



**Proposed Land Acquisition/Airspace Establishment in Support
of Large-Scale MAGTF Live-Fire and Maneuver Training
Project Description Paper—Issue 8—February 14, 2013
Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center
Twentynine Palms, CA**

Executive Summary

Background: Marines must train as they fight. To meet tomorrow's challenges; the Marine Corps must plan today to fulfill Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) training requirements. To do this, more training land and airspace are needed than are now available anywhere in the country. As a result, the Marine Corps studied alternatives for training-land acquisition and accompanying Special Use Airspace for three battalions to simultaneously maneuver in close coordination using combined-arms (i.e., air/ground) live fire for a 48-72 hour training period. A Marine Corps study, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), assessed three regions of the country for their capability to support sustained MEB training. It found the Southwest most suitable, but it showed that achieving the required sustained, combined-arms live-fire maneuver MEB training capability, without distributed operations (i.e., spread over multiple bases) and representational forces, would require expansion at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), Twentynine Palms, CA.

Project Alternatives: The Marine Corps considered many alternatives to meet its MEB training requirements at MCAGCC, looking to the north, south, east and west. Five land acquisition and associated airspace establishment alternatives were presented to interested stakeholders at Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) public scoping meetings in December 2008. Nearly 20,000 public comments on these alternatives and issues helped to develop a range of reasonable alternatives to meet MEB training requirements, including an "Alternative 6" that would recommend continued public access to a Shared Use Area in the West Study Area when Marines would not use the area for MEB training, an area comprising 43,049 acres.

Public Involvement: A Draft EIS (DEIS) analyzed these six alternatives and a "No Action Alternative," consistent with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. It described the alternatives, how training would occur under them, their environmental impacts, and ways to mitigate those impacts. Published in February 2011 for review and comment, the DEIS drew over 650 stakeholders to attend three public meetings. It received nearly 22,000

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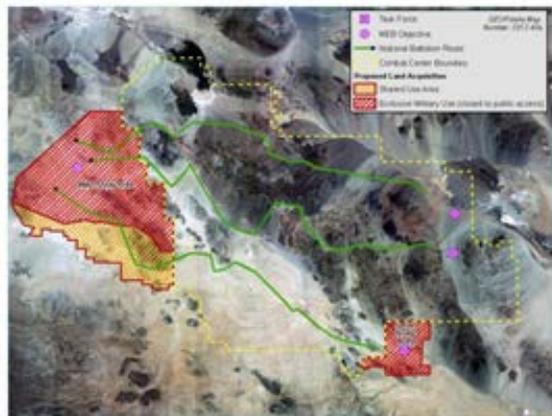
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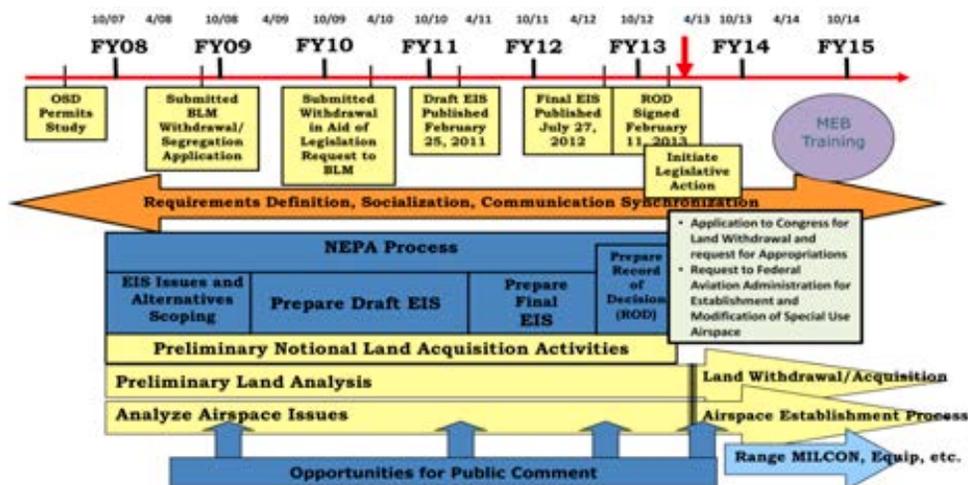
comments from federal, state and local public agencies and elected officials, businesses, and non-governmental organizations – including conservationists, recreation enthusiasts, aviators, farmers/ranchers, manufacturers, miners, developers and individuals. These comments were evaluated in preparing the Final EIS (FEIS), a number of additional studies were conducted, and changes were made in response to them. An FEIS was released on July 27, 2012.

