



**Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command (MAGTF)  
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)  
Twentynine Palms, CA  
Land Acquisition/Airspace Establishment Project**



## **Project Update Notice #35, March 20, 2026**

### **Marine Corps Finalizes Environmental Assessment for Special Use Airspace, Finds No Significant Impact**

The Marine Corps and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) have completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzes the potential environmental impacts associated with establishing new permanent Special Use Airspace (SUA) and modifying existing SUA) at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California. Based on the analysis in the Final EA, the Marine Corps has issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), selecting Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative).

Issuance of the FONSI concludes the Marine Corps' environmental review process and allows the proposal to move forward to the FAA for its final determination. While the Marine Corps initiated the proposal, the FAA is the federal authority responsible for establishing, modifying, or withdrawing SUA within the National Airspace System (NAS). Therefore, the FAA is also required to consider the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed airspace modifications. Implementation of the selected alternative remains contingent upon FAA issuance of a separate Decision Notice/FONSI and completion of the rulemaking process.

**This notice provides a background on the proposed action, and information on the selected alternative.**

#### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The proposed action is intended to provide permanently charted Special Use Airspace above and adjacent to the Combat Center in order to safely support current and future year-round Marine Corps aviation and combined-arms training requirements. The Combat Center serves as the Marine Corps' premier training installation for conducting large-scale Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) exercises that integrate aviation and ground forces in complex combined arms, live-fire and maneuver training environments.

Congress recognized the importance of this training capability in the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which authorized expansion of training ranges at the Combat Center to accommodate MAGTF-level training requirements. The authorization was consistent with the preferred alternative identified in the 2012 Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and subsequent 2013 Record of Decision. At that time, decisions regarding the establishment of additional airspace were deferred so the Department of the Navy could continue coordinating with the FAA to develop an airspace proposal capable of meeting Marine Corps training needs while minimizing impacts to other users of the National Airspace System.

Realistic training environments are essential to preparing Marines for the complex conditions they may encounter during real-world operations. Integrated air and ground training at installations like the Combat Center provides an opportunity for units to rehearse missions in a controlled but operationally realistic setting.

Training conducted at the Combat Center allows Marine units to:

- Integrate aviation and ground forces in combined-arms exercises that replicate the coordination required during real-world operations.
- Train at the scale required for Marine Air Ground Task Force operations, allowing multiple aircraft and ground elements to operate simultaneously in a shared battlespace.
- Practice complex command-and-control and airspace deconfliction procedures, which are essential for safe and effective aviation operations.
- Rehearse missions using modern aircraft, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) platforms, weapons systems, and technologies in environments that approximate the operational conditions Marines may face overseas.

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Since the 2012 EIS, 2013 Record of Decision, and 2014 NDAA, Marine Corps training requirements have continued to evolve as new weapons systems, aircraft platforms, and operational concepts have been developed that require a larger volume of airspace. Airspace at the Combat Center has become increasingly congested, creating challenges for safely integrating multiple aircraft operating areas during complex training scenarios. Establishment and modification of SUA at the Combat Center would enhance safety, provide necessary lateral separation to enhance training flexibility and safety, and facilitate scalable MAGTF-level exercises in accordance with MCO 3502.6, Marine Corps Force Generation Process; U.S. Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 (March 2020, with annual updates); and Combat Center Order 3500.16A, Service Level Training Exercise Order (May 14, 2020).

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE AIRSPACE PROPOSAL**

The airspace proposal evaluated in the Environmental Assessment is the result of more than a decade of coordination and planning between the Marine Corps, FAA, and a range of aviation stakeholders.

Following the publication of the 2012 EIS, and 2013 Record of Decision for the Combat Center land expansion, the Marine Corps continued to work closely with the FAA to evaluate potential airspace configurations that could support Marine Corps requirements while minimizing impacts to civil aviation and other users of the NAS. During this period, the Marine Corps explored several interim solutions, including Temporary SUA, and Controlled Firing Area, while continuing to refine concepts for permanent airspace modifications.

