



**Proposed Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment in  
Support of Large-Scale MAGTF Live Fire and Maneuver Training  
Project Description Paper—Issue #6b—December 7, 2011  
Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command  
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center  
Twentynine Palms, CA**

**Executive Summary**

I. **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 has been studying alternatives for proposed training-land acquisition and accompanying Special Use Airspace for three battalions to simultaneously maneuver in close coordination using combined-arms (e.g., 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.

II. **Project Alternatives:** The Marine Corps has 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 have helped to develop a range of reasonable alternatives to meet MEB training requirements, including an "Alternative 6" that would accommodate continued public access to 40,000 acres in the West Study Area when Marines would not use the area for MEB training.

III. **NEPA Process:** A Draft EIS (DEIS) analyzed these six alternatives and a "No Action Alternative," consistent with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. The DEIS described the alternatives, how training would occur under them, their environmental impacts, and ways to mitigate those impacts. It was published in February 2011 for review and comment. During the Public Comment Period on the DEIS, nearly 500 stakeholders attended three public meetings and nearly 22,000 comments were received from federal, state and local public agencies and elected officials, businesses, and non-governmental organizations – including

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**For Further Information Please Contact**

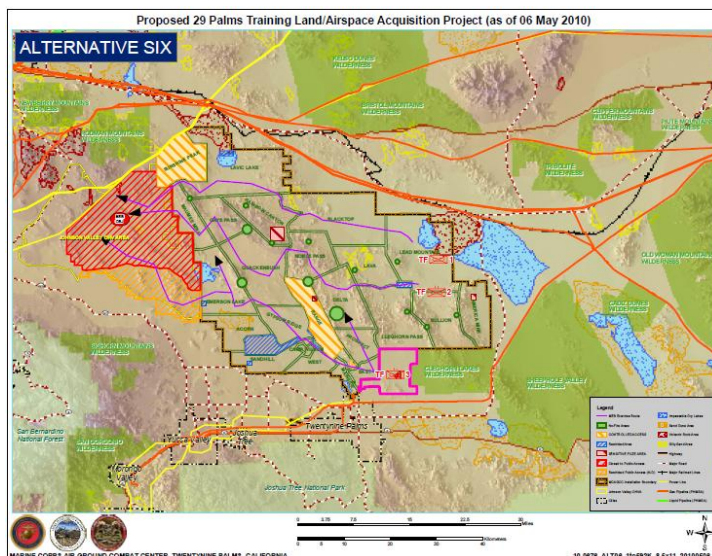
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## Proposed 29 Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 6b – December 7, 2011

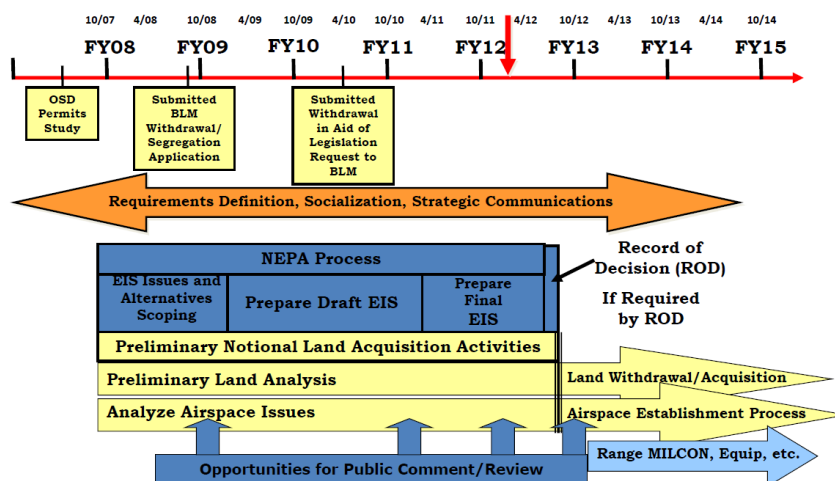
conservationists, recreation enthusiasts, aviators, farmers/ranchers, manufacturers, miners, developers and individuals. These comments were received via mail, delivery, e-mail, the project website or by telephone message to the project phone number.

