



**Proposed Land Acquisition/Airspace Establishment in Support  
of Large-Scale MAGTF Live-Fire and Maneuver Training  
Project Description Paper—Issue 9—July 2015  
Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command  
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center  
Twentynine Palms, CA**

**Executive Summary**

Background: Marines must train as they fight. To meet tomorrow's challenges, the Marine Corps has taken and is taking the steps necessary to fulfill Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) training requirements. The Marine Corps studied alternatives for training-land acquisition and accompanying Special Use Airspace for three battalions to simultaneously maneuver in close coordination using combined-arms (i.e., 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.

Project Alternatives: The Marine Corps 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 helped to develop a range of reasonable alternatives to meet MEB training requirements, including an "Alternative 6" that would recommend continued public access to a Shared Use Area in the West Study Area when Marines would not use the area for MEB training, an area comprising 43,049 acres.

Public Involvement: A Draft EIS (DEIS) analyzed these six alternatives and a "No Action Alternative," consistent with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. It described the alternatives, how training would occur under them, their environmental impacts, and ways to mitigate those impacts. Published in February 2011 for review and comment, the DEIS drew over 650 stakeholders to attend three public meetings. It received nearly 22,000 comments from federal, state and local public agencies and elected officials, businesses, and non-governmental organizations – including conservationists, recreation enthusiasts, aviators, farmers/ranchers,

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**For Further Information Please Contact**

**29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project**

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## 29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 9

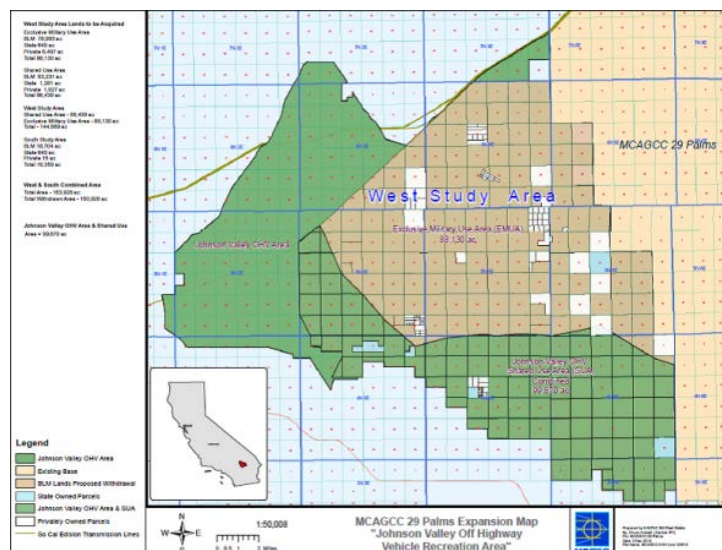
manufacturers, miners, developers and individuals. These comments were evaluated in preparing the Final EIS (FEIS), a number of additional studies were conducted, and changes were made in response to them. An FEIS was released on July 27, 2012.

**Making a Decision:** After evaluating nearly 1,000 comments on the FEIS and considering the FEIS along with costs and mission training requirements, the Secretary of the Navy published the Record of Decision (ROD) on February 15, 2013. The ROD selected a modified Alternative 6 as the alternative to meet MEB training requirements, with a recommendation for mitigation developed in coordination with the Bureau of Land Management. The Department of the Navy submitted an application to Congress for the withdrawal of public lands.

**Congressional Withdrawal:** Enacted in December 2013, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA) authorized the withdrawal of federal land and purchase of non-federal land to meet MEB training requirements. This included an Exclusive Military Use Area west and south of MCAGCC of approximately 107,000 acres. It also included an approximately 56,000 acre Shared Use Area available for public recreation 10 months per year and for military training two months of each year. The bill also designated approximately 43,000 acres as the Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area (JVOHVRA) for year-round public recreation.

**Special Use Airspace Proposals:** In April 2014, the Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy submitted Special Use Airspace (SUA) proposals to the FAA for meeting the requirements for live fire from aviation and ground-based weapons, which is necessary to support the MEB training requirement. The FAA will undertake its public involvement processes in the months, and maybe years, ahead, allowing aviation stakeholders to comment on the proposals under consideration. As it does now with its current SUA, the Marine Corps promises to release to the National Airspace System any SUA when it is not needed for military training requirements

**Resource Management Group (RMG):** With the Congressionally chosen alternative, the NDAA also established the RMG, a partnership between the BLM and the Marine Corps to alternatively manage the Shared Use Area, develop and implement a Public Outreach Plan, and draft an Implementation Agreement.