### **Key milestones include:**

- **2012:** The Department of the Navy completed the Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment Environmental Impact Statement, which evaluated alternatives for expanding training land and associated airspace at the Combat Center.
- **2013:** The Marine Corps issued a Record of Decision identifying the preferred land expansion alternative. At that time, expansion of associated airspace was deferred to allow additional coordination with the FAA.
- **2014:** Congress passed the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), authorizing land expansion at the Combat Center to support large-scale MAGTF training.
- **2014–2024:** The Marine Corps worked closely with the FAA and airspace stakeholders to refine potential airspace solutions. During this period the Marine Corps also evaluated interim solutions, including temporary SUA and a Controlled Firing Area.
  - **August 2017:** The Marine Corps granted Temporary SUA to support a large-scale exercise.
  - **August 2018:** The FAA established a CFA over expansion areas to support smaller scale, live-fire training year-round.
- **2019:** The Marine Corps published a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment and Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives (DOPAA). This notice described the proposed airspace modifications and invited public participation in the environmental review process.
- **2025:** Based on years of coordination and feedback, the Marine Corps submitted a revised airspace proposal to the FAA. This revised proposal became Alternative 2, the Preferred Alternative analyzed in the Draft and Final EA.
- **August 2025:** Draft EA released to the public; initiating a 45-day comment period.
  - During the Draft EA public comment period, 30,280 comments were received from California and federal government agencies, elected officials, business and commercial entities, interest groups, non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens.
  - Of the total number of comments received, 3,266 comments were unique, with the remaining comments consisting of form letters or duplicate comments.
  - Most of the comments received on the Draft EA were concerned about the proposed action and its potential impact to recreational activities; socioeconomic (due to impacts on off-highway vehicle use and organized events); and general aviation activities (decrease or eliminate public access and restrict general aviation activities and increased safety risks when airspace is activated). All comments were considered in preparation of the Final EA.
- **March 20, 2025:** Final EA/FONSI issued.

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## SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Based on the analysis in the Final EA, the Marine Corps selected Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative). Alternative 2, if implemented, establishes new SUA and modifies existing airspace in a configuration that supports Marine Corps training requirements while reducing impacts on other users of the NAS when compared to Alternative 1.

Under this selected alternative, the Marine Corps would establish new permanent SUA, including new permanent SUA areas (R-2509, Johnson Valley MOA, Sundance ATCAA, CAX MOA, and Turtle Low MOA) and modify the lateral boundaries, component sectors, and/or altitude limits within existing SUA areas (Bristol MOA/ATCAA and Sundance MOA) to support ongoing daily training activities at the Combat Center. Alternative 2 would allow the Combat Center to support the installation's routine year-round training activities and large-scale MAGTF exercises conducted throughout the year.

### ➤ **Activation Limits and Operational Considerations**

Although the EA analyzed environmental impacts for up to 365 days of activation per year (Alternative 1), Alternative 2 (Selected Alternative) incorporates several operational limitations designed to minimize impacts to other users of the NAS.

#### **Under Alternative 2:**

- R-2509 would only be activated on an as-needed basis for training, with a minimum of 6 hours' advance notice provided to pilots through Notice to Airman (NOTAM).
- Activation of R-2509 and Johnson Valley MOA would be limited to a maximum of up to 60 days per calendar year. Many of the 60 days per year proposed would occur when the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area is already closed to the public for military training. When the airspace is not activated, it would operate the same as it does today with no military-related restriction; the airspace would remain available to general aviation for at least 305 days annually.
- Activation of CAX MOA and Turtle Low MOA would be limited to a maximum of up to 40 days per calendar year.

### ➤ **Johnson Valley Shared Use Area**

The Marine Corps recognizes the unique model of land use in the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area, as established by Congress in the 2014 NDAA. The proposed airspace action does not involve any changes to land ownership, land management, or land use designations within the Shared Use Area. The Bureau of Land Management would continue to manage the area for recreation, consistent with existing policies, rules, and regulations. The public would continue to enjoy access and use these lands in the same manner as they do today.

