

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and SEIS Fact Sheet**

### **1. What has happened since the 2012 Land Acquisition EIS?**

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the “Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment to Support Large-Scale Marine Air Ground Task Force Live Fire and Maneuver Training” to meet the Marine Corps’ Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) sustained, combined arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirement took 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 Record of Decision (ROD) was released on February 15, 2013. The Final EIS for the land acquisition incorporated consultation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and comments received from Federal, State, tribal and local agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and individual members of the public. The Department of the Navy (DON) selected Alternative 6 in the ROD, which reflected a balance between reducing environmental impacts and meeting mission requirements. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA) authorized the withdrawal of federal land and purchase of non-federal land adjacent to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Combat Center) to meet the Marine Corps MEB training requirement.
- The withdrawal included an Exclusive Military Use Area (EMUA) consisting of two parcels, one to the west and one to the south of the Combat Center, of approximately 107,000 acres. It also included an approximately 56,000-acre Shared Use Area available for public recreation 10 months per year and for military training two months of each year. The NDAA also designated approximately 43,000 acres as the Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area (JVOHVRA) for year round public recreation.
- The expansion of the Combat Center led to the preservation of approximately 15,000 acres of habitat for threatened and/or endangered species. The desert tortoise population within this newly-acquired training land has been identified for translocation in order to sustain their survivability in accordance with the Final EIS.
- The Marine Corps continues to acquire privately-owned parcels, finalized the tortoise translocation plan with the USFWS, and works to establish new airspace, in order to use the Expansion Areas for eventual MEB training.
- A Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement was prepared during the fall of 2016. As part of this analysis, a revised Biological Opinion was released on January 31, 2017. A Record of Decision for BLM, a cooperating agency on this project, was signed on February 9, 2017. The Department of the Navy’s Record of Decision was signed on February 10, 2017, documenting the Marine Corps selection of a tortoise translocation alternative.

## **2. Why prepare a Supplemental EIS?**

- In its Biological Opinion (BO) of the 2012 EIS's 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 adversely modify its critical habitat. Since the 2012 FEIS and 2013 ROD were published, the Marine Corps has conducted additional detailed studies and has worked cooperatively with USFWS and the BLM on alternative translocation plans for the desert tortoise, as required in the 2012 BO and 2013 ROD. This environmental study will not change or amend the land withdrawals that are federal law.
- In light of new information gained from these efforts, the DON elected to prepare a SEIS focusing on the evaluation of potential impacts of alternative tortoise relocation plans, and environmental effects associated primarily with biological resources, land use, air quality, and cultural resources related to the translocation.
- The purpose of the proposed action evaluated in the SEIS is to study alternative translocation plans in support of the project that was described in the 2012 EIS, selected in the 2013 ROD, and authorized by the Fiscal Year 2014 NDAA.
- The Marine Corps needs to implement the proposed action to satisfy requirements identified in the 2012 Final EIS and associated 2012 BO.
- By supplementing the 2012 Final EIS, the SEIS advanced the NEPA's purpose of informing decision-makers and the public about the environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

## **3. What did the SEIS focus on?**

- The SEIS analyzed the potential environmental impacts of alternative plans and locations for implementing a Desert Tortoise Translocation Program in support of MEB-sized training exercises on the newly acquired lands.
- The SEIS considered a no-action alternative (implement the 2011 General Translocation Plan originally evaluated in the 2012 BO) and two action alternatives for desert tortoise translocation, based upon plans completed in March and June of 2016, respectively. All three alternatives identify recipient sites (to which tortoises will be translocated) and control sites (where the resident tortoise population will be studied to provide comparative data on survival, and threats to survival, habitat stability and changes, and health and disease relative to the translocated tortoise populations at the recipient sites). Each alternative also included details of the proposed tortoise translocation, including specific handling procedures, fencing, clearance surveys, and post-translocation multi-year monitoring activities. The tortoise translocation plans were developed in consultation with USFWS and BLM.
- The SEIS analyzed in detail the environmental effects associated with biological resources,

land use, air quality, and cultural resources. Other resources that were assessed in the 2012 EIS were considered but not carried forward for further analysis in the SEIS based on the characteristics of the SEIS proposed action. The SEIS explained the rationale for not carrying forward any specific resources. The analysis of resources in the SEIS included an evaluation of direct and indirect impacts, and accounted for cumulative impacts from other relevant activities.

**4. What agencies took part in the SEIS process?**

- The DON was the Action Proponent and Lead Agency preparing the SEIS, in cooperation with the BLM, which was designated as a cooperating agency. A cooperating agency is any federal agency, other than the lead agency, which has jurisdiction by law or special expertise concerning an environmental impact involved in a proposal. Due to the nature and scope of the proposed action, including BLM land ownership, the participation of the BLM as a cooperating agency was established.
- The Marine Corps consulted and coordinated with USFWS and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) regarding translocation methods, recipient sites, and research treatments that were part of the SEIS proposed action to better support the goals of the translocation effort.
- Other stakeholders that were engaged in the environmental process included elected officials, government and regulatory agencies, NGOs, the general public, and the media through early and open communication. Affected Federally Recognized Tribes were consulted as appropriate and in compliance with Executive Order 13175.

