



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
MARINE AIR GROUND TASK FORCE TRAINING COMMAND
MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER
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March 19, 2026

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking your time to engage in the environmental review process. Public engagement is an important part of the National Environmental Policy Act process, and your input was instrumental.

This letter provides information on the Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for Permanent Special Use Airspace Establishment and Modifications at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center and covers some of the key concerns expressed through public comments.

As a long-standing presence in the region, the Marine Corps recognizes its responsibility to be a careful steward of the lands and airspace that are critical resources both to national defense and the surrounding community. The Marine Corps carefully reviewed every comment received, and this feedback directly informed the analysis presented within the Final EA and ensured the decision was made with a thorough understanding of the public's perspective.

Public comments reflected a strong interest in several key areas, including potential impacts to recreation within the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area, organized events such as King of the Hammers competitive off-highway vehicle event, the local economy, general aviation safety and operations, and emergency response access. This letter summarizes how the Final EA addressed many of these topics and highlights key provisions of the selected alternative (Alternative 2).

Restricted Area (RA) R-2509

Under the selected alternative, R-2509 would be managed as follows:

- **Activation:** The airspace will be activated on an as-needed basis for training, with a minimum of 6 hours' notice provided to pilots via a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM).
- **Annual Limit:** The total number of activation days is capped and will not exceed 60 days in any given year. This airspace would remain available for general aviation for at least 305 days annually.

Recreation Access in Johnson Valley

The selected alternative was developed with consideration of the existing congressionally designated shared-use status of the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area, which provides for both military training and public recreation. Establishing restricted airspace does not change land ownership, land management authority, or the shared-use framework established by Congress. Public access and recreation would continue under the existing framework, with the area remaining open throughout the year except during prescheduled military training closures (up to 2, 30-day periods) authorized by Congress under the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act.

Consistent with this shared-use designation, the airspace structure was intentionally designed to maintain compatibility with recreation activities when the area is open to the public. When the Shared

Use Area is open when R-2509 would be activated, the Marine Corps would establish a 1,500-foot above ground level (AGL) floor for the restricted airspace over the area. This vertical separation would allow recreation activities like off-roading, camping, recreational drones, etc. to continue on the ground while military aircraft operate safely above. This procedure would be codified in a Letter of Procedure. For more details, see Final EA Chapter 2, Section 2.4.1.2.

Organized Events in the Shared Use Area

Commenters also raised questions regarding whether the proposed airspace could affect organized events held within the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area, including the King of the Hammers competitive off-highway vehicle race event.

The analysis presented in the Final EA determined that recreation events in the Shared Use Area would experience minimal to no impact as a result of the Marine Corps' selected alternative. Organized events in the Shared Use Area would continue to be permitted by BLM under the existing shared-use framework.

A key aspect of this airspace design is its status-based nature (activation limited to 60 days per year); it would not be continuously active. The military's ability to activate the airspace with six hours' notice would present some planning requirements for flights above 1,500 feet AGL. While flights above 1,500 feet AGL would not be in conflict when the airspace is inactive ('cold'), event proponents cannot reliably plan for this condition months in advance.

Therefore, the 1,500-foot AGL floor provides a dual purpose.

First, it provides a clear, permanent unrestricted area when the Shared Use Area is open. This unrestricted area accommodates organized recreation activities below this altitude without any coordination required - including any low-level rotary aircraft for filming or similar purposes.

Second, it establishes a definitive trigger point for coordination. Any planned flight that *might* need to exceed 1,500 feet AGL (a unique filming perspective or specific operation) would require advanced coordination with the Marine Corps where options for deconfliction may be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, even if the airspace ultimately remains inactive ('cold') on the day of the event.

Since King of the Hammers requires a land-use license with the Marine Corps for limited use of courses that go through the installation, this advance coordination would be routinely incorporated in the existing event planning process. Similarly, the planning process for other large events will provide opportunity for this coordination.

Because public recreation and organized events within the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area would be minimally impacted, a change in regional economic activity generated from these activities and events is not expected. For more details, see Final EA Chapter 3, Sections 3.6.3.4 and 3.7.3.4.

Aviation Safety

The Final EA (Section 3.2 and Appendix G) describes how the establishment of airspace “Restricted Areas” addresses the safety and operations for deconflicting military and civil aviation activity. The proposed Special Use Airspace structure is specifically designed to segregate high-intensity and hazardous military operations from general aviation traffic during scheduled periods when the airspace is in use. If established, R-2509 would be charted and published in Federal Aviation Administration aeronautical products used by pilots. This is a critical safety mechanism for two primary reasons:

First, charting provides a permanent and predictable visual reference and awareness for all aviators. This ensures that pilots are aware of the airspace's location, vertical limits, and controlling agency during pre-flight planning and in-flight navigation, allowing them to remain well clear of the area when it is active.

Second, it enables proactive risk mitigation. Long before takeoff, a pilot can see the existence of R-2509 and know to check its status via NOTAMs or by contacting the controlling agency.

Emergency and Medical Access

A significant theme throughout the public comment period was the concern that the proposed airspace above public land (i.e., R-2509) could impede flights for medical evacuation, law enforcement, or firefighting. We want to state unequivocally that these vital operations would not be affected. Our commitment to ensuring immediate and safe access for emergency services is demonstrated by our robust, long-standing procedures and partnerships. The Combat Center’s relationship with civilian medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) providers is a prime example of this proven capability, and we have a history of granting real-time access for other agencies, including law enforcement. That same high standard of care and coordination is fundamental to the management of this proposed airspace.

This commitment is guaranteed by a multi-layered system of federal regulations and specific military policies. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Joint Order 7110.65BB mandates priority handling for all emergency flights, including MEDEVAC and air ambulance services, ensuring their protected status throughout the National Airspace System. In direct compliance with FAA JO 7400.2R, the Marine Corps will continue its policy of guaranteeing rapid access during emergencies, which includes the non-negotiable commitment to immediately suspending training activities if needed.

The practical application of these rules is straightforward. If the R-2509 is not activated, or if an emergency flight's route remains below the established 1,500-foot floor, no additional coordination is needed.

If an emergency requires access above 1,500 feet while R-2509 is active, Combat Center Range Control would facilitate immediate entry through a well-established process, not a new procedure. This process is routinely executed with our primary local MEDEVAC partner, Mercy Air.

Because these proven protocols, backed by federal regulations and a history of successful real-time coordination, provide a clear framework for all scenarios, the selected alternative will not impede the speed or safety of any emergency response operations.

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What's Next?

Based on the analysis in the Final EA, the Marine Corps has issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). This finding concludes the Marine Corps' environmental review process and allows the proposal to move forward to the FAA for its final determination.

To view a copy of the Final EA and Marine Corps FONSI, click on the "EA Documents" link at the top of the home page <http://www.29palmspsua.com/>.

Sincerely,



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Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
Chief of Staff