



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

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 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

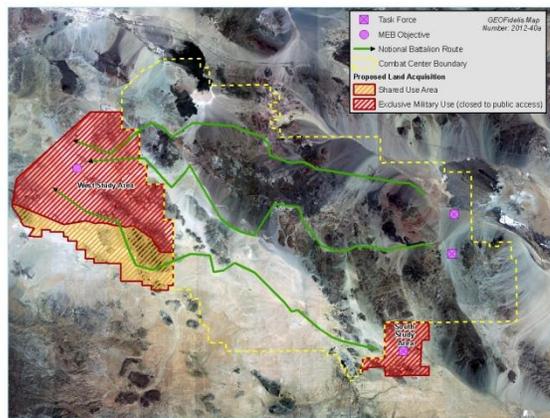
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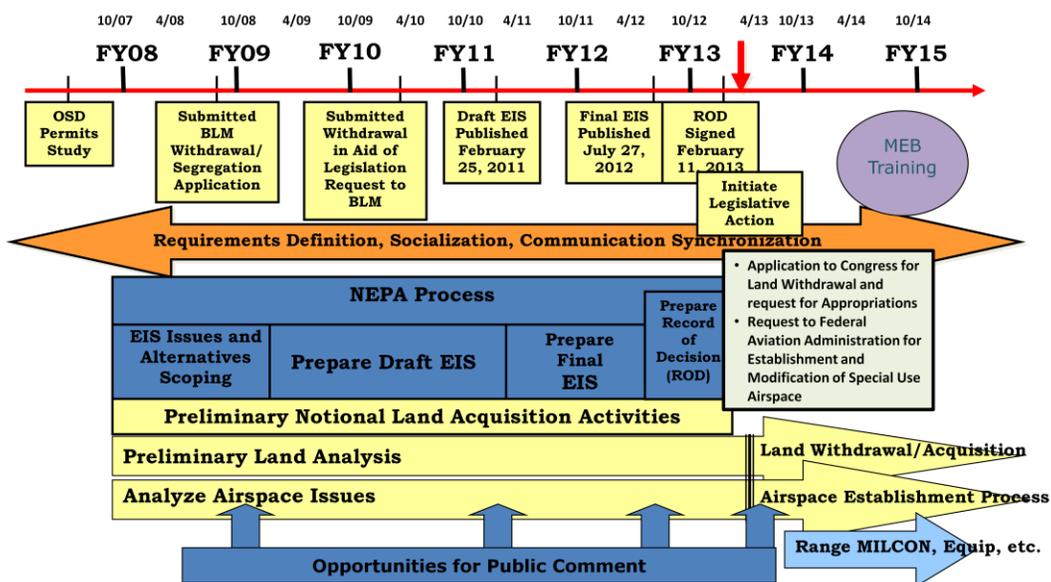
evaluated in preparing the Final EIS (FEIS), a number of additional studies were conducted, and changes were made in response to them. An FEIS was released on July 27, 2012.

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.



For Further Information Please Contact

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