace proposal to support any training land acquisition that is approved. The FAA will then conduct formal airspace customer feasibility forums, and undertake the appropriate processes, including formal, established procedures to analyze the airspace proposal request.
- If the FAA concludes that additional Special Use Airspace should be established, or current airspace modified, at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) to support MEB training requirements, it would establish or modify such Special Use Airspace per its published process.

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3. Would this program result in any new restrictions being placed on commercial airline or civil aviation over flights?

- Through its long-standing working relationship with the FAA, the Marine Corps will continue to work to minimize disruption to the National Airspace System.
- Existing MCAGCC airspace impacts on commercial or civil aviation flights over or near MCAGCC might be extended over any newly-acquired land due to safety issues involved with live-fire, combined arms air-ground task force training.
- The Marine Corps will work with the FAA and aviation stakeholders on issues examined during the EIS.
- The Marine Corps supports FAA efforts to optimize the safe use of airspace over the installation by commercial and civil aviation.

4. What types of airspace are used to support military training at MCAGCC?

- Restricted Area (RA): Non-military aircraft are prohibited from entering during military training activities that involve live fire; MCAGCC releases it for use by all aircraft in the National Airspace System when it is not needed for military training.
- Military Operations Area (MOA): A military operations area is airspace designated outside of Class A airspace (18,000 to 60,000 feet) to separate or segregate certain nonhazardous military activities from Instrument Flight Rule (IFR) traffic and to identify for Visual Flight Rule (VFR) traffic where these activities are conducted.
- Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA): Similar to a MOA (and usually overlaying a MOA) within Class A airspace (18,000 to 60,000 feet), non-military aircraft may fly in ATCAA during military training so long as air traffic controllers can maintain IFR separation from military aircraft; only non-hazardous military activities may be undertaken in ATCAA.

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THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ENSURES PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND INPUT

- 1. How would the Marine Corps acquire any new land or airspace? What is the process? Who makes the ultimate decisions on the Marine Corps request?**
 - The Environmental Impact Statement study and NEPA process has taken nearly four and one-half years to complete, including public review and comment. The Draft EIS was released on February 25, 2011; the Final EIS was released on July 27, 2012; and, the ROD was signed on February 11, 2013.
 - The ROD supports the acquisition of additional lands, as well as the establishment and modification of Special Use Airspace.
 - DoN has submitted a request for federal public land withdrawal within the Alternative 6 footprint to Congress, which must be enacted into law to provide any withdrawn lands for MEB training.
 - Congress would also appropriate any money required to purchase non-federal lands and property interests at fair market value.
 - DoN will request the FAA to undertake its formal process to consider establishment or modification of Special Use Airspace, which should conclude in 2014.
 - The goal is to have Marines training in new training lands and airspace in 2014, and to undertake a MEB training exercise in 2015.
- 2. What is the involvement of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on this project?**
 - The BLM was a cooperating agency on the Environmental Impact Statement studies.
 - The BLM and the Marine Corps have held public meetings to hear stakeholder input regarding the Department of the Navy's military training land withdrawal/segregation request.
 - The Combat Center and BLM will enter into a written agreement to manage the Shared Use Area, including the establishment and management of a Resource Management Group to address the issues associated with this shared use – such as community outreach, safety and related matters.
 - BLM will manage the 43,049 acre Shared Use Area for the 10 months of the year that it is available to the public for recreation use. The Marine Corps will manage the land the other two months of the year for military training.
- 3. What is the BLM process and how have citizens engaged?**
 - The BLM issued a public notice of the proposed land withdrawal in the Federal Register on September 15, 2008. The BLM and the USMC held public meetings on October 23 and 24, 2008 at which time the public had a chance to review and comment on the proposed withdrawal. There was a 90-day public comment period through December 15, 2008, during which time the public made nearly 2,300 comments to the BLM. The BLM provided these

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comments to the Marine Corps during the Environmental Impact Statement scoping period that ran from October 30, 2008, to January 31, 2009. As a cooperating agency, the BLM coordinated closely with the Marine Corps during all steps in the project's planning process, including preparation of the Final EIS.