Importantly, establishment of the Special Use Airspace would not expand military land closures or affect public access to the Shared Use Area. Military use of the area would remain limited to the existing limits of two training periods for up to 30 days per year, authorized by the 2014 NDAA. Outside of those training periods, the area would remain open for public recreation.

- When activating R-2509, the Marine Corps would manage the airspace differently depending on the status of the Shared Use Area.
- If the area is closed to the public, the floor of the R-2509 would extend to the ground surface to support aviation activities associated with training in the area
- When the area is open to the public, the floor of the R-2509 would be established at 1,500 feet above ground level (AGL). This vertical separation allows ground-based recreation activities – including off-highway vehicle use, camping, hiking, recreational drones, and even low-flying rotary aircraft – to continue safely while ensuring appropriate separation between military operations and the public.
- Under these conditions, the public will not need to track the status of the airspace or obtain permission to conduct typical recreation activities occurring on the ground or within airspace normally used for ground-based recreation purposes.
- The Marine Corps designed this procedural element of the airspace configuration to ensure the shared nature of the area would be preserved.
- Operational procedures governing activation of R-2509 and coordination with the FAA will be formalized through an FAA-Marine Corps Letter of Procedure (LOP).

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## ➤ **Organized Recreation and Events and Emergency Access**

The analysis in the Final EA determined that recreation events in the Shared Use Area would experience minimal to no impact as a result of the selected alternative. Recreation access and organized events in the Shared Use Area would continue to be permitted by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) under the existing shared use framework.

A key aspect of the airspace proposal 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 6 hours' notice would present some planning requirements in certain cases. 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 to the public. This unrestricted area accommodates organized recreation activities below this altitude without any coordination required – including low-flying 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 '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 on the installation during the event, this advanced coordination would be routinely incorporated into the existing event planning process.

Additionally, establishment of Permanent SUA would not impact rapid vital operations like medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) in Johnson Valley at any time. We understand that minutes can be critical when saving lives; when needed, MEDEVAC flights will be granted expedited access through restricted airspace during medical emergencies. This commitment is guaranteed by a multi-layered system of federal regulations and specific military policies. FAA Joint Order 7110.65BB mandates priority handling for all emergency flights, ensuring their protected status throughout the NAS.

- The Combat Center maintains long-standing procedures for emergency access with MEDEVAC providers, law enforcement and other agencies.
- The Combat Center has a history of granting real-time access in alignment with FAA regulations. That same standard of care and coordination would continue with any airspace changes.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Marine Corps' issuance of the FONSI concludes the Marine Corps' environmental review under NEPA.

The FAA will now review the proposal for further evaluation and the formal rulemaking process. The FAA will determine whether to establish the proposed airspace through its regulatory process.

**(see next pages for the current airspace configuration and configuration for the selected alternative, Alternative 2)**

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## EXISTING AIRSPACE AT THE COMBAT CENTER