IV. Making a Decision: The Department of the Navy will evaluate the comments made on the DEIS and use them to prepare a Final EIS. The Final EIS will form part of the basis to select the best course of action to fulfill MEB training requirements. This decision – based on the EIS, costs, training requirements, etc. – will be published in a Record of Decision (ROD). If the ROD concludes that withdrawal of public lands from the BLM is recommended, the Congress would have to agree to any such withdrawal and the federal government must also pay fair market value for any non-federal lands it proposes to acquire. The FAA would then initiate the formal processes necessary to establish or modify any accompanying Special Use Airspace needed for MEB training requirements.

V. Preferred Alternative: Alternative 6 is selected in the DEIS as the preferred alternative: it is the optimal alternative considering operational and environmental impact factors together. Developed in response to public comments it was designed to preserve public access to important off-road recreation areas during periods when MEB training did not require use of those lands. The Alternative would allow for reopening to public recreation use approximately 40,000 acres of the acquisition area for 10 months a year.



VI. Project Timeline: The graphic below displays major project elements and current timeline..



## Background

The Marine Corps is the Nation's expeditionary force. Marines must train as they fight to successfully deploy as a force in readiness anywhere in the world. Based upon recent battlefield experiences, the increased ranges of new weapons and battlefield transportation systems, and evolving war-fighting doctrine, the Marine Corps identified necessary training requirements for a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) that prepare Marines for what they will encounter in combat operations. Realistic training means Marines will have the best chance to successfully meet their mission in combat and return safely to the United States.

Currently, no Department of Defense facility is large and capable enough to provide sustained, combined-arms (e.g., air/ground), live-fire and maneuver MEB training. A Marine Corps study, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), evaluated potential solutions – locations nationwide that might meet the training requirement – concluding that expansion at MCAGCC was necessary to do this realistic MEB training. Given these findings, the United States Marine Corps is evaluating a range of reasonable alternatives for fulfilling MEB sustained, combined arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirements at MCAGCC.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has studied proposed acquisition of land and the establishment or modification of corresponding Special Use Airspace contiguous to MCAGCC that would permit training exercises allowing three Marine battalions to simultaneously maneuver for 48-72 hours, with multiple battalions converging on a single objective using combined-arms live fire.



The Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) study examined military installations in the Southwest, mid-Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico regions that might meet the MEB training requirement. The CNA study concluded that MCAGCC was the best location to meet the requirement, but concluded that "even a training facility as large as Twentynine Palms cannot meet all MEB training requirements without significant expansion."



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MCAGCC is the Marine Corps' service-level facility for Marine Air Ground Task Force training, the place through which nearly all Marine Corps units rotate for training before deployment. While it has been the site of large-scale combined arms live-fire training in the past, it has insufficient land and airspace to meet MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirements.



**For a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) to be prepared to deploy and respond immediately to any level of global crisis, it must train as it fights – with sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training. A MEB-size force requires more training land than is currently available at MCAGCC or at any other range in the United States.**

The Marine Corps' Reference Publication 3-OC provided guidance on the land and airspace needed to conduct MEB training. A July 15, 2005 Land Use Requirements Study concluded that acquiring lands contiguous to MCAGCC would be necessary to meet training requirements. After further study and review, the Marine Requirements Oversight Council (MROC) – the Marine Corps' General Officer leadership decision-making body – validated the MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirements and authorized the further study of proposed land acquisition adjacent to MCAGCC. The MROC has twice authorized study of land acquisitions and the Office of the Secretary of Defense concurred. A range of reasonable alternatives to achieve this training goal was developed and the EIS has analyzed the environmental impacts of those alternatives.

The use and expansion of military lands has been the subject of much debate over the past 20 years. It is sometimes difficult for the public to understand why a military installation would need to become larger when many installations have been closed under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. In addition, some believe that a base as large as MCAGCC must be "able to handle about anything." With the recent expansion at the Army's National Training Center at Fort Irwin, some question whether the Marines could train there instead. There are good answers to these important questions and the Marine Corps is committed to fulfilling its MEB training requirements with the public's understanding and support.

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First, BRAC is the congressionally authorized process to “right-size” the military’s installations. While some bases close or shrink during BRAC, others grow to receive the units that still must be housed and trained that are moved from closing bases. Following five rounds of BRAC decisions, MCAGCC remains the Marine Corps premier combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training facility.

Second, many factors make new and improved military training vital, including MEB-level sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training. These include modern weapon systems with increased ranges, new battlefield transportation systems, continuously improved war-fighting doctrine drawn from combat experience, and the capabilities of the Nation’s potential adversaries. The MROC validated these MEB training requirements based upon the lessons learned from combat operations and by anticipating future military threats. The Marine Corps analysis, conducted by CNA, concluded that no U.S. training range is large enough to train the full capability of a MEB. The National Training Center at Fort Irwin, while a world class facility, does not currently have ranges capable of supporting Marine Corps MEB-level training requirements.



