



Training Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment Project Frequently Asked Questions June 2018



MARINE CORPS TRAINING REQUIREMENTS PROMPTED THE NEED FOR EXPANSION

1. What prompted the need for expanded ranges at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center?

- Lessons learned from combat, 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.
- 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.
- 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 CNA study concluded that an expanded Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Combat Center) was the best location to meet the training requirement.

2. What is MEB level, sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training, and why is it important?

- 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. 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.
- Before the expansion, the Marine Corps did not have a venue with adequate range and airspace resources to support MEB level, fully integrated, live-fire, MAGTF training. 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.
- A 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.
- “Combined-arms” means that ground-based and airborne weapons systems, including direct and indirect fire, will be used in the training exercise.
- In December 2013, the FY2014 National Defense Authorization Act authorized the withdrawal of federal and purchase of non-federal land in Johnson Valley to expand the Combat Center and achieve military training requirements for large-scale MEB exercises.

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(web) <https://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff-Offices/Government-and-External-Affairs/Johnson-Valley/>

(e-mail) smbplmsjohnsonvalley@usmc.mil (phone) 760-830-3737

(mail) MAGTFTC, MCAGCC, Bldg. 1417, Box 788105, Twentynine Palms, CA 92278-8105



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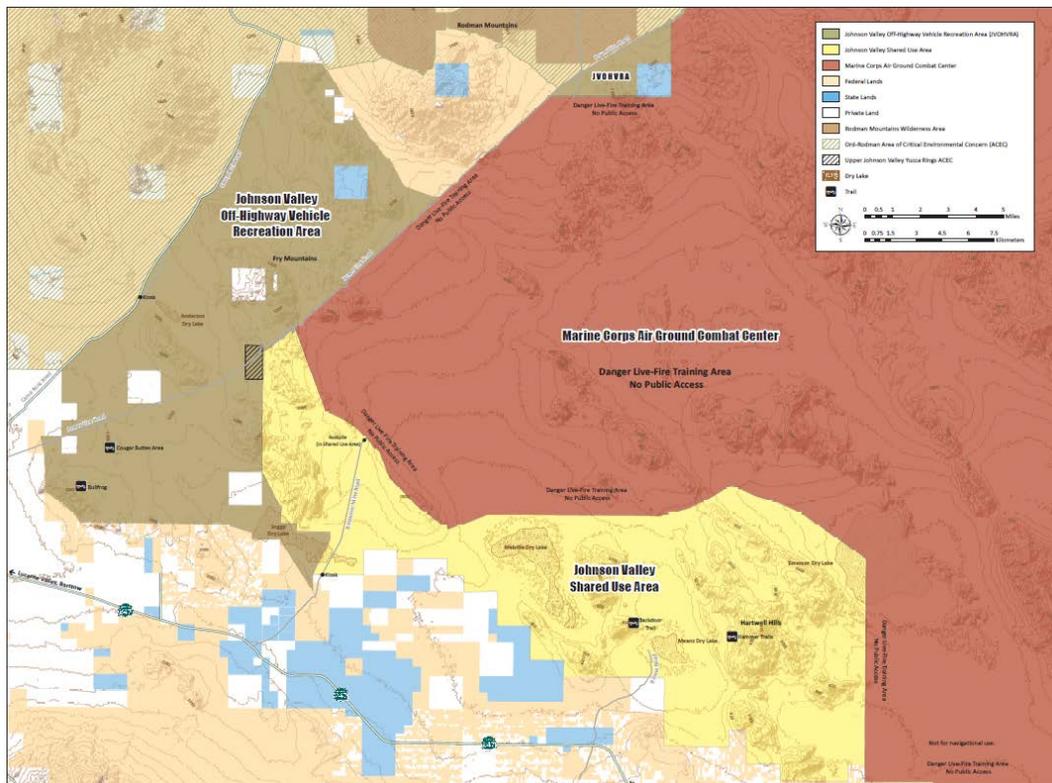
3. Didn't the Marine Corps have enough land at the Combat Center?