**5. Does the outcome of the SEIS affect currently established boundaries of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, the Shared Use Area, or the Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area?**

- No, the SEIS sought only to address tortoise translocation alternatives to meet the purpose and need of the proposed action and to assess any environmental effects associated primarily with biological resources, land use, air quality, and cultural resources related to the translocation. Boundaries of the Combat Center, the Shared Use Area, and the JVOHVRA were not affected.

**6. Has the Combat Center ever conducted tortoise translocation?**

- Yes, successful translocation has taken place in the past. In 2006, the Combat Center translocated 17 adult tortoises to support construction of Range 220. Of the 17 animals translocated, only one mortality occurred during the three years of post-translocation monitoring, which equates to 98% annual survivorship. Additionally, no impacts were detected on resident tortoises monitored in the recipient population.
- Over 475 desert tortoises have been hatched and reared at the Combat Center's desert tortoise Headstart Facility, a program undertaken in cooperation with the USFWS and academic

researchers. Young tortoises remain at the Combat Center's Tortoise Research and Captive Rearing Site (TRACRS) until they grow large enough to better survive on their own.

- The Combat Center's Headstart program is a long-term assessment of how to protect nests, hatchlings and juveniles until they grow resilient enough to endure the harsh physical environment, resist most predation by common ravens and coyotes, and mature to fully- functional adults that produce offspring that also support the population.
- The Combat Center's Headstart program generated annual survivorship between approximately 85 and 96% (compared to about 40% or less in the wild), and released to the wild in the Fall of 2015 the first cohort of juveniles: 35 nine-year olds with carapace dimensions of 4 to 5 inches (110 to 140 millimeters) long . Collecting and analyzing survivorship data for released tortoises is the next major phase in our headstart commitment to support the recovery of the desert tortoise.

#### **7. Did the SEIS consider previous efforts to translocate?**

- Yes, along with the lessons learned from the 2006 translocation, the DON adapted lessons learned from other translocation projects from across the Mojave Desert. Recipient sites assessed in the SEIS show low coyote/dog predation rates and are far from human habitation. By selecting recipient sites based on habitat quality, similar topography/terrain, and by releasing translocated tortoises in groupings spatially and socially similar to the sites from which they were removed, stress will be reduced. Also, the animals will be handled and transported only within temperature guidelines approved by the USFWS, and, if necessary, they will be hydrated before release.
- The Marine Corps, the BLM, and USFWS are taking measures to ensure the success of the translocation, and mortality is not expected to exceed what the species is experiencing in the Mojave Desert.
- The DoD, DON, the Marine Corps, and the Combat Center, through its well-recognized environmental program, all understand that the lands they use for training are a part of the public trust and are committed to being good environmental stewards of the lands placed under their management.

#### **8. Was management of the Shared Use Area be affected by the outcome of this SEIS?**

- No, consistent with federal law, BLM will continue to manage the nearly 56,000 acre Shared Use Area for 10 months of the year during which it is available to the public for recreational use. The Marine Corps will manage the land during two 30-day periods of the year for military training. The proposed action does not change or amend the land withdrawal.

#### **9. How was the public involved in this process?**

- The public had the opportunity to review the Final SEIS, which was released to the public in January 2017. The DON issued a Notice of Availability on January 6, 2017 in the Federal Register.
- The public had opportunity to review and comment upon the Draft SEIS, which was released to the public in October 2016, and was available for a 45-day public review. The DON issued a Notice of Availability and Notice of Public Meetings on September 30, 2016 in the Federal

Register.

- Public information meetings were held in the communities of Joshua Tree, Palm Springs, and Barstow on October 25, 26, and 27, 2016, respectively.
- Public comments were invited during the 45-day public review period via the SEIS project website: [www.SEISforLAA.com](http://www.SEISforLAA.com)
- Further background and historical documents, including the 2012 Final EIS, can be found on: <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff/G4InstallationsandLogistics/LandAcquisition.aspx>

#### **10. Besides the websites, where else can I read the SEIS or related documents?**

Documents and other public materials can be obtained at the following locations:

##### **Newton T. Bass Apple Valley Library**

14901 Dale Evans Parkway  
Apple Valley, CA 92307

##### **Barstow Branch Library**

304 E. Buena Vista St.  
Barstow, CA 92311

##### **Palm Springs Public Library**

300 S. Sunrise Way  
Palm Springs, CA 92262

##### **Stanley Mosk Library and Courts Building**

914 Capitol Mall  
Sacramento, CA 95814

##### **San Bernardino County Library**

###### **Administrative Offices**

777 E. Rialto Avenue. San  
Bernardino, CA 92415

##### **Twentynine Palms Library**

6078 Adobe Road  
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277

##### **Victorville City Library**

15011 Circle Drive  
Victorville, CA 92395

##### **Yucca Valley Branch Library**

57098 Twentynine Palms Highway  
Yucca Valley, CA 92284

##### **Joshua Tree Library**

6465 Park Blvd. Joshua  
Tree, CA 92284

##### **Lucerne Valley Janice Horst Branch Library**

33103 Old Woman Springs Road  
Lucerne Valley, CA 92356

##### **Needles Branch Library**

1111 Bailey Ave.  
Needles, CA 92363

##### **Ovitt Family Community Library**

215 E. C St.  
Ontario, CA 91764