Making a Decision: After evaluating nearly 1,000 comments on the FEIS and considering the FEIS along with costs and mission training requirements, the Secretary of the Navy signed the Record of Decision (ROD) on February 11, 2013. The ROD selected the Preferred Alternative to meet MEB training requirements, with a recommendation for mitigation developed in coordination with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Department of the Navy has submitted a withdrawal application to BLM and will submit a proposal for lands in the Alternative 6 footprint to Congress and to the Federal Aviation Administration to initiate the formal process to establish and modify Special Use Airspace.

The Preferred Alternative: Developed in response to public comments, and slightly modified in the Final EIS and in coordination with BLM, it is the optimal alternative considering operational and environmental impact factors together. It outlines recommendations to Congress for withdrawal of public lands in a manner that would preserve public access to important off-highway recreation areas during periods when MEB training would not require use of those lands, allowing for reopening 43,049 acres under BLM management to public recreation use for 10 months a year.



Project Timeline: The graphic below displays major project elements and current timeline.



Background

The Marine Corps is the Nation's expeditionary force. Marines must train as they fight to successfully deploy as a force in readiness anywhere in the world. Based upon recent battlefield experiences, the increased ranges of new weapons and battlefield transportation systems, and evolving war-fighting doctrine, the Marine Corps identified necessary training requirements for a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) that prepare Marines for what they will encounter in combat operations. Realistic training means Marines will have the best chance to successfully meet their mission in combat and return safely to the United States.

Currently, no Department of Defense facility is large and capable enough to provide sustained, combined-arms (i.e., air/ground), live-fire and maneuver MEB training. A Marine Corps study, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), evaluated locations nationwide that might meet the training requirement. The CNA study concluded that expansion at MCAGCC could meet the training requirement but expansion at other installations would not. Given these findings, the United States Marine Corps evaluated a range of reasonable alternatives at MCAGCC for fulfilling MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirements.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has studied proposed acquisition of land and the establishment or modification of corresponding Special Use Airspace contiguous to MCAGCC that would permit training exercises allowing three Marine battalions to simultaneously maneuver for 48-72 hours, with multiple battalions converging on a single objective using combined-arms live fire.



The Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) study examined military installations in the Southwest, mid-Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico regions that might meet the MEB training requirement. The CNA study concluded that MCAGCC was the best location to meet the requirement, but concluded that "even a training facility as large as Twentynine Palms cannot meet all MEB training requirements without significant expansion."

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MCAGCC is the Marine Corps' service-level facility for Marine Air Ground Task Force training, the place through which nearly all Marine Corps units rotate for training before deployment. While it has been the site of large-scale combined arms live-fire training in the past, it has insufficient land and airspace to meet MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirements.



For a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) to be prepared to deploy and respond immediately to any level of global crisis, it must train as it fights – with sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training. A MEB-size force requires more training land than is currently available at MCAGCC or at any other range in the United States.

The Marine Corps' Reference Publication 3-OC provided guidance on the land and airspace needed to conduct MEB training. A July 15, 2005, Land Use Requirements Study concluded that acquiring lands contiguous to MCAGCC would be necessary to meet training requirements. After further study and review, the Marine Requirements Oversight Council (MROC) – the Marine Corps' General Officer leadership decision-making body – validated the MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirements and authorized the further study of proposed land acquisition adjacent to MCAGCC. The MROC has twice authorized study of land acquisitions and the Office of the Secretary of Defense concurred. A range of reasonable alternatives to achieve this training goal was developed and the EIS has analyzed the environmental impacts of those alternatives.