- No, the previous maneuver and training areas at MCAGCC were insufficient to meet Marine Corps training requirements for sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training and the Combat Center could not accommodate all the units that currently need to train.
- Only 40 percent of the Combat Center, prior to expansion, was 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.

THE COMBAT CENTER, EXPANDED

1. How did the base boundaries of the Combat Center change as a result of the expansion?

- The FY2014 NDAA established an Exclusive Military Use Area (EMUA) of 107,000, increasing the base's total footprint. In addition, a Shared Use Area of 56,000 was established to provide for public recreation 10 months of the year, and to provide for military training for two, non-consecutive months per year. The final boundaries are depicted below



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2. What is the Shared Use Area, can the public still go there?

- The Shared Use Area is approximately 53,000 acres of land in Johnson Valley available to the public for recreation for ten months a year, and to the Marine Corps for military training for two months a year. The BLM manages the Shared Use Area during the time when it is open to the public. The Marine Corps and BLM, via the Resource Management Group (RMG) notify the public 12-18 months in advance of closures of the Shared Use Area for military training.

3. What is the Exclusive Military Use Area?

- The EMUA is 107,000 acres of land acquired by the military per the FY2014 NDAA. In accordance with congressional legislation, these lands are now owned by the Marine Corps, fully incorporated into the Combat Center boundaries and are closed to the public. Public uses on any area of the base, including the new areas, are strictly prohibited.

4. What is the Resource Management Group?

- The RMG was activated by charter in June 2014; the purpose of the RMG is to provide for the cooperative and coordinated management of the Shared Use Area by the BLM for recreational and natural resource conservation purposes ten months of the year, and for military training purposes by the Marine Corps for up to two thirty day periods per year.
- The RMG is mandated by Congress to implement a Public Outreach Program to educate the public on land use changes, advise the Secretaries of Navy and Interior as to issues associated with these multiple uses, meet at least once per year, and to solicit input from stakeholders as to the management and facilitation of public recreation and other uses in the Shared Use Area when military training is not occurring.
- BLM manages the nearly 56,000 acre Shared Use Area for the 10 months of the year that it is available to the public for recreation use. The Marine Corps manages the land the other two thirty-day periods of the year for military training.
- The RMG is the proper venue for any requests for use of the Exclusive Military Use Area for organized recreation events. Requests will be forwarded to the Marine Corps for their consideration on a case-by-case basis, to the best of its ability within the bounds of public safety.
- The public is encouraged to visit the Combat Center's Johnson Valley Website (<https://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff-Offices/Government-and-External-Affairs/Johnson-Valley/>) for the latest information concerning the land expansion and military training scheduled in the Shared Use Area. The website also provides a link to

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“Discover Johnson Valley,” a mobile smartphone application developed to assist users in avoiding the base boundary while visiting Johnson Valley. The application provides closure notifications for the Shared Use Area.

5. How much land is still available in Johnson Valley for off-roading and other recreation?

- The FY2014 NDAA designated 43,000 acres of land as the Johnson Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area (JVOHVRA) for year round use. Separate from the JVOHVRA the 56,000 acres of Shared Use Area are available for public use 10 months of the year.
- In total, there are nearly 100,000 acres of land in Johnson Valley designated by Congress still available for recreational use when the Shared Use Area is open to the public. For more information concerning Johnson Valley and the status of the Shared Use Area, please contact the BLM’s Barstow Field Office at 760-252-6000 or the Johnson Valley Resource Management Group at (760) 830-3737 or smbplmsjohnsonvalley@usmc.mil.

6. When will the military be training in the Shared Use Area?

- The first training took place in August 2016; since then, the Marine Corps has notified the public 12-18 months in advance of any training periods. The Large Scale Exercise utilizing the Shared Use Area will take place in August 2019.

EXPANSION PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS

1. How will I know when the Shared Use Area is closed (during the two months of the year) for Marine Corps training?

- The Marine Corps and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), via the RMG, work together to inform the public 12-18 months in advance of military training to allow the public appropriate time to plan for use of and to schedule events in the Shared Use Area.
- The Marine Corps implements a robust communication, outreach and engagement plan to share information with the public and stakeholders about the Shared Use Area and any land use changes.
- Some methods used to inform the public include press releases, public service announcements, post cards to land owners adjacent to the Shared Use Area, community meetings, social media and website updates.