- In June 2009, the Department of the Navy removed approximately 60,000 acres of land it had originally proposed for study, including approximately 33,000 acres of public lands. These lands were in each of the three EIS study areas (east, west and south), and represent nearly 15 percent of the original study area. On January 25, 2010, the BLM published a notice in the Federal Register that ended the segregation on these public lands on February 24, 2010.
- On September 15, 2010, the BLM published a notice in the Federal Register to initiate a Withdrawal in Aid of Legislation. This withdrawal was designed to keep the segregation of use in effect on the land under study in the project EIS. The public comment period on that proposed action was in effect through the Draft EIS public comment meetings in April 2011.
- Representatives of the Marine Corps, including Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) personnel, have regularly met with stakeholders to discuss issues, both aboard Marine Corps installations and in community forums, to draw community perspectives into the planning processes.

4. Who owns the private lands? What effect does segregation have on private lands?

- During the Environmental Impact Statement process, a concurrent examination was made of private land ownership in the area.
- Private lands are not part of the withdrawal and segregation of public lands process. Segregation only affects federal land, and it prevents the establishment of permanent interests that would conflict with the proposed withdrawal for military purposes.
- Any private or state lands proposed to be acquired would be purchased through the payment of fair market value to the owner.
- In response to public comments, additional studies were conducted during preparation of the Final EIS that looked at potential effects to "homestead" communities such as Amboy, Flamingo Heights, Homestead Valley, Wonder Valley, etc.

5. How did the public express its views of the project alternatives? To what extent did the Marine Corps coordinate with the public?

- Nearly 1,000 comments were received on the Final EIS. They were evaluated in preparation of the ROD.
- Nearly 22,000 comments were received from the public on the Draft EIS, and over 650 people attended three meetings to review the Draft EIS analysis of the environmental impacts, on both natural and socio-economic resources, of the various alternatives. Stakeholder comments – including from public agencies; state, local and tribal governments;

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businesses, non-governmental organizations such as conservationists, recreation enthusiasts and developers and individuals, for example – were studied during preparation of the Final EIS.

- Nearly 20,000 public comments were also received during the three-month EIS scoping period that ended January 31, 2009. These comments helped to shape the studies and analyses, and led to the development of a sixth alternative – which has become the Marine Corps' Preferred Alternative.
- The Marine Corps worked closely with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Federal Aviation Administration throughout the EIS process. These cooperating agencies helped to ensure that all stakeholder concerns were addressed during preparation of the EIS.
- The Marine Corps will continue to work with BLM in the management of the Shared Use Area and with FAA in the management of any Special Use Airspace established or modified to support MEB training.

6. Why were there four public review and comment periods? Are there others?

- The first comment period was in connection with the BLM's public notice for the segregation of lands for the Marine Corps' EIS study. Comments during this period were made to the BLM, but have been shared with the Marine Corps and considered in preparing the EIS.
- The second comment period was for the "scoping period" for the EIS study. During this period the public was invited to provide comments to the Marine Corps on issues and the proposed alternatives for study in the National Environmental Policy Act process. These comments helped to shape the range of reasonable alternatives and substantive issues that were studied in the EIS, including the development of Alternative 6, which became the Preferred Alternative.
- The third comment period was for review of the Draft EIS. These comments led to further studies, the slight modification of Alternative 6, and the identification of appropriate and feasible mitigation measures for biological resources, airspace use and recreation.
- The fourth review period followed release of the Final EIS. The nearly 1,000 comments received were evaluated in preparation of the Record of Decision (ROD).
- The Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy team have given consideration to all comments received during the past comment periods. Comments during the public review period of the Final EIS have been evaluated in preparation of the ROD signed by the Secretary of the Navy on February 11, 2013.
- The public will be able to comment during the FAA process and, of course, during Congressional deliberation on the public lands withdrawal request.