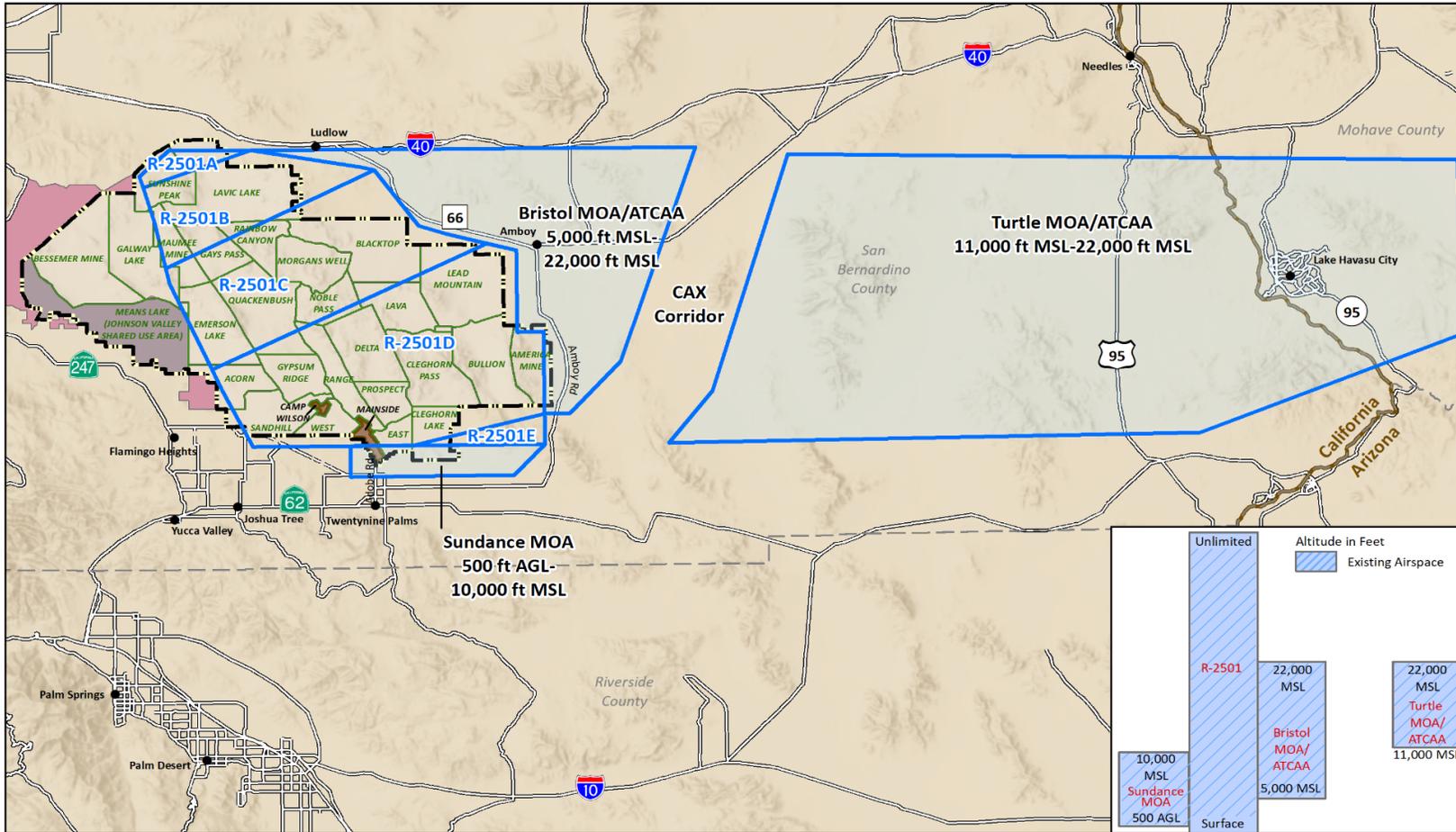
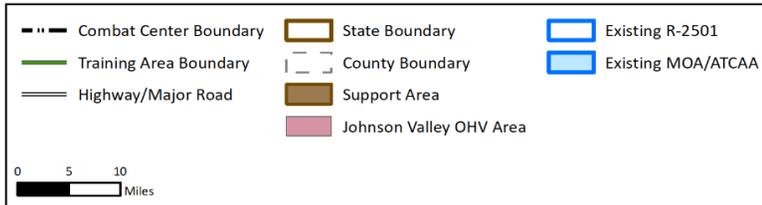