**The Marine Corps is a proud partner in the protection of natural resources and has an outstanding and award-winning record of environmental stewardship. The project has studied potential impacts to natural and cultural resources and would avoid unnecessary impacts. Any new lands and resources would receive the same high standard of Marine Corps stewardship. When feasible, the project would identify appropriate mitigation for unavoidable adverse impacts that might result.**

Although a large installation, MCAGCC has significant lands that cannot support training due to sensitive cultural or natural resources, the underlying aquifer, and safety or terrain constraints. As a result, approximately 60 percent of the current base is unavailable for the type of MEB training that the Marine Corps needs to conduct. If any new lands for MEB-level training are sought following the NEPA process and the issuance of a Record of Decision, the Marines would steward these new lands and their resources with the same excellence that they have in the past and continue to do today.

### **Project Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment Alternatives**

MCAGCC, along with the Marine Corps Training and Education Command (TECOM), studied the MROC guidance in great depth to determine that lands studied could truly contribute to the MEB training requirements. In studying ways to fulfill the MEB training requirement, the Marine Corps wanted to ensure that only those lands necessary to meet the MEB training requirements would be acquired through any eventual land acquisition and Special Use Airspace establishment approved after the NEPA process and issuance of the Record of Decision (ROD). As noted, the Marine Corps studied areas east, west, north and south of the base for their training suitability. Areas to the base's north have been determined to be unsuitable due to terrain, infrastructure and lack of MEB training value.

An application for withdrawal of public lands for military training was submitted to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for study areas to the east, west and south, approximately 420,000 acres of federal and non-federal land. BLM issued a segregation notice on September 15, 2008, to reserve the federal public lands from competing future claims during the NEPA process. The BLM and the Marine Corps held public meetings on the withdrawal request in October 2008 and have worked with stakeholders to allow uses such as recreation to continue during the study period.

The NEPA process requires the Marine Corps to study reasonable alternatives for meeting its requirements, and to assess the impacts of the proposed alternatives on natural and socio-economic resources within those study areas. Five alternatives for meeting MEB-level training, and a No Action Alternative, were released to the public for review and comment during the EIS scoping period. Three public scoping meetings were held in the first week of December 2008 and nearly 20,000 public comments were received on the proposed alternatives and issues to be studied during the EIS scoping and BLM comment periods.

As a result of analyzing these comments, aligning the study areas more closely with terrain features, eliminating lands with minimal training value, and reducing the number of occupied affected private parcels, the Department of the Navy sent a notice to BLM relinquishing the Marine Corps interest in some of the segregated lands. As a result, approximately 60,000 acres were removed from the EIS study areas to the east, south and west of MCAGCC, and about 360,000 total acres remained in the areas studied in the EIS.

In addition to these refinements of the five alternatives presented to the public during scoping, a sixth alternative was developed that would accommodate public access to some of the lands in the west study area when Marines would not use the area for MEB training.