The use and expansion of military lands has been the subject of much debate over the past 20 years. It is sometimes difficult for the public to understand why a military installation would need to become larger when many installations have been closed under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. In addition, some believe that a base as large as MCAGCC must be "able to handle about anything." With the expansion at the Army's National Training Center at Fort Irwin, some question whether the Marines could train there instead. There are good answers to these important questions and the Marine Corps is committed to fulfilling its MEB training requirements with the public's understanding and support.

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First, BRAC is the congressionally authorized process to “right-size” the military’s installations. While some bases close or shrink during BRAC, others grow to receive the units that still must be housed and trained that are moved from closing bases. Following five rounds of BRAC decisions, MCAGCC remains the Marine Corps premier combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training facility.

Second, many factors make new and improved military training vital, including MEB-level sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training. These include modern weapon systems with increased ranges, new battlefield transportation systems, continuously improved war-fighting doctrine drawn from recent combat experience, and the capabilities of the Nation’s potential adversaries. The MROC validated these MEB training requirements based upon the lessons learned from combat operations and by anticipating future military threats. The Marine Corps analysis, conducted by CNA, concluded that no U.S. training range is large enough to train the full capability of a MEB. The National Training Center at Fort Irwin, while a world class facility, does not currently have ranges capable of supporting Marine Corps MEB-level training requirements.



The Marine Corps is a proud partner in the protection of natural resources and has an outstanding and award-winning record of environmental stewardship. The project has studied potential impacts to natural and cultural resources and would avoid unnecessary impacts. Any new lands and resources would receive the same high standard of Marine Corps stewardship. The project has identified appropriate conservation and mitigation measures. The US Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion on the project concludes that the project would not likely jeopardize the desert tortoise and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat.

Although a large installation, MCAGCC has significant lands that cannot support training due to sensitive cultural or natural resources, the underlying aquifer, and safety or terrain constraints. As a result, approximately 60 percent of the current base is unavailable for the type of MEB training that the Marine Corps needs to conduct. If Congress approves the acquisition of new lands for MEB-level training as is now being sought by the Department of the Navy following completion of NEPA and the issuance of its Record of Decision (ROD), the Marines would steward these new lands and their resources with the same excellence that they have in the past and continue to do today.

Project Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment Alternatives

MCAGCC, along with the Marine Corps Training and Education Command (TECOM), studied the MROC guidance in great depth to determine that lands studied could truly support the MEB training requirements. In studying ways to fulfill the MEB training requirement, the Marine Corps wanted to ensure that only those lands necessary to meet the MEB training requirements would be acquired through any eventual land acquisition and Special Use Airspace establishment approved after the NEPA process and issuance of a ROD supporting such acquisition. As noted, the Marine Corps studied areas east, west, north and south of the base for their training suitability. Areas to the base's north were determined to be unsuitable due to terrain, infrastructure and lack of MEB training value.

An application for withdrawal of public lands for military training was submitted to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to study areas adjacent to MCAGCC on the east, west and south of the base, approximately 420,000 acres of federal and non-federal land. BLM issued a segregation notice on September 15, 2008, to reserve the federal public lands from competing future claims while the Department of the Navy completed the NEPA process. The BLM and the Marine Corps held public meetings on the withdrawal application in October 2008 and have worked with stakeholders to allow uses such as recreation to continue during the study period.

The NEPA process required the Marine Corps to study reasonable alternatives for meeting its requirements, and to assess the impacts of the proposed alternatives on natural and socio-economic resources within those study areas. Five alternatives for meeting MEB-level training, and a No Action Alternative, were released to the public for review and comment during the EIS scoping period. Three public scoping meetings were held in the first week of December 2008 and nearly 20,000 public comments were received on the proposed alternatives and issues to be studied during the EIS scoping and BLM comment periods.