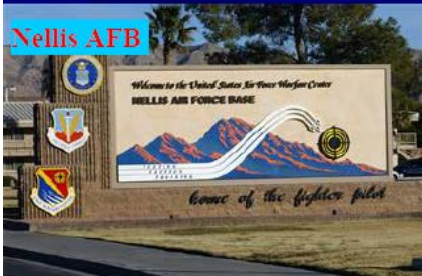


## Background

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.

A Marine Corps study, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), evaluated locations nationwide that might meet the training requirement. The CNA study concluded that expansion at MCAGCC could meet the training requirement but expansion at other installations would not. Given these findings, the United States Marine Corps evaluated a range of reasonable alternatives at MCAGCC for fulfilling MEB sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirements.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) 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.

<b><i>One of Four Combat Training Centers in DoD</i></b>	
<b>MCAGCC</b> 	<b>NTC</b> 
<b>Nellis AFB</b> 	<b>Joint Readiness Training Center AND FORT POLK</b> 

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."



**29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project  
Project Description Paper Number 9**

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.

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.



**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 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 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.

## **29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 9**

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 recent 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. The project has identified appropriate conservation and mitigation measures. The US Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion on the project concludes that the project would not likely jeopardize the desert tortoise and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat.

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 was unavailable for the type of MEB training that the Marine Corps needs to conduct.

### **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 support the MEB training requirements. In studying ways to fulfill the MEB training requirement, the Marine Corps

**29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project**  
**Project Description Paper Number 9**

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 any ROD supporting such acquisition. 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 were 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) to study areas adjacent to MCAGCC on the east, west and south of the base, 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 while the Department of the Navy completed the NEPA process. The BLM and the Marine Corps held public meetings on the withdrawal application in October 2008 and worked with stakeholders to allow uses such as recreation to continue during the study period.

The NEPA process required 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. About 360,000 total acres remained in the areas that were studied in the EIS.

In addition to the refinements in each of the five alternatives presented to the public during scoping resulting from public comments and further study, a sixth alternative was developed in response to public comments that accommodated public access to some of the lands in the west study area when Marines were not using the area for MEB training.

Set out below are maps and basic descriptions of the three most viable alternatives that were studied in the EIS, a fourth map shows the no action alternative that would not meet MEB level requirements. These alternatives were developed in response to how they met Critical Training Requirements for MEB sustained, combined-arms live-fire maneuver training and other evaluation criteria. The Critical Training Requirements were identified as:



## 29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 9

- Three Battalion Task Forces abreast converging onto a MEB objective
- 48-72 hours of continuous offensive operations toward the MEB objective
- Integrated air and ground live fires with optimized freedom of action (within reasonable constraints)

The other evaluation criteria were that the land and airspace would allow for:

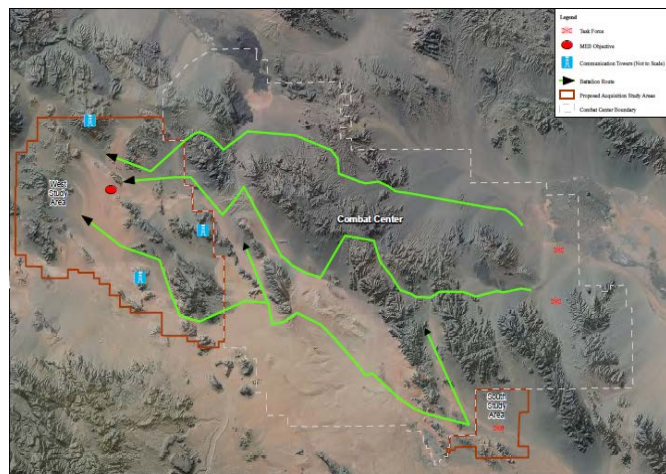
- Employment of current/future weapons systems and munitions
- Employment of tactical communications/logistics over extended distances
- Contiguousness with current MCAGCC
- Avoiding parks, critical habitat, wildlife refuges and wilderness areas
- 1000 meter buffer between live-fire areas and the base boundary

### Land Alternative 1 (West/South)

**201,657 acres**

**180,353 acres west/21,304 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. This alternative would have been the best from an operational standpoint.