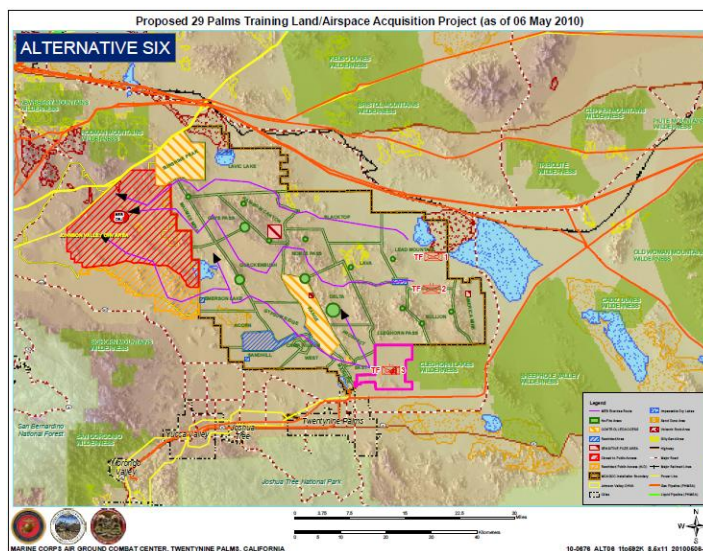




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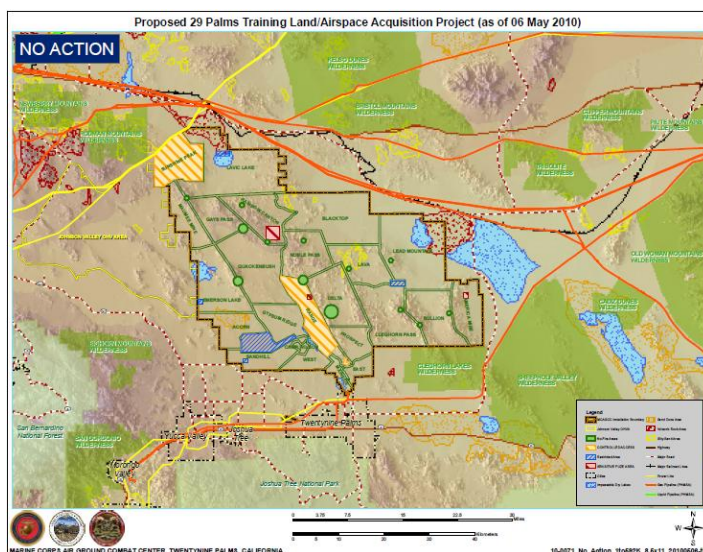
**Land Alternative 6 (West/South)  
Preferred Alternative**  
About 145,000 acres west/21,000 acres south

Maneuver would start from the east on the current MCAGCC base and the south study area, and the MEB battalions would converge on an objective in the west study area. No dud-producing ordnance use in approximately 40,000 acres in the south of the west study area; this approximately 40,000 acres would be open for public use when MEB training not required.



**No Action Alternative Land  
(Current Base)  
No New Land**

The No Action Alternative would not meet the sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver MEB training requirement. Continued support of combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training would occur for smaller units.



To be able to undertake sustained, combined-arms live-fire maneuver MEB training in any newly acquired lands, the Marine Corps would need to seek changes to or establishment of Special Use Airspace (SUA) to support that training. Because of similar geographic footprints among the alternatives studied for potential land acquisition, there were only four proposed SUA establishment and modification alternatives. They are set out in the graphics that follow on the next page. Any proposed establishment or modification of SUA to support the MEB training requirements would be reviewed, following completion of the project's EIS, by the Federal Aviation Administration under its established processes. The four potential SUA proposals are

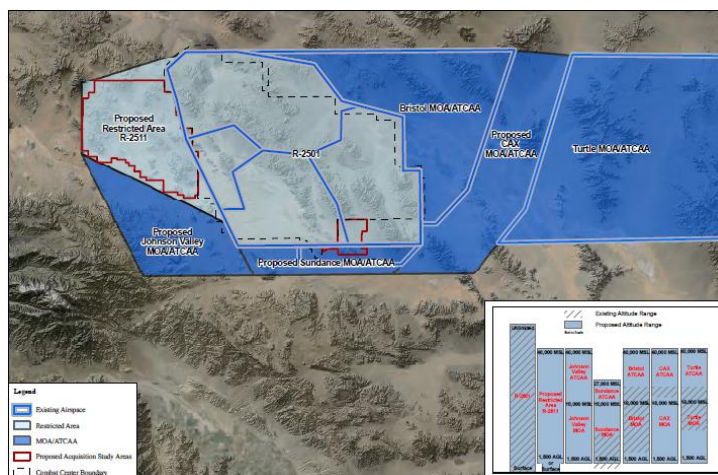
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set out below (airspace block elevations depicted in the lower right hand corner of the maps are also available in airspace documents on the project website). The types of airspace used in military training at MCAGCC are:

- ♦ **Restricted Area (RA):** A Restricted Area is used to contain the effects of ground-based and airborne weapons systems to ensure public safety. MCAGCC releases RA for use by all aircraft in the National Airspace System when not needed for military training. Restricted Area starts at ground level above the installation footprint, and at 1,500 feet above ground level over non-DoD controlled land, going up to a potentially unlimited ceiling.
- ♦ **Military Operations Area (MOA):** A military operations area is airspace designated outside of Class A airspace (18,000 – 60,000 feet) to separate or segregate certain nonhazardous military activities from Instrument Flight Rule (IFR) traffic and to identify for Visual Flight Rule (VFR) traffic where these activities are conducted.
- ♦ **Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA):** Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA), which normally overlays a MOA (at altitudes above 18,000 feet), is like a MOA in that it allows non-military aircraft to be vectored through at the discretion of the local air traffic control authority.