As a result of analyzing these comments, aligning the study areas more closely with terrain features, eliminating lands with minimal training value, and reducing the number of occupied affected private parcels, the Department of the Navy sent a notice to BLM relinquishing the Marine Corps interest in some of the segregated lands. As a result, approximately 60,000 acres were removed from the EIS study areas to the east, south and west of MCAGCC. About 360,000 total acres remained in the areas that were studied in the EIS.

In addition to the refinements in each of the five alternatives presented to the public during scoping resulting from public comments and further study, a sixth alternative was developed in response to public comments that accommodated public access to some of the lands in the west study area when Marines were not using the area for MEB training.

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Set out below are maps and basic descriptions of the six alternatives that have been studied in the EIS – the range of reasonable alternatives – along with the “No Action” alternative.

These alternatives were developed in response to how they met Critical Training Requirements for MEB sustained, combined-arms live-fire maneuver training and other evaluation criteria. The Critical Training Requirements were identified as:

- Three Battalion Task Forces abreast converging onto a MEB objective
- 48-72 hours of continuous offensive operations toward the MEB objective
- Integrated air and ground live fires with optimized freedom of action (within reasonable constraints)

The other evaluation criteria were that the land and airspace would allow for:

- Employment of current/future weapons systems and munitions
- Employment of tactical communications/logistics over extended distances
- Contiguousness with current MCAGCC
- Avoiding parks, critical habitat, wildlife refuges and wilderness areas
- 1000 meter buffer between live-fire areas and the base boundary

Land Alternative 1 (West/South)

201,657 acres

180,353 acres west/21,304 acres south

- Maneuver would start from the east on the current MCAGCC base and the south study area, and the MEB battalions would converge on an objective in the west study area.



Land Alternative 2 (Partial West/South)

134,863 acres

113,558 acres west/21,304 acres south

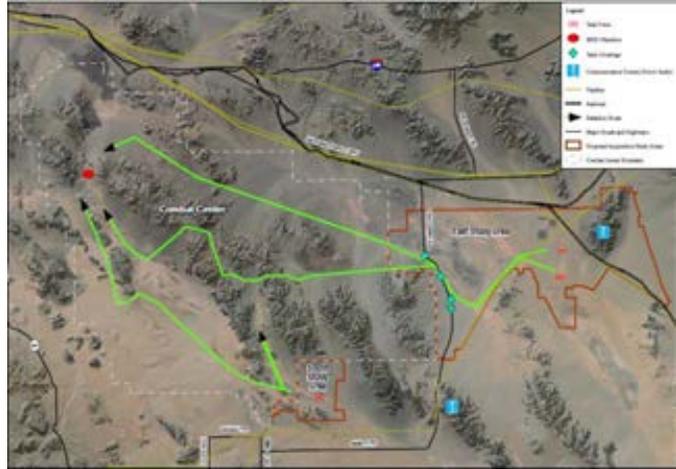
- Maneuver would start from the east on the current MCAGCC base and the south study area, and the MEB battalions would converge on an objective in the west study area.



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**Land Alternative 3 (South/East)
198,580 acres
21,304 acres south/177,276 acres east**

- Maneuver would start from the south and east study areas and the MEB battalions would converge on an objective within the current MCAGCC base in the northwest.



**Land Alternative 4 (West/South)
201,657 acres
180,353 acres west/21,304 acres south**

- Maneuver would start in the west study area and the MEB battalions would converge on two objectives, one in the south study area and the other within the current MCAGCC base in the east.
- No dud-producing ordnance use in the west study area. The area would be open for public use when MEB training not required.



**Land Alternative 5 (West)
180,353 acres west**

- Maneuver would start in the west study area and the MEB battalions would converge on two objectives on the current base: one in the Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) area and the other in the east.
- No dud-producing ordnance use in west study area. The area would be open for public use when MEB training not required.