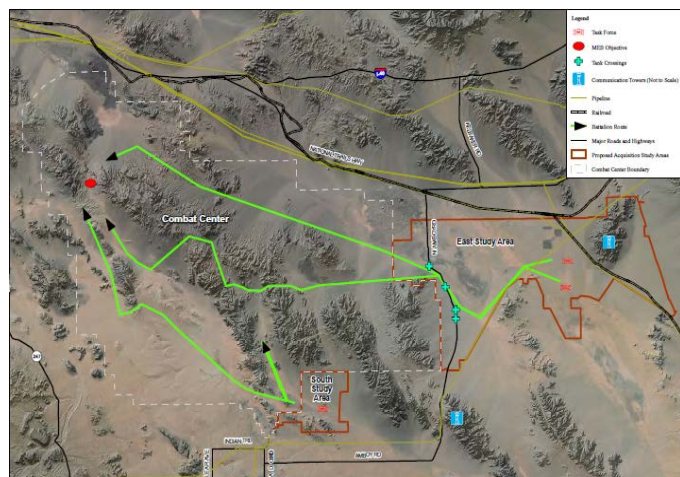


### Land Alternative 3 (South/East)

**198,580 acres**

**21,304 acres south/177,276 acres east**

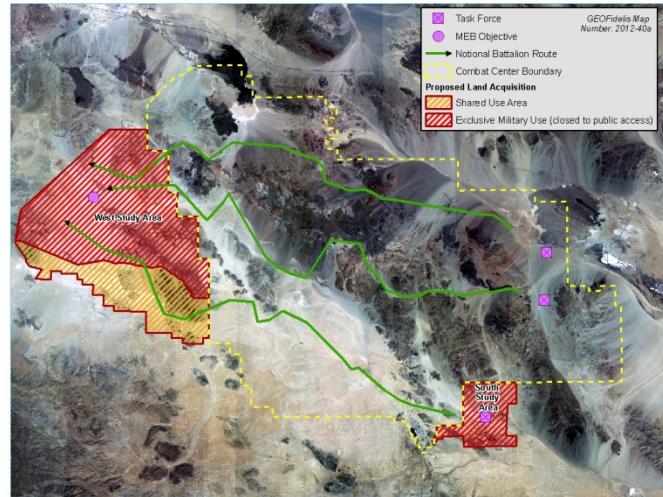
- Maneuver would start from the south and east study areas and the MEB battalions would converge on an objective within the current MCAGCC base in the northwest.
- This alternative was preferred by recreationists, as it would have the least impact on lands traditionally used for recreation but it had significant training restrictions.



## 29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 9

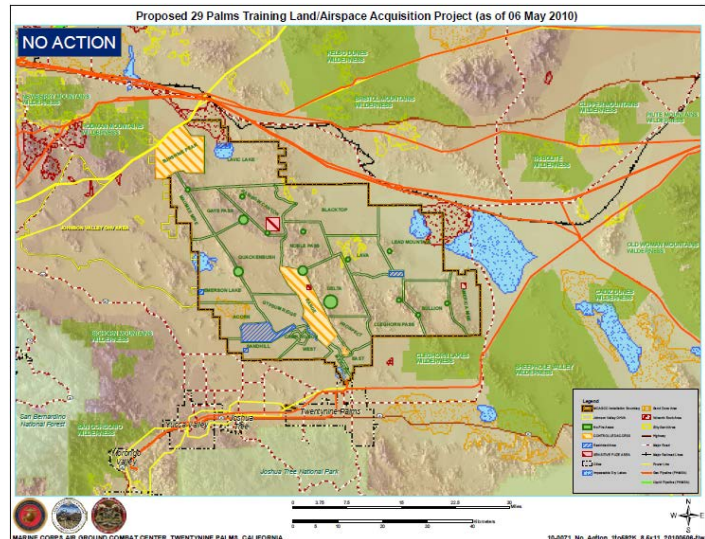
### **Land Alternative 6 (West/South) Preferred Alternative—Selected in ROD 167,971 acres 146,667 acres west/21,304 acres south**

- 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 a 43,049 acre Shared Use Area in the south of the west study area
- Shared Use Area open 10 months of the year for public use when MEB training not required.
- Under written agreement with USMC, BLM would implement the management and control of the Shared Use Area for recreation uses.
- This alternative was the optimal alternative when taking into account both operational and environmental impact together.