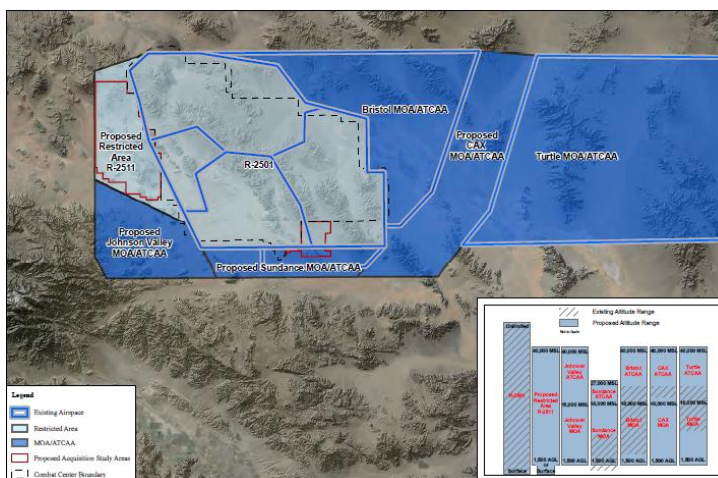
**Proposed Special Use Airspace  
under  
Land Acquisition Alternatives  
1, 4 and 5**

**Would add Western RA to west.  
 Would add Western MOA/ATCAA.  
 Would add Combined Arms  
 Exercise MOA/ATCAA to east.  
 Would expand Sundance  
 MOA/ATCAA to the south, east and  
 west.**



**Proposed Special Use Airspace  
under  
Land Acquisition Alternative 2**

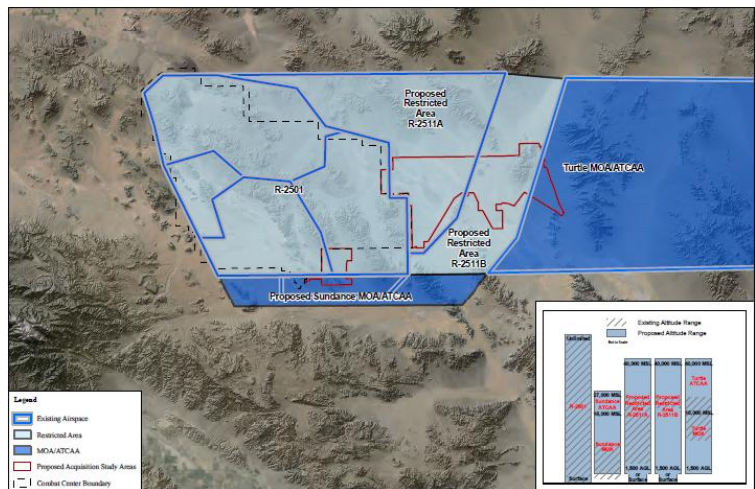
**Would add Western RA to west, less  
 than Alternatives 1, 4, 5 and 6.  
 Would add Western MOA/ATCAA to  
 west, less than Alternatives 1, 4, 5  
 and 6.  
 Would add Combined Arms  
 Exercise MOA/ATCAA to east.  
 Would expand Sundance  
 MOA/ATCAA to the south, east and  
 west.**