Figure 1-2. Existing Airspace Used to Support the Combat Center



Source: Combat Center 2016a, 2018; Esri 2017, 2024



## ALTERNATIVE 2 (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE) SPECIAL USE AIRSPACE

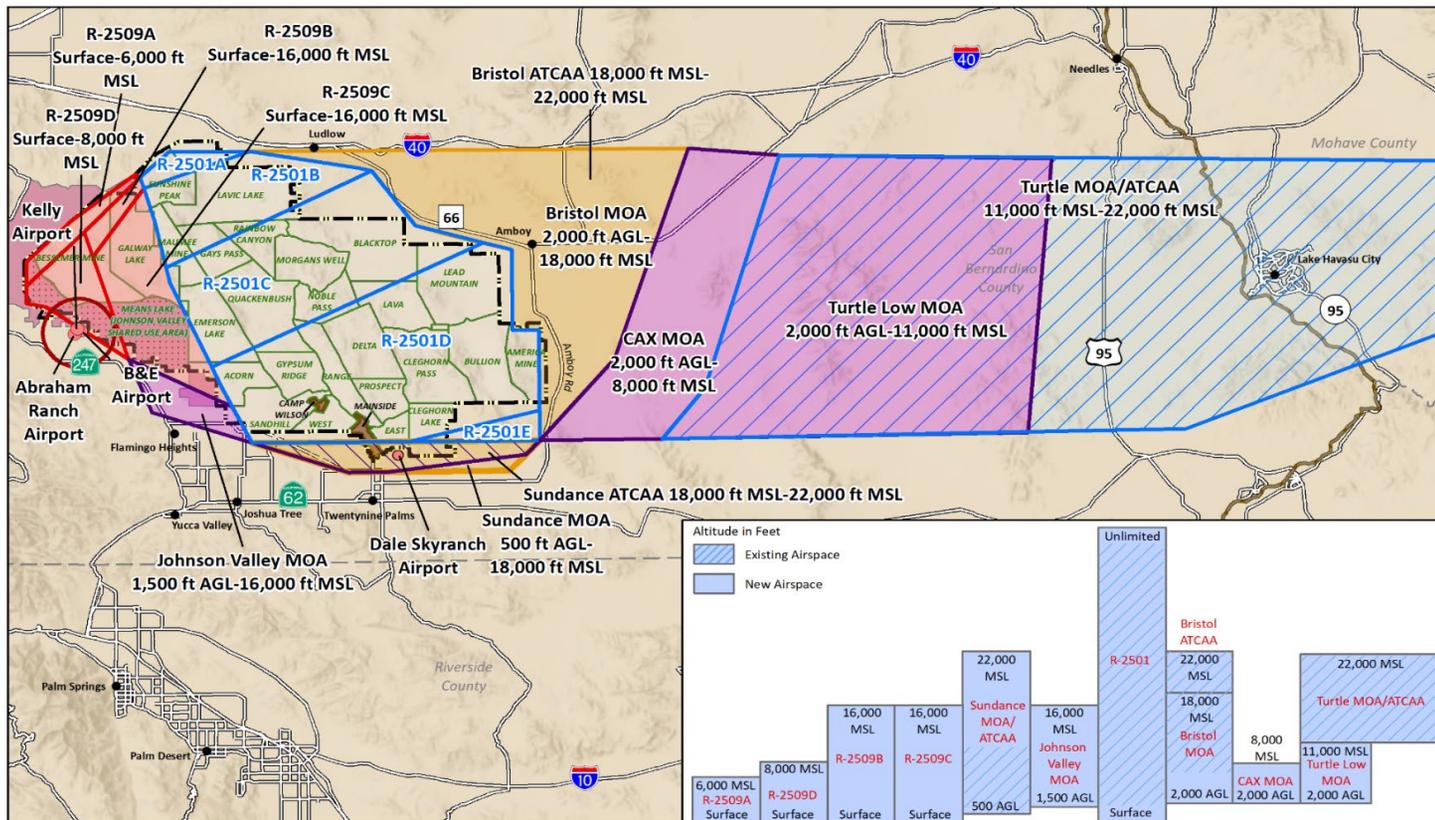
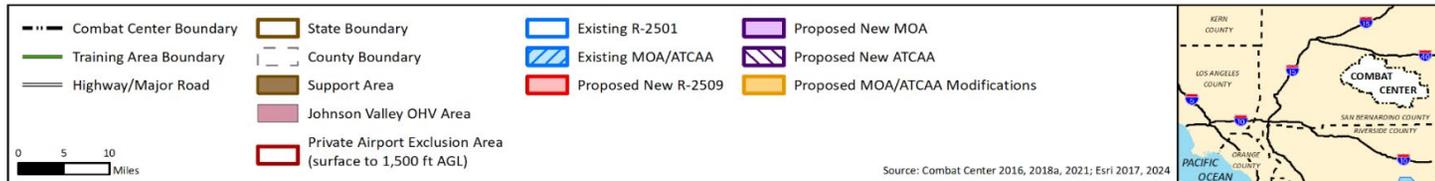