### **No Action Alternative Land 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.



Acquiring additional airspace is also necessary to support sustained, combined-arms live-fire maneuver MEB training. Because of similar geographic footprints among the alternatives studied for potential land acquisition, there were originally only three proposed SUA establishment and modification alternatives - one for Alternatives 1, 4, 5 and 6; one for Alternative 2; and one for Alternative 3. They are set out in the graphics that follow on the next two pages. The Department of the Navy requested the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to establish additional and



## 29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 9

modify existing SUA to support the MEB training requirements. The proposal will be reviewed by the FAA under its established processes. The three originally analyzed SUA proposals are 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:

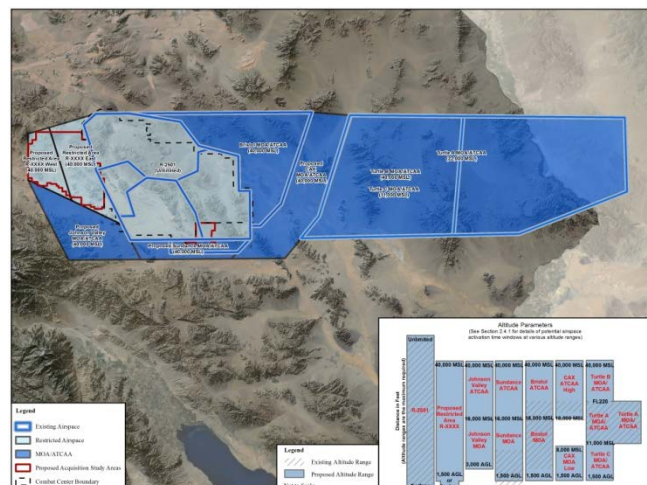
- ♦ **Restricted Area (RA):** A Restricted Area is used to contain the effects of ground-based and airborne weapons systems to ensure public safety. MCAGCC releases RA for use by all aircraft in the National Airspace System when not needed for military training. Restricted Area starts at ground level 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, 5 and 6

*Alternative 6 is the Preferred  
Alternative—Selected in the ROD*

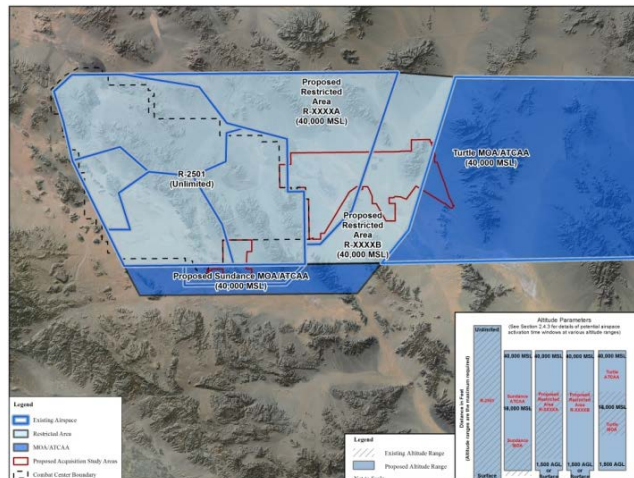
- Would add Western RA to west.
- Would add Western MOA/ATCAA.
- Would add Combined Arms Exercise MOA/ATCAA to east.
- Would expand Sundance MOA/ATCAA to the south, east and west.
- Would add vertically to Sundance, Turtle and Bristol MOAs/ATCAAs.



## 29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 9

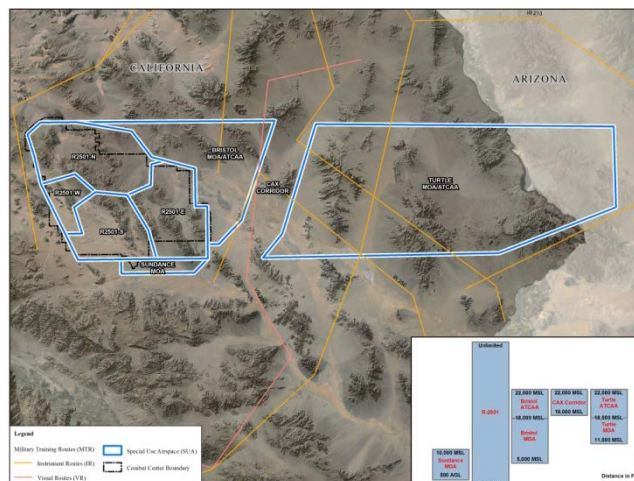
### Proposed Special Use Airspace under Land Acquisition Alternative 3

- 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.
- Would add vertically to Sundance, and Turtle MOAs/ATCAAs.