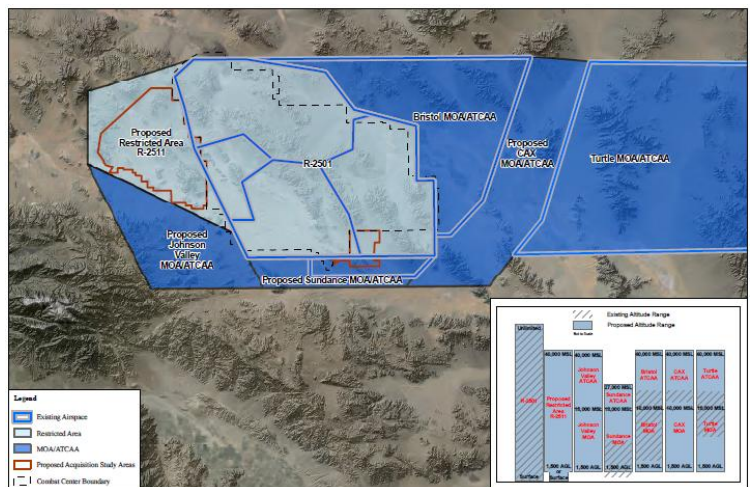


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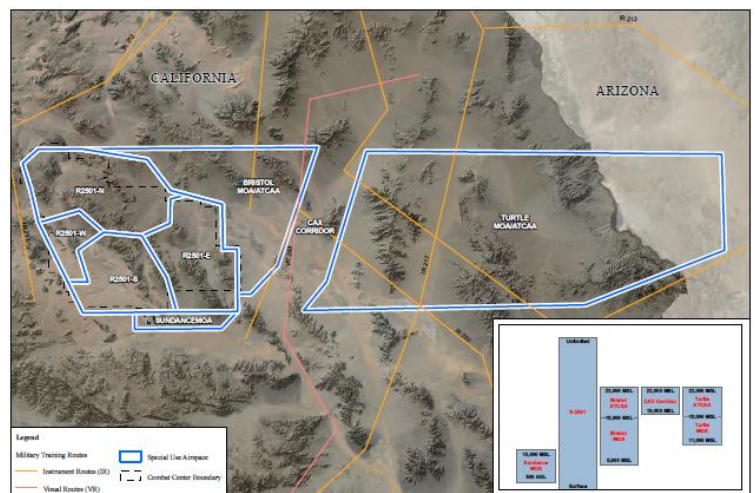
**Proposed Special Use Airspace  
under  
Land Acquisition Alternative 3  
Would convert Bristol MOA/ATCAA  
into Bristol RA.  
Would add Combined Arms  
Exercise RA between currently  
authorized Bristol MOA/ATCAA and  
Turtle MOA/ATCAA.  
Would expand Sundance  
MOA/ATCAA to the south, east and  
west.**



**Proposed Special Use Airspace  
under  
Land Acquisition Alternative 6  
*Preferred Alternative*  
Would add Proposed Combined  
Arms Exercise MOA/ATCAA  
between currently authorized  
Bristol MOA/ATCAA and Turtle  
MOA/ATCAA.  
Would expand Sundance MOA/  
ATCAA to the south, east and west.  
Would add Western RA and  
Western MOA/ATCAA to the west  
of the current R2501 Restricted  
Area.**



**No Action Alternative  
(Current Base)  
No New or Modified Airspace**



**NEPA Process**

The Department of the Navy is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and has completed and released for public review and comment a Draft EIS, that evaluates the



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environmental impacts associated with the proposed alternatives for land acquisition and Special Use Airspace establishment. The BLM and FAA have agreed to be cooperating agencies. Other agencies and a broad range of interested stakeholders for the proposed project have participated in various stages of preparing the DEIS, including providing scoping comments on the alternatives and issues to be studied.

The Department of the Navy published its Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in October 2008 and held three public meetings in December 2008 to inform the public of the requirements. Nearly 20,000 public comments were received on the proposed project and five alternatives (and a No Action Alternative) and on substantive issues for study in the EIS.

Stakeholders commented on impacts to natural and cultural resources, recreation, energy production and transmission, air and ground transportation, air quality, noise, and other relevant issues. The Department of the Navy and the Marine Corps analyzed these comments to develop a range of reasonable alternatives for meeting Marine Corps MEB training requirements. These comments contributed to the refinement of the five alternatives presented to the public during scoping and to the development of a sixth alternative that accommodates east-to-west maneuver as well as public access to some of the lands in the West Study Area when Marines would not use the area for MEB training. This range of reasonable alternatives, and the No Action Alternative, have been studied in preparation of the DEIS.

The Marine Corps understands that the needs, interests and demand for resources among the general public, the commercial sector, environmental groups, and the military are sometimes in competition, as the quantity or availability of resources decrease respectively to the increasing number of users. The Marine Corps and MCAGCC are committed to cultural and natural resource protection, environmental stewardship, and being a “good neighbor” to the community. Participating in the NEPA process will enable the Department of the Navy and the Marine Corps to make the best decision to meet Marine Corps MEB training requirements.