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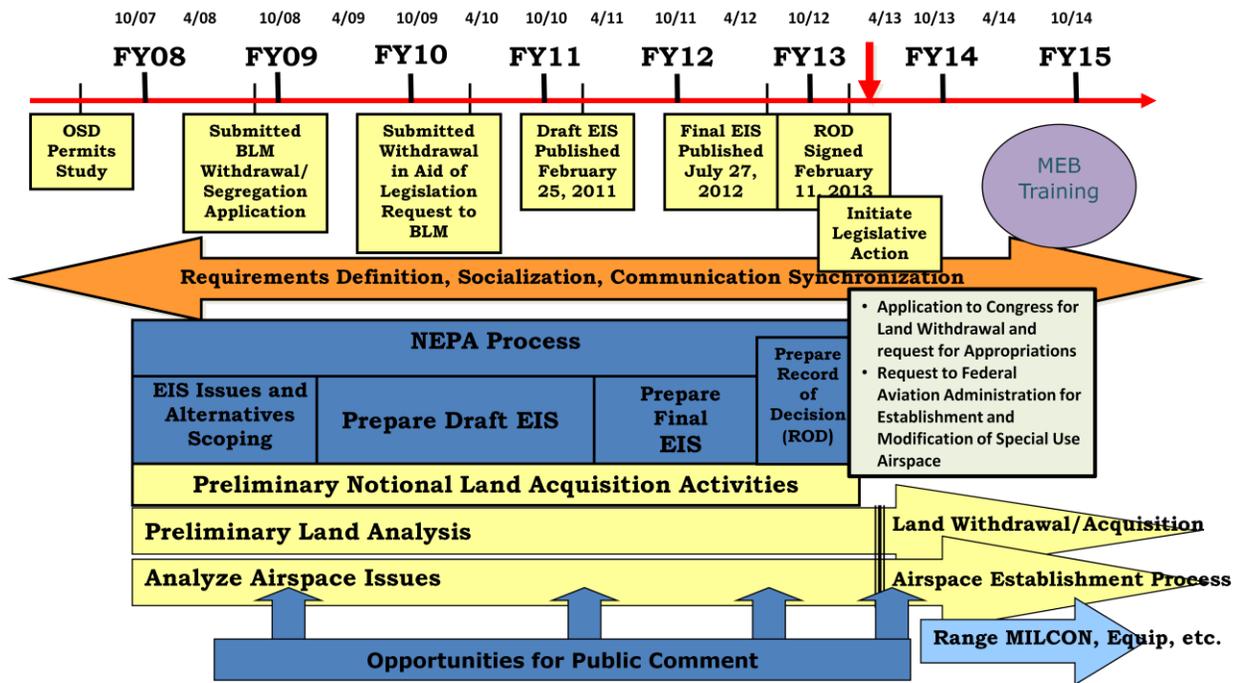


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7. What is the project timeline?

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) development process took more than four years to complete, including public review and comment. The Draft EIS was released on February 25, 2011; the Final EIS was released July 27, 2012. The NEPA process was completed with the release of the ROD, nearly four and one-half years after the Notice of Intent to conduct the EIS study.
- The Secretary of the Navy signed a Record of Decision (ROD) on February 11, 2013, which selects Alternative 6. The DoN has submitted a withdrawal application to the BLM and will submit a proposal to Congress to purchase non-federal lands and the withdrawal of Department of Interior lands in the Alternative 6 footprint, and will submit a proposal to the FAA for the establishment and modification of Special Use Airspace.
- Congress will consider legislation for withdrawal in 2013, and the Navy hopes to receive the withdrawal in the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act.
- The Federal Aviation Administration will undertake its formal process to consider establishment or modification of Special Use Airspace, which should conclude in 2014.
- The goal is to have Marines training in new training lands and airspace in 2014, and to undertake a MEB exercise in 2015.
- The timeline below displays those objectives.



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ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES WERE CAREFULLY AND THOROUGHLY STUDIED

1. What threatened or endangered species are on the base?

- There is one listed species, the threatened Desert Tortoise. Over 380 Desert Tortoises have been hatched and reared at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) during the first few years of a program undertaken with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and academic researchers. The Marine Corps at MCAGCC also works to protect and study such sensitive species as the Nelson Big Horn Sheep, various bat species and desert plants on base.

2. What have the resource surveys undertaken for the Environmental Impact Statement concluded about Desert Tortoises and other species, as well as cultural resources, in the study areas?

- The resource studies are now complete and were used in preparation of the Final EIS to evaluate impacts to biological and cultural resources by the different alternatives and have been used to prepare a biological assessment for review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS), which issued a Biological Opinion (BO) on the project July 17, 2012. All of the alternatives studied showed impacts on these resources, some significant and some less than significant.
- In its BO of the proposed actions dated July 17, 2012 the USFWS concluded the proposed action was not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the desert tortoise, nor destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat.
- Special conservation measures would be implemented with any proposed action, to avoid or minimize potential impacts.
- In response to comments and work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during the biological assessment, four additional special conservation measures were developed in preparation of the Final EIS, including development of Special Use Areas, Monitoring and Research, Resource Protection and Enforcement. Consideration has been given to the impacts on species of any displaced off-highway vehicle activity.
- In addition to these natural resource studies, consultations have occurred with Native American Tribes and the State Historic Preservation Officer to ensure that cultural resources are appropriately protected and managed.
- Stakeholders reviewed and commented on the natural and cultural resources analyses set out in the Draft EIS during the public comment period that ended May 26, 2011, and at the three public comment meetings held April 12, 13, and 14, 2011. In response to public comments, biological resources sections were updated with additional information or discussion of impacts on a variety of species, including migratory birds, and reduced plant productivity associated with dust deposition on leaf surfaces.

