

Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)

Special Use Airspace Update



April 2026

Environmental Review for Airspace Proposal is Complete

The Marine Corps, in cooperation with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), finalized the comprehensive Environmental Assessment (EA) for proposed Permanent Special Use Airspace Establishment and Modifications at the Combat Center. This final analysis, greatly informed by public feedback, analyzed the full scope of potential environmental effects, including how it can impact the community and other users of the land and air.

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The Marine Corps has issued a FONSI, based on the comprehensive analysis presented in the Final EA. The study determined that - with procedural safeguards built into the proposal - its overall environmental impact would not be significant.

What Happens Now?

The Marine Corps has concluded its environmental review. The proposal will now undergo a separate review by the FAA. The FAA has the final authority to approve any changes to the National Airspace System.



Johnson Valley Shared Use Area

- Public access for ground-based recreation would not change.
- If the airspace were to be used by the Marine Corps while the Shared Use Area is open, a 1,500-foot altitude floor would create a safe buffer to activities occurring on the ground.
- For Bureau of Land Management (BLM) permitted events and filming, low-flying rotary aircraft flying below 1,500 feet AGL (above ground level) would not require any Marine Corps approvals or coordination.
- MEDEVAC flights would receive immediate and safe access to the area under established procedures. Flights below 1,500 feet AGL, or during times the airspace is not activated for military training, would not require any coordination.



Economic Impacts

- Because recreational activities in the Shared Use Area would continue unimpeded, the proposal is not expected to cause a change in the associated regional economic benefits.
- Large, organized events like King of the Hammers, which are vital to the local economy, would continue to be permitted by the BLM. During the planning process, organizers would be able to coordinate with the Marine Corps for any unique altitude needs exceeding 1,500 feet AGL (such as for media, chase helicopters, etc.) to assess for opportunities for deconfliction.



Noise

- The noise analysis concluded that overall sound levels in residential areas and at local schools will remain below the official FAA threshold for a significant impact.
- Air-to-ground ordnance (the loudest training) would be restricted to exclusive military-use zones, away from public areas.



General Aviation

- When not in use for military training, the airspace would be returned to the National Airspace System, ensuring maximum availability for all pilots.
- R-2509, Johnson Valley MOA, CAX MOA, and Turtle Low MOA would be activated at least 6 hours in advance using standard FAA NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) procedures, providing clear and timely advance notice to the aviation community.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Why does the Marine Corps need this airspace?

The proposed airspace changes are essential for enabling large-scale, realistic training exercises at the Combat Center - the only installation in the Marine Corps where this type of integrated, combined-arms training can be conducted at scale. The expanded airspace would afford ground forces and aviators greater capability to train together as a seamless team under conditions that reflect real-world operations. This type of training simulates the conditions Marines will face in real-world operations and is critical to building the coordination and proficiency that directly contribute to their effectiveness and safety when they are in harm's way.

Why can't the Marine Corps use temporary measures instead of permanent airspace?

Permanently charting the airspace is a critical safety feature for everyone. Unlike temporary measures, it makes the training areas visible on all aviation maps, allowing civilian pilots to plan routes safely and effectively long-term.

It is important to note that a permanent designation would not mean the airspace is used exclusively by the military; when not in use for training, it would be returned to the National Airspace System for civilian aviation.

How would the proposed airspace changes affect my ability to recreate in the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area?

When the Shared Use Area is open to the public, your access and activities on the ground would not be affected. The proposal includes 1,500-foot AGL "floor" for military aircraft. This floor would automatically be in place anytime the restricted area over Johnson Valley is active while the Shared Use Area is simultaneously open to the public. This ensures all ground-based recreation under that floor, including recreational drones within FAA limits, or low-flying rotary aircraft, can continue unimpeded below. Established procedures also ensure immediate and safe access for any emergency (MEDEVAC) or law enforcement flights.

For a more detailed list of FAQs please visit the MCAGCC Special Use Airspace webpage.

<http://www.29palms.marines.mil/airspace>

Would I still be able to fly my recreational drones in the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area?

Yes, when the Shared Use Area is open to the public. FAA regulations generally require recreational drones to be flown at or below 400 feet above ground. For the most current regulations, recreational flyers should always consult the FAA's official website at: www.faa.gov/uas

Would this affect large events like King of the Hammers and the local economy?

Because on-the-ground recreation would not be impeded, the proposed airspace changes are not expected to change the associated economic benefits these ongoing activities bring to the region. Large, organized events would continue to be permitted via the BLM.

The proposal's 1,500-foot AGL floor for military training when the Shared Use Area is open ensures that most off-road event-related aviation, such as rotary aircraft for filming, can operate below that level without any need for coordination with the Marine Corps. For any unique situations where an event might require altitudes above 1,500 feet AGL, organizers are able to coordinate directly with the Marine Corps during their planning process to assess specific requirements and opportunities for deconfliction.

The EA states that the Marine Corps will evaluate days of use after one year. Does the Marine Corps plan to increase the number of days of use over Johnson Valley?

At this time, the Marine Corps does not have plans to increase the number of days of use for the R-2509 airspace over the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area. A request to increase the number of days of use in the future would require a new proposal to the FAA. Even in that case, on-the-ground recreation in the Shared Use Area would not be impacted because the 1,500-foot AGL floor would continue to accommodate recreation in the area regardless of the number of training days.