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- The public is encouraged to visit the Combat Center's Johnson Valley Website (<https://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff-Offices/Government-and-External-Affairs/Johnson-Valley/>) for the latest information concerning the land expansion and military training scheduled in the Shared Use Area. The website also provides a link to "Discover Johnson Valley," a mobile smartphone application developed to assist users in avoiding the base boundary while visiting Johnson Valley. The application provides closure notifications for the Shared Use Area.
- 2. What is the Combat Center doing to enhance the safety of recreationists within the vicinity of the Shared Use Area during training?**
- The Marine Corps and BLM work together to inform the public well in advance of military training through press releases, public service announcements, postcards to land owners adjacent to the Shared Use Area, community meetings, notifications in libraries and other government facilities, social media and their websites. Prior to closure, the Marine Corps will ensure the area is clear of recreational visitors and activity. Manned gates and checkpoints will be used to prevent public access during an exercise. Checkpoints will remain in place until the area is re-opened for recreation Combat Center officials. In addition, significant public outreach efforts will be conducted prior to and during the exercises to inform the public about the closure.
- 3. How is the Combat Center ensuring that the Shared Use is Area is safe for public use?**
- The safety of our surrounding community, to include OHV enthusiasts, is a primary concern. The Combat Center ensures the Shared Use Area is clear of all recreational activity prior to conducting training as well as ensuring the land is clear of hazards and safe for recreational use prior to re-opening for the land for public access.
 - Safe public use of the Shared Use Area is a paramount concern of the Marine Corps and BLM. The Marine Corps and BLM, via the RMG informs the public of land use changes and safety restrictions affecting the withdrawn areas.
 - Public safety is a top priority for the Marine Corps and BLM throughout land use change in the Shared Use Area.
 - Marine Corps places temporary signs at the boundary of the Shared Use Area during training activities until it is re-opened for public recreation

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7. How are the new base boundaries maintained for public safety?

- Base personnel routinely patrol all boundaries for the public's safety. The Combat Center's law enforcement goals are 1) to prevent disruptions to military training, 2) to educate the public of the boundaries and the potential hazards of military training areas, 3) to protect property, to include areas controlled for environmental stewardship 4) and to remove trespassers from military lands. Under Title 18 of the U.S. Code, offenders may be cited for trespassing and sent to the Magistrate court.
- The new base boundaries are marked with signage for the public's safety. Individuals have a personal and legal responsibility to avoid trespassing onto the Combat Center regardless of the presence or absence of signs. This is consistent with all federal law and is not unique to the Combat Center.

8. What are reporting requirements if recreationalists discover unknown/potentially hazardous material (e.g., unexploded ordnance) in the Shared Use Area? (What are the step by step instructions?)

- If recreationalists discover unknown/potentially hazardous material in Shared Use Area, they must notify BLM (760-252-6000) first, then San Bernardino Sherriff's Department (909-884-0156) and/or San Bernardino Fire Department (909-384-5286). If one of those agencies believes it is "military ordnance" they will notify the Combat Center.

4. Who is liable if there are injuries in the Shared Use Area?

- The United States Government may not be held liable if civilians are injured in the Shared Use Area. Section 2923 of the NDAA 2014 prevents government liability for civilian injury.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

1. How did the expansion affect threatened or endangered species on the base?

- The expansion of MCAGCC led to the preservation of approximately 15,000 acres of habitat for threatened and/or endangered species within the newly acquired areas, as well as neighboring Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. As a result of the Expansion, the Marine Corps will be conducting endangered species monitoring and expanding the head-starting program for 30 years in an effort to recover the threatened Desert Tortoise.