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3. Would the additional noise bother the outlying communities?

- The Marine Corps has studied potential noise impacts in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement analysis and the study has determined that noise impacts of any land acquisition or airspace establishment would likely remain on board the installation and would be less than significant off base. This does not mean that some noise would not be heard off base, but the noise would not be significant.
- In response to public comments on the Draft EIS, additional noise studies were undertaken and added to complete the Final EIS, including analyses of single-event noise and noise-generated vibrations results.

4. Is the USMC considering asking the Congress to de-designate wilderness areas to the east of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center for potential expansion to the east?

- The Marine Corps has not proposed land acquisition in any congressionally designated wilderness areas.
- In the Wilderness Act of 1964, Congress established a National Wilderness Preservation System. In 1994 Congress designated three areas near to MCAGCC as wilderness areas: Cleghorn Lakes Wilderness, Sheephole Valley Wilderness and Cadiz Dunes Wilderness.
- These wilderness areas are administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as they are left unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. The wilderness designation provides protection of those areas and the preservation of their wilderness character.

5. Has the Bureau of Land Management provided recreational and other data to the USMC?

- Yes, and the BLM worked with the Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy as a cooperating agency in evaluating the resource impacts of the proposed alternatives studied in the Environmental Impact Statement, including any losses of socio-economic values, recreation and mining.

6. Do “off-roaders” currently use the potential acquisition land near MCAGCC?

- Off-roaders use the Johnson Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Area within the project’s west study area. To a much lesser extent, similar recreation occurs in portions of the project’s east and south study areas.
- The impacts of the various alternatives on recreation use of the area have been studied in preparation of the EIS. Stakeholders reviewed and commented on this analysis during the public comment period that ended May 26, 2011, and at the three public comment meetings held April 12, 13, and 14, 2011. These comments were evaluated and led to slight modifications to Alternative 6, the Preferred Alternative, and to a Displaced Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Study.

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- Stakeholder comments provided during the earlier scoping period on the alternatives presented for public comment helped to establish the range of reasonable alternatives that was studied in the EIS – including the development of Alternative 6 (the Preferred Alternative) that preserves public access approximately 10 months of the year, when the land is not needed for Marine Expeditionary Brigade training, to 43,049 acres of land in this area for off-road and other recreation use.

7. What happens to off-roaders being able to use the study lands now that the Final Environmental Impact Statement has been published?

- Public access for hiking or off-road vehicle activity will continue to be allowed until such time as Congress approves the withdrawal of lands for military training. Alternatives 4, 5, and 6 would allow public access to the lands, once any lands are withdrawn, when they are not being used for Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) training. In the preferred alternative, public access on any newly withdrawn lands would be limited to the 43,049 acre Shared Use Area identified in the EIS, and then only during non-MEB training periods and after a survey has determined the lands are again safe for public use.

8. Would off-roaders be able to use it after the acquisition?

- In the preferred alternative, 43,049 acres of any lands withdrawn for military training (including the Hammers) would be made available to the public for off-road and other recreation use, during the approximately 10 months per year when it would not be needed for MEB training.
- On any lands acquired for training on which dud-producing live-fire occurred, safety reasons would prohibit any public access.
- The alternatives studied in the Environmental Impact Statement were analyzed for the impacts that would result from the potential elimination or restriction of public access to any lands that might be acquired. Stakeholders reviewed and commented on this analysis during the public comment period that ended May 26, 2011, and at the three public comment meetings held April 12, 13, and 14, 2011. Those comments were evaluated in preparation of the Final EIS and resulted in slight changes to Alternative 6.
- The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center would use any acquired land for its training operations and if for safety reasons the public could not be allowed to enter after live-fire training, the land would no longer be available to off-roaders.
- Two alternatives presented for discussion during the public scoping process call for “west-to-east” maneuver and the use of non-dud producing ordnance (ordnance that does not have an explosive charge) until task forces reach the current installation boundary. The manageability and training constraints of such a potential shared land use are addressed in the Final EIS.
- In addition, Alternative 6 – selected as the Preferred Alternative – was developed in response to comments received during the scoping period. In Alternative Six, 43,049 acres of withdrawn lands, including the popular Hammers area, would remain open for public use

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approximately ten months of the year, when sustained, combined-arms, live-fire maneuver MEB training is not occurring at the installation. Non dud-producing ordnance would be used in this 43,049 acre area during MEB training to allow for continued public access and use.