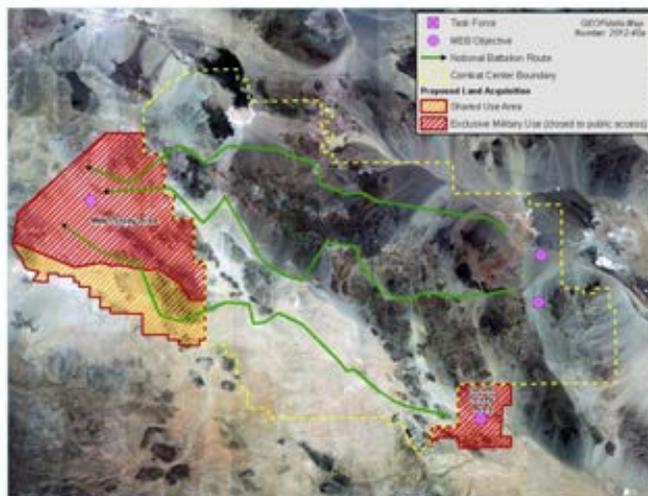


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**Land Alternative 6 (West/South)
Preferred Alternative—Selected in ROD
167,971 acres**

146,667 acres west/21,304 acres south

- Maneuver would start from the east on the current MCAGCC base and the south study area, and the MEB battalions would converge on an objective in the west study area.
- No dud-producing ordnance use in a 43,049 acre Shared Use Area in the south of the west study area
- Shared Use Area open 10 months of the year for public use when MEB training not required.
- Under written agreement with USMC, BLM would implement the management and control of the Shared Use Area for recreation uses.



**No Action Alternative Land
(Current Base)
No New Land**

- The No Action Alternative would not meet the sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training requirement. Continued support of combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training would occur for smaller units.



To be able to undertake sustained, combined-arms live-fire maneuver MEB training in any newly acquired lands, the Marine Corps will seek changes to or establishment of Special Use Airspace (SUA) to support that training. Because of similar geographic footprints among the alternatives studied for potential land acquisition, there were only three proposed SUA establishment and modification alternatives (one for Alternatives 1, 4, 5 and 6; one for Alternative 2; and one for Alternative 3). They are set out in the graphics that follow on the next two pages. The Department of the Navy request to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to establish and modify SUA to support the MEB training requirements will be reviewed by the FAA

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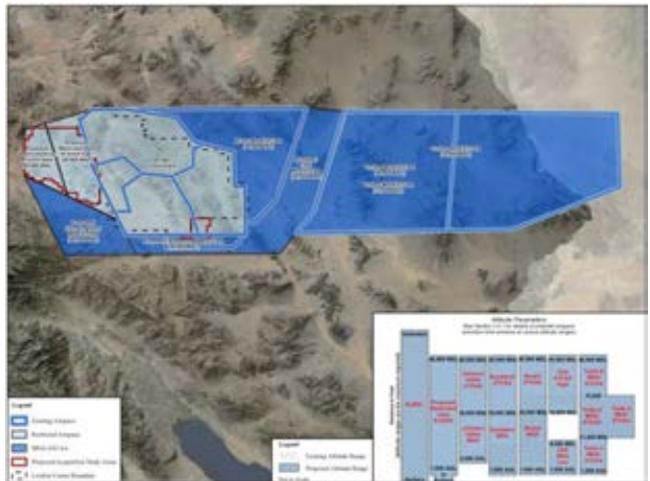
under its established processes. The three analyzed SUA proposals are set out below (airspace block elevations depicted in the lower right hand corner of the maps are also available in airspace documents on the project website). The types of airspace used in military training at MCAGCC are:

- ◆ **Restricted Area (RA):** A Restricted Area is used to contain the effects of ground-based and airborne weapons systems to ensure public safety. MCAGCC releases RA for use by all aircraft in the National Airspace System when not needed for military training. Restricted Area starts at ground level above the installation footprint, and at 1,500 feet above ground level over non-DoD controlled land, going up to a potentially unlimited ceiling.
- ◆ **Military Operations Area (MOA):** A military operations area is airspace designated outside of Class A airspace (18,000 – 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):** Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA), which normally overlays a MOA (at altitudes above 18,000 feet), is like a MOA in that it allows non-military aircraft to be vectored through at the discretion of the local air traffic control authority.