Figure 2-3. Special Use Airspace Under Alternative 2



### KEY DETAILS

- Establishes new Permanent SUA
  - R-2509
  - Johnson Valley MOA
  - CAX MOA
  - Turtle Low MOA
  - Sundance ATCAA
- Modifies existing SUA
  - Bristol MOA/ATCAA
  - Sundance MOA
- Supports training 365 days per year, but with the following limits on activation:
  - Up to 60 days per calendar year for R-2509 and Johnson Valley MOA
  - Up to 40 days per calendar year for CAX MOA and Turtle Low MOA
- FAA Los Angeles Air Route Traffic Control Center would remain controlling agency, with the Combat Center the using agency
- Supports ongoing training and large-scale exercises

**Comparison of Special Use Airspace under the 2026 EA No-Action Alternative (Existing Airspace) and Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative)**

Special Use Airspace	2026 EA No-Action Alternative (Existing Airspace)	Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative)
R-2501	Surface to Unlimited	No change from 2026 EA No-Action Alternative
R-2509 A	Does not currently exist	Surface to 6,000 feet MSL <sup>1</sup>
R-2509 B	Does not currently exist	Surface to 16,000 feet MSL <sup>1</sup>
R-2509 C	Does not currently exist	Surface to 16,000 feet MSL <sup>1</sup>
R-2509 D	Does not currently exist	Surface to 8,000 feet above MSL <sup>1 2</sup>
Johnson Valley MOA	Does not currently exist	1,500 feet AGL to 16,000 feet MSL
Bristol MOA	5,000 to but not including FL180	2,000 feet AGL to but not including FL180
Bristol ATCAA	FL180 to FL220	No change from 2026 EA No-Action Alternative
Sundance MOA	500 feet AGL to 10,000 feet above MSL	500 feet AGL to but not including FL180 <sup>3</sup>
Sundance ATCAA	ATCAA designation does not currently exist	FL180 to FL220
CAX MOA	Does not currently exist	2,000 feet AGL to 8,000 feet MSL
Turtle Low MOA	Turtle Low MOA does not currently exist	Same as Alternative 1
Turtle MOA	11,000 feet MSL to but not including FL180	No Change from 2026 EA No-Action Alternative

Legend: AGL = above ground level; ATCAA = Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace; FL = Flight Level; MOA = Military Operations Area; MSL = mean sea level

<sup>1</sup> When the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area is open for public recreation while R-2509 is activated, the floor would be established at 1,500 feet above ground level (AGL).

<sup>2</sup> For R-2509D, excluding airspace within a 3.4-nm radius of lat. 34°25'3.34"N., long. 116°36'52.12"W., which would be surface to 1,500 feet AGL to accommodate Abraham Ranch, Kelly, and B&E private airports.

<sup>3</sup> For Sundance MOA, excluding a 1-nm radius of the Dale Sky ranch Airport surface to 1,500 feet AGL and a 1-mile-wide corridor, extending from the center of the airport on a straight line south to the edge of the Sundance MOA.