9. Where would the off-roaders go if the Marine Corps acquires the land?

- The Marine Corps' preferred alternative would allow for the continued off-road recreation use of 43,049 acres of land in the Johnson Valley, including the Hammers, during the approximately 10 months a year when MEB training is not underway in that area. During MEB training off-road recreation would have to occur in other areas established for this purpose. During preparation of the Final EIS, a Displaced Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Study was undertaken that identifies some of these potential areas.
- By not selecting Alternative 1, the best alternative from a military training perspective, 42,803 acres in the Johnson Valley OHV area remains available to the public year round.

10. Would historic or archeological resources be impacted by the acquisition?

- The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs (NREA) mission is to develop and maintain awareness of the natural and cultural resources at MCAGCC and the importance of resource protection, to develop a plan to catalogue, protect and mitigate any losses of those resources at MCAGCC.
- Potential impacts to cultural resources resulting from a proposed alternative were identified and studied in the Environmental Impact Statement, and consultations have occurred with Native American Tribes and the State Historic Preservation Officer to ensure that cultural resources are appropriately protected and managed if these lands are acquired for MEB training.
- Special conservation measures would be implemented with the proposed action to avoid or minimize potential impacts.

11. Would dust generation increase and would it impact local communities?

- Potential dust generation issues were studied as air quality impacts in the Environmental Impact Statement and were found to be less than significant.
- In response to public comments, additional discussion regarding air quality impacts to sensitive receptors (e.g., young children, the elderly, or people with respiratory conditions) has been added.
- The Marine Corps does not anticipate any impact on local communities from dust.
- The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center's Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan ensures coordination with military training organizations to minimize disturbances to training areas (i.e., road proliferation, dust control, etc.).

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12. Would water quality or quantity be impacted?

- Water resources impacts were studied in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement and the studies found that any impacts to water would be less than significant. Additional studies on water resources and potential impacts to water quality from ordnance use were conducted in response to public comments.

13. What about airborne chemicals, ground contamination, noise and restrictions to traffic (e.g., on Hwy 247 or Amboy Road)?

- Impacts to the environment from these types of factors were studied in the Environmental Impact Statement and it was found that the impacts to public health and safety would be less than significant. Impacts to traffic would be less than significant in all alternatives but one; they would be significant in Alternative 3 (which was not selected as the preferred alternative).

14. What effect does the withdrawal request have on energy projects proposed for the area?

- Projects that would be incompatible with military training in the study areas, including those in the Preferred Alternative, will be kept “on hold” pending any final congressional action on the requested withdrawal. If Congress approves the withdrawal of any land for military training purposes, alternative energy projects would likely be incompatible with that training and would have to be located elsewhere.
- This land use incompatibility is a significant impact that cannot be mitigated, and it is identified in the Final EIS as such.

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**MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER,
A PREMIER TRAINING FACILITY**

1. What is the estimated cost for land acquisition?

- Initial estimates for potential project costs – environmental reviews, regulatory compliance and real estate acquisition – to complete the potential land acquisition were approximately \$50 million for the smallest acquisition alternative. The current acquisition estimate for the Preferred Alternative is about \$56.4 million.

2. Where would the money come from for any land acquisition?

- The money for land acquisition would come from Congressional appropriations through the regular military construction program.

3. Who trains here?

- Currently, over 90 percent of the Marines deploying to combat in Afghanistan receive training at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center before deployment, as well as units who are stationed at the base and units from other services and from other nations.
- Some units from the Army train here to hone select skills after they have trained for their “core” skills at their own bases.
- Many multi-national forces train here as well.

4. What units train regularly on base?

- The base is home to many First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) units, including the 7th Marine Regiment; 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion; 1st Tank Battalion; the 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines; “D” Company, 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion (AAV); Combat Logistics Battalion 7, Marine Wing Support Squadron 374; and VMU-1.
- Marine Reserve units also train at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center.

5. Do other countries’ militaries train here? Which ones?

- Yes, military units from many countries have trained here, including units from the United Kingdom and Singapore.

6. What units are currently training at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center? Are they the next unit to head out?

- For security purposes, the Marine Corps does not discuss future deployment plans of military units.

7. Do the units return to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center between each combat tour?

- Yes, because the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center offers units the unique, comprehensive training package. Training includes taking the lessons learned from the

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combat theater and incorporating them into training to ensure that Marines are trained with the most up-to-date information.