**Proposed Special Use Airspace under
Land Acquisition Alternatives
1, 4, 5 and 6**

*Alternative 6 is the Preferred
Alternative—Selected in the ROD*

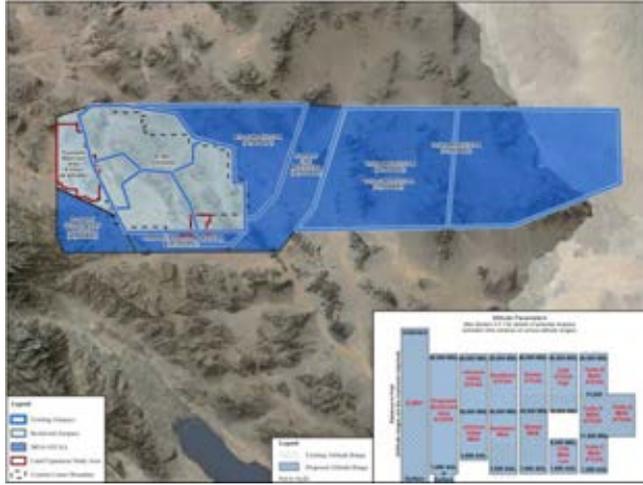
- Would add Western RA to west.
- Would add Western MOA/ATCAA.
- Would add Combined Arms Exercise MOA/ATCAA to east.
- Would expand Sundance MOA/ATCAA to the south, east and west.
- Would add vertically to Sundance, Turtle and Bristol MOAs/ATCAAs.



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**Proposed Special Use Airspace under
Land Acquisition Alternative 2**

- Would add Western RA to west, less than Alternatives 1, 4, 5 and 6.
- Would add Western MOA/ATCAA to west, less than Alternatives 1, 4, 5 and 6.
- Would add Combined Arms Exercise MOA/ATCAA to east.
- Would expand Sundance MOA/ATCAA to the south, east and west.
- Would add vertically to Sundance, Turtle and Bristol MOAs/ATCAAs.



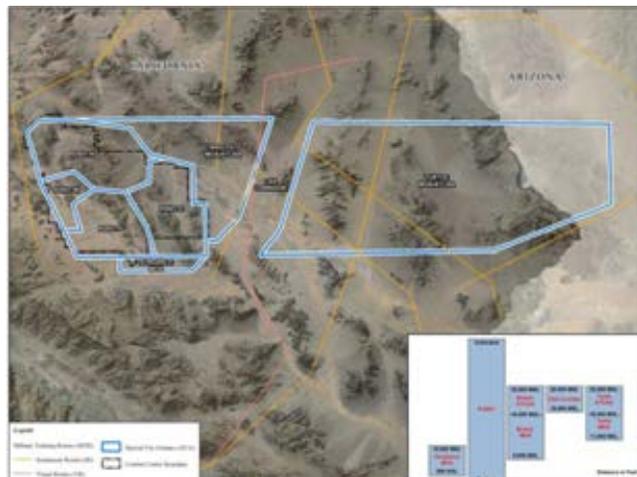
**Proposed Special Use Airspace under
Land Acquisition Alternative 3**

- Would convert Bristol MOA/ATCAA into Bristol RA.
- Would add Combined Arms Exercise RA between currently authorized Bristol MOA/ATCAA and Turtle MOA/ATCAA.
- Would expand Sundance MOA/ATCAA to the south, east and west.
- Would add vertically to Sundance, and Turtle MOAs/ATCAAs.



**No Action Alternative
(Current Base)**

- No New or Modified Airspace



NEPA Process—Public Involvement

The Department of the Navy published its Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in October 2008 and held three public meetings in December 2008 to inform the public of the requirements. Nearly 20,000 public comments were received on the proposed project and five alternatives (and a No Action Alternative) and on substantive issues for study in the EIS.