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- The base provides habitat to one listed species, the threatened Desert Tortoise. Over 380 Desert Tortoises have been hatched and reared at the Combat Center during the first few years of a program undertaken with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and academic researchers. The Marine Corps at the Combat Center also works to protect and study such sensitive species as the Nelson Big Horn Sheep, various bat species and desert plants on base.
- 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.
- A General Translocation Plan for desert tortoises that would have been affected by the expansion was prepared in coordination with USFWS to move tortoises from affected areas to low-impact areas in accordance with the Biological Opinion (BO) and Biological Assessment (BA).
- In 2016, in response to various factors and new information available, two alternative translocation plans were developed and studied as part of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, whereas an updated BO was released in January 2017. The Department of Navy selected Alternative 2 in their Record of Decision, the environmentally preferable alternative, in alignment with the BO. The translocation plan described in Alternative 2 was developed using internal USFWS guidance with a focus on augmenting depleted tortoise populations.
- The Marine Corps observes all special conservation measures and mitigation measures identified by the SEIS.
- The ROD additionally commits the Marine Corps to various other measures to protect resident desert tortoises, and the Marine Corps continues to conduct surveys and perform health assessments to support recovery efforts.
- In April 2017 929 desert tortoises were translocated in accordance with the Final SEIS. Desert tortoises were moved by specially trained Biologists to recipient sites located both within protected areas on DoD lands and on BLM lands near the Combat Center. In October of 2017, the last of the tortoises, totaling 114 were translocated.

The Marine Corps is committed to continuing its excellent stewardship of the environment, particularly of the natural and cultural resources on the base and newly acquired lands, including the Shared Use Area.

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2. Did the expansion impact historic or archeological resources?

- Potential impacts to cultural resources resulting from the expansion 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.
- The Combat Center Environmental Affairs (EA) mission is to develop and maintain awareness of the natural and cultural resources at MCAGCC and the importance of resource protection, implements measures to catalogue, protect and mitigate any losses of those resources at MCAGCC.
- In addition to natural resource studies, consultations occurred with Native American Tribes and the State Historic Preservation Officer to ensure that cultural resources are appropriately protected and managed.
- The Marine Corps is committed to continuing its excellent stewardship of natural and cultural resources in the newly acquired lands.

3. Does noise from the expansion bother the outlying communities?

- Critical training performed by Marines and sailors aboard the Combat Center prepares them for combat and contingency operations. They must “train as they fight” — using the weapons, ordnance, munitions and aircraft they would use in combat and other deployments. Aircraft and ordnance generate sounds that can sometimes be heard in the surrounding communities.

To report these sounds, please call the Combat Center’s G-5 at (760) 830-9222 or email: SMBPLMSSOUNDREPORTING@usmc.mil

- 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
- The Marine Corps has studied potential noise impacts in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement analysis and the study determined that noise impacts the land acquisition or airspace establishment would likely remain on the base and would be less than significant off base.
- Increased noise from military training is experienced by some surrounding communities such as Lucerne Valley, Landers and Yucca Valley; however, no one outside the base boundaries should be exposed to a noise level greater than or equal to a 70dB Community Noise Equivalent Level, which is comparable to a normal conversation or television volume.

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- The Combat Center currently releases a public service announcement to inform the public of upcoming large exercises that may cause additional noise within the community. This custom will continue as a courtesy to the surrounding communities. In addition, the Combat Center has implemented a system to receive noise reports from community members to best understand how training noise may impact the surrounding community.
- 4. Did the expansion and resulting training result in increased dust generation?**
- Potential dust generation issues were studied as air quality impacts in the Environmental Impact Statement and were found to be less than significant.
 - The Marine Corps has not observed 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.).
- 5. Did the expansion impact local water resources?**
- 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.

KING OF THE HAMMERS

- 1. How is the Combat Center supporting the public desire for the continuance of the annual King of Hammers event in Johnson Valley?**
- The Marine Corps has worked closely with the event organizer to support the continuance of this significant local event. The Combat Center has obtained a multi-year land use license to grant permission for a small section of the race to enter into portions of the base.
 - Each year, the Combat Center partners with the event organizer to host an information booth at the event to answer questions from the public about the expansion, public safety, and new boundaries.
- 2. Can the public access the race route portions that take place on the base?**
- For the public's safety, spectators are not allowed on the portion of the race that are located within the base boundaries. This portion of the route is clearly marked.

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