8. What kind of training do they receive at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center?

- Among other training, they receive Marine Air-Ground Task Force combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training, cultural awareness training, and Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) training.

9. What is MOUT and why is it important?

- A “MOUT” is a “Military Operations in an Urban Terrain” training facility. It provides for training of Marines to replicate their operations in an urban environment, such as those presented in Afghanistan and Iraq, where there is close-quarter battle and the presence of many non-combatants.

10. What future weapons systems will be used here?

- The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center would need to accommodate the F-35B Joint Strike Fighter, the MV-22 Osprey and new munitions.

11. How long is MEB training and where would it occur?

- Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) training at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center would occur up to twice a year and would last for just under 30 days, including a culminating sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training exercise of three days duration.
- MEB training would occur throughout Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center’s current installation and in any newly acquired lands, and support Special Use Airspace.
- In the preferred alternative – Alternative 6 – only non dud-producing ordnance would be used for training in the 43,049 acres to which the public would have access during periods of time that MEB training is not occurring.

12. How long does a Battalion train at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center?

- Battalion-size training usually occurs for 28 days per exercise.

13. Would depleted uranium rounds be used aboard the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in training activities, and are they already used aboard the base?

- There is no requirement to use depleted uranium rounds in training and the Marine Corps does not use depleted uranium rounds for training aboard the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center.

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INCIDENTAL PROJECT QUESTIONS

- 1. What would the Marine Corps build on this land?**
 - If lands were acquired, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) would construct such assets as required to support training, including targetry and roads.
- 2. Would there be an increase in the permanent party population aboard the base?**
 - There would only be an increase of up to 77 personnel as a result of the training land and airspace study effort.
- 3. To what extent does the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) apply to this project?**
 - The Marine Corps has met with the State of California to discuss CEQA requirements for state actions that could be undertaken following the project decision. State agencies are encouraged to use the National Environmental Policy Act documents when such documents comply with CEQA. To the extent practicable, the Environmental Impact Statement has incorporated CEQA requirements to allow state agencies to utilize the Environmental Impact Statement analysis to support any future project-specific analyses that may be required by CEQA.
- 4. Will greenhouse gas emissions and climate change due to global warming be analyzed?**
 - The Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy are complying with requirements to study greenhouse gas emissions and climate change issues in the Environmental Impact Statement.
- 5. How long has this potential acquisition been in the works?**
 - The Marine Corps' Requirements Oversight Council (MROC) initiated the effort in 2002 by asking for a study to determine how best to meet future training requirements. Once MROC determined the requirement to provide sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training for a Marine Expeditionary Brigade, it initiated further studies to see how to meet those training requirements. A study, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses, showed that the ranges in the southwest United States provided the best training area for a MEB, and that an expanded Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) was the best location to meet the training requirement. The MROC authorized a study to look into potential land acquisition at MCAGCC. That decision has been reviewed at various levels within the Department of the Navy (DoN) and the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Marine Corps has received validation and confirmation through all echelons.
- 6. When did the Marine Corps first notify the public of the project?**
 - Once the requirement had been validated by the Marine Corps' Requirements Oversight Council, Department of the Navy and Department of Defense, and permission to undertake National Environmental Policy Act and other analyses was approved in the summer of 2007, the Marine Corps immediately notified Congress, issued a press release and sent letters from

For Further Information Please Contact

**29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project – (phone) 760-830-3764
(web) <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff/G4InstallationsandLogistics/LandAcquisition.aspx>
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Training Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment Project?
Frequently Asked Questions
February 14, 2013**



the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center's Commanding General to community leaders and organizations. Since then, the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center and Head Quarters Marine Corps have held meetings with Members of Congress and their staffs, State Government officials in Sacramento, the Bureau of Land Management and Federal Aviation Administration, and with community stakeholders such as off-road vehicle enthusiasts, energy companies, the film industry, the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center neighbors, local government officials, local airports and pilot associations, and others. A Notice of Intent (NOI) to undertake the NEPA analysis and prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published on October 30, 2008.

7. Can the public get Geographic Information System (GIS) files, specific maps or other products to assist in their analysis of the Final Environmental Impact Statement?

- The project has loaded necessary maps and other documents onto the MCAGCC project website: <http://www.marines.mil/unit/29palms/las/>.
- GIS files can be requested through the USMC process outlined at <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff/G4InstallationsandLogistics/LandAcquisition.aspx>

8. Is it necessary to transport equipment to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center to support MEB training?

- MCAGCC maintains a great deal of equipment at the installation to support training and to minimize transportation costs and impacts.

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