Stakeholders commented on impacts to natural and cultural resources, recreation, energy production and transmission, air and ground transportation, air quality, noise, and other relevant issues. The Department of the Navy and the Marine Corps analyzed these comments to develop a range of reasonable alternatives for meeting Marine Corps MEB training requirements. These comments contributed to the refinement of the five alternatives presented to the public during scoping and to the development of a sixth alternative that accommodates east-to-west maneuver as well as public access to some of the lands in the West Study Area when Marines will not use the area for MEB training. This range of reasonable alternatives, and a No Action Alternative, were studied in preparation of a Draft EIS that was released on February 25, 2011. Three public comment meetings on the Draft EIS were held in the region and over 650 people attended the meetings to the Draft EIS held in Joshua Tree, Ontario, and Victorville. Nearly 22,000 public comments were received on the Draft EIS and were evaluated in preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS).

The Department of the Navy prepared and released on July 27, 2012 the Final EIS that evaluated the environmental impacts associated with the proposed alternatives for land acquisition and Special Use Airspace establishment and modification, and proposed appropriate mitigation for unavoidable impacts. The BLM and FAA were cooperating agencies in producing the EIS. Other agencies and a broad range of interested stakeholders for the proposed project have participated in various stages of preparing the Draft and Final EIS, including providing scoping comments on the alternatives and issues to be studied. Overall, more than 42,000 public comments were received throughout the EIS process, including nearly 1,000 on the Final EIS itself.

The Marine Corps understands that the needs, interests and demand for resources among the general public, the commercial sector, environmental groups, and the military are sometimes in competition, as the quantity or availability of resources decrease respectively to the increasing number of users. The Marine Corps and MCAGCC are committed to cultural and natural resource protection, environmental stewardship, and being a “good neighbor” to the community. It seeks only the minimum of lands and access to airspace that is necessary to meet its MEB training requirements. The EIS and its public comments enabled the Department

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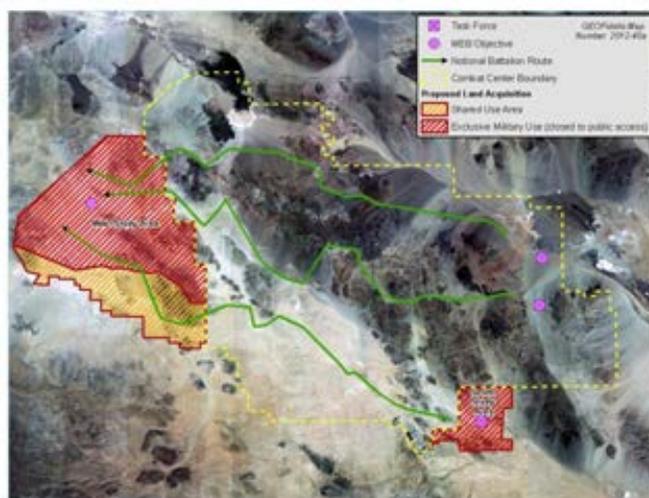
of the Navy and the Marine Corps to make the best decision to meet Marine Corps MEB training requirements.

Making a Decision

The NEPA process led the Department of the Navy to a decision, and that final decision was based on environmental impacts evaluated in the EIS, costs, and mission training requirements. The Final EIS, in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations, included appropriate mitigation measures not already included as part of the alternatives or yet identified in the Draft EIS and further mitigation was devised after review of public comments on the Final EIS and in consultation with BLM.

Alternative 6 was selected as the Preferred Alternative in the Draft EIS, and this selection was maintained in a slightly altered form in the Final EIS. Alternative 6 is not the best alternative from a training perspective. Neither is it the best from an environmental perspective. *It is the preferred alternative because it is the optimal alternative considering operational and environmental impact factors together.* Developed in response to public comments it was designed to preserve public access to important off-highway recreation areas during periods when MEB training did not require use of that land. The Preferred Alternative as finalized would allow for reopening to public recreation use 43,049 acres of the acquisition area for 10 months a year. These lands will be managed for recreation use by BLM, under written agreement with the Marine Corps, during those 10 months when not being used for training.