### **Making a Decision**

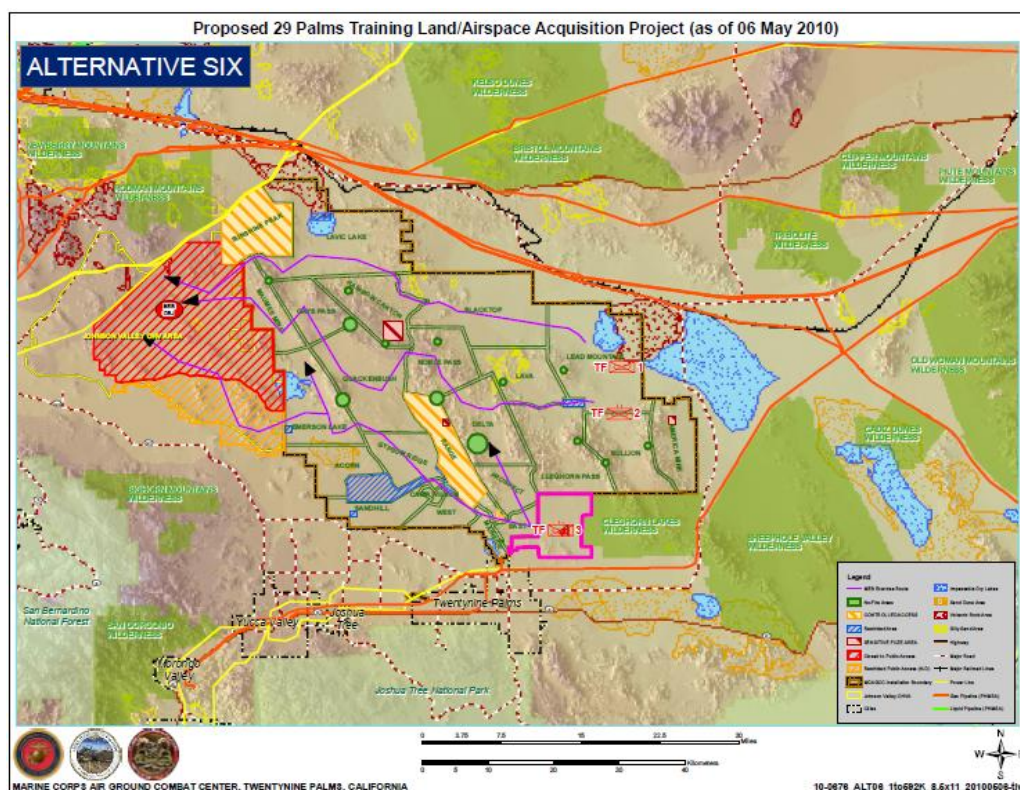
The NEPA process will lead the Department of the Navy to a decision, and any final decision rests upon the EIS alternatives analysis. The EIS, in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations, will include any appropriate mitigation measures not already included as part of the alternatives or yet identified in the DEIS.

The public had an opportunity to review the DEIS during a public comment period running from February 25 through May 26, 2011, and made nearly 22,000 comments on the issues, alternatives and analyses contained in the DEIS. In addition, nearly 500 people attended three

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public comment meetings held on the DEIS: one in Joshua Tree, one in Ontario, and one in Victorville. Comments received at the public comment meetings or submitted in during the comment period will all be analyzed and evaluated in the preparation of the Final EIS. This will include public comments on the Marine Corps' selection of Alternative 6 as its preferred land acquisition alternative.

Alternative 6 was selected in the DEIS as the preferred alternative because it is the optimal alternative considering operational and environmental impact factors together. Developed in response to public comments it was designed to preserve public access to important off-road