The graphic to the right depicts the Alternative 6 land acquisition boundaries in the west and the south, and shows the 43,049 acre area in which the public would have public access during the 10 months of the year when MEB training is not underway. Public safety training and other public safety measures would be required to allow public access to the area following MEB training – but no dud-producing ordnance would be used in this “Shared Use Area” as a public safety mitigation measure.



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Airspace associated with land acquisition Alternative 6 is further explained in the graphic below. The graphic depicts the proposed days and hours per year of use of the various SUA types during the MEB training, as well as MEB Building Block Training during other times of the year. This

R-XXXX parameters:			Johnson Valley MOA/ATCAA parameters:			Sundance MOA/ATCAA parameters:			Bristol MOA/ATCAA parameters:			CAX Corridor MOA/ATCAA parameters:			Turtle MOA/ATCAA parameters:		
Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days
FL180	8	160	FL180	8	160	FL180	12	28**	FL180	12	28+	FL180 - FL270	24	6++	Turtle A MOA/ATCAA from 11,000 feet MSL to FL220 from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Mon-Fri; other times by NOTAM Turtle B and C sectors from 1,500 feet AGL to FL270 for up to 24 hours per day for 6 days.++ Turtle B and C sectors from 1,500 feet AGL to FL400 for up to 12 hours per day for six days.*		
	12	28		12	28							FL180 - FL400	12	6++*			
FL270	24	6	FL270	24	6	FL270	24	6	FL270	24	6++	1,500 - 8,000 feet					
FL400	12	6	FL400	12	6*	FL400	12	6*	FL400	12	6++*	MSL24FL270	24	6++			
													1,500 - 8,000 feet				
													MSL24FL270	12	6++*		

Days are per year.
 *not to exceed 40 hours per year
 **1,500 feet AGL to 10,000 feet MSL intermittently by Notice to Airmen (NOTAM)
 +5,000 feet AGL to FL220 from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday-Friday, others times by NOTAM;
 ++ by NOTAM

estimation seeks to optimally balance the interest in efficient utilization of any new training lands to meet training requirements while accommodating the high demand for airspace use in the region by commercial and civil aviation.

After evaluation of public comments on the Final EIS, the Department of the Navy (DoN) made its decision and signed its ROD on February 11, 2013. The ROD will be published in the Federal Register and local newspapers.

DoN has submitted a completed application to Congress to withdraw public lands for MEB training purposes. It will use appropriated fund to purchase the non-federal lands at fair market value and to take other required actions to prepare any newly acquired property for military use. If Congress approves the withdrawal, the Marine Corps will enter into a written agreement with BLM to implement the management and control of the Shared Use Area for recreation use during the 10 months of the year it will not be used to conduct MEB training.

The DoN will request that the FAA undertake its formal process to consider establishment and modification of associated Special Use Airspace. The Marine Corps will continue consultation with the FAA as the FAA undertakes its regular processes to evaluate the SUA request. It will work to properly calibrate airspace configurations and use sufficient to support MEB and MEB-building block training while allowing for effective overall management of the national air space.

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Conclusion

To “train as they fight,” the Marine Corps requires sufficient range capability to provide for MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training. Realistic training prepares Marines to succeed in their mission and helps bring them home safely from combat.



The Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy will continue to cooperate with stakeholders to allow appropriate, continuing public use of public lands during legislative consideration of its withdrawal request and, if withdrawal is approved, in the management of the Shared Use Area that is part of the acquisition as well as appropriate access to any newly established or modified Special Use Airspace. Listening to stakeholder comments throughout the NEPA process, the Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy have tried to identify the right solution to meet Marine Corps MEB training requirements, so that Marines can be properly trained to defend our Nation, its allies and vital interests as balanced against other resources requirements. We will continue to be good

neighbors in the High Desert and will work in collaboration with BLM, local communities and the off-highway vehicle recreationalists to make the continued recreational enjoyment in the Shared Use Area a hallmark of collaboration and partnership.



For Further Information Regarding the Project Please Contact
29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project
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