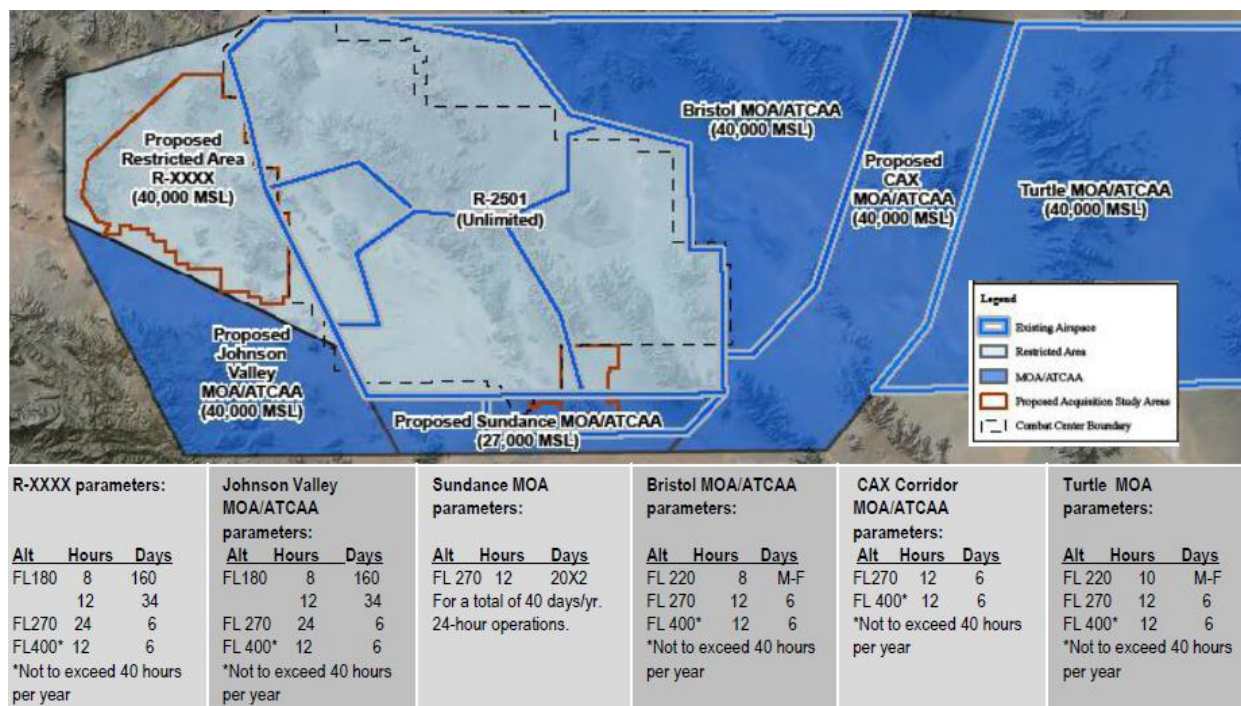


recreation areas during periods when MEB training did not require use of that land. The Alternative would allow for reopening to public recreation use approximately 40,000 acres of the acquisition area for 10 months a year.

The graphic below depicts the Alternative 6 land acquisition boundaries in the west and the south, and shows the area in which the public would have public access during the 10 months of the year when MEB training is not underway, approximately 40,000 acres. Public safety training and other public safety measures would be required to allow public access to the area following MEB training – but no dud-producing ordnance would be used in this “Restricted Public Access Area” as a public safety mitigation measure.

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Airspace associated with land acquisition Alternative 6 is further explained in the graphic below, which displays the proposed days and hours per year of use of the various SUA types during the MEB training, as well as MEB Building Block Training during other times of the year. This estimation is designed to optimally balance the interest in efficient utilization of any new training lands while also accommodating the significant demands for airspace use in the region by both commercial and civil aviation.



After evaluation of public comments on the DEIS, the Department of the Navy will prepare a Final EIS (FEIS) in which the final evaluation of alternatives, impacts and mitigation will be presented. After publication of the FEIS and evaluation of all factors – environmental, cost, mission and others – the Department of the Navy will make its decision and publish it in a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD will be publicly distributed and published in the Federal Register and local newspapers. If the ROD includes proposed land acquisition, the Department of the Navy would seek only to acquire lands and the airspace necessary to ensure that MEB training can be fulfilled.

If the ROD selects the acquisition of public lands to meet MEB training requirements, the Department of the Navy would submit a completed withdrawal application to the BLM and take other required actions. Congress and the President must approve any withdrawal. If the ROD selects the acquisition of private lands, the Department of the Navy would request funding to purchase the lands at fair market value and to take other required actions to prepare the



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property for military use. If the ROD concludes that additional Special Use Airspace needs to be established, the Department of the Navy would request that the FAA undertake the FAA's formal process to consider establishment or modification of associated Special Use Airspace for MEB training.

To “train as they fight,” the Marine Corps requires sufficient range capability to provide for MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training. Realistic training prepares Marines to succeed in their mission and helps bring them home safely from combat.



The Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy welcome the participation of all interested stakeholders in this important process, will continue to work with the many stakeholders throughout the NEPA process, and looks forward to receiving public comments on the Final EIS. The Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy will cooperate with stakeholders to allow appropriate, continuing public use of public lands during the study period. Listening to stakeholder comments throughout the NEPA process, the Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy will identify the right solution to meet Marine Corps MEB training requirements, so that Marines can be properly trained to defend our Nation, its allies and vital interests.



**For Further Information Regarding the Project Please Contact**  
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