### No Action Alternative (Current Base)

- No New or Modified Airspace



Based on the Record of Decision and subsequent enactment of the NDAA land withdrawal and non-federal land acquisition, Special Use Airspace proposals to establish new SUA were submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration in April 2014. Detailed descriptions of the times, latitudes and longitudes and elevations of each specific proposal for establishment and modification, as well as graphical charts depicting the proposed SUA can be found on the web at:

<http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff/G4InstallationsandLogistics/LandAcquisition/AirspaceStudies.aspx>.

## NEPA Process—Public Involvement

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.

**29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project  
Project Description Paper Number 9**

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 will not use the area for MEB training. This range of reasonable alternatives, and a No Action Alternative, were studied in preparation of a Draft EIS that was released on February 25, 2011. Three public comment meetings were held in the region and over 650 people attended the meetings held in Joshua Tree, Ontario, and Victorville. Nearly 22,000 public comments were received on the Draft EIS and were evaluated in preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS).

The Department of the Navy prepared and released on July 27, 2012 the Final EIS that evaluated the environmental impacts associated with the proposed alternatives for land acquisition and Special Use Airspace establishment and modification, and proposed appropriate mitigation for unavoidable impacts. The BLM and FAA were cooperating agencies in producing the EIS. Other agencies and a broad range of interested stakeholders for the proposed project have participated in various stages of preparing the Draft and Final EIS, including providing scoping comments on the alternatives and issues to be studied. Overall, more than 42,000 public comments were received throughout the EIS process, including nearly 1,000 on the Final EIS itself.

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; these values were taken into account when evaluating the land alternatives. The EIS and its public comments enabled 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 led the Department of the Navy to a decision, and that final decision was based on environmental impacts evaluated in the EIS, costs, and mission training requirements. The Final EIS, in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations, included appropriate mitigation measures not already included as part of the alternatives or yet identified in the Draft EIS and further mitigation was devised after review of public comments on the Final EIS and in consultation with BLM.

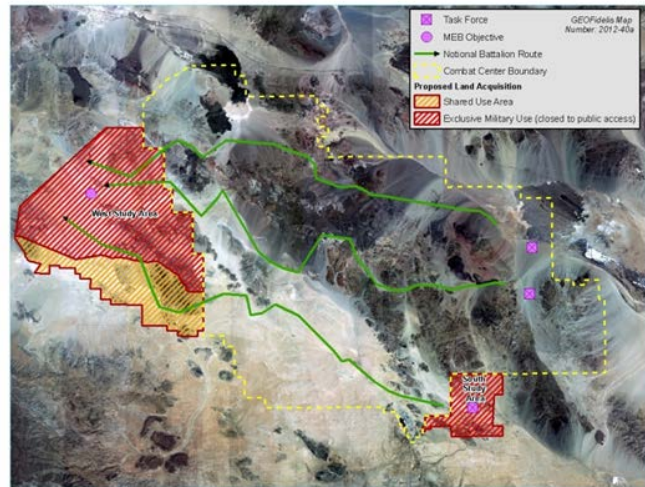


## 29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 9

Alternative 6 was selected as the Preferred Alternative in the Draft EIS, and this selection was maintained in a slightly altered form in the Final EIS. Alternative 6 is not the best alternative from a training perspective. Neither is it the best from an environmental perspective. *It was the preferred alternative because it was 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-highway recreation areas during periods when MEB training did not require use of that land. The Preferred Alternative as finalized would allow for reopening to public recreation use of 43,049 acres of the acquisition area for 10 months a year. These lands would be managed for recreation use by BLM, under written agreement with the Marine Corps, during those 10 months when not being used for training.

The graphic to the right depicts the Alternative 6 proposed land acquisition boundaries in the west and the south, and shows the 43,049 acre area in which the public would have public access during the 10 months of the year when MEB training is not underway.

After evaluation of public comments on the Final EIS, the Department of the Navy (DoN) made its decision and published its ROD on February 15, 2013. The ROD was published in the Federal Register and local newspapers. It officially deemed Alternative 6 as the Selected Alternative that would be presented to Congress for its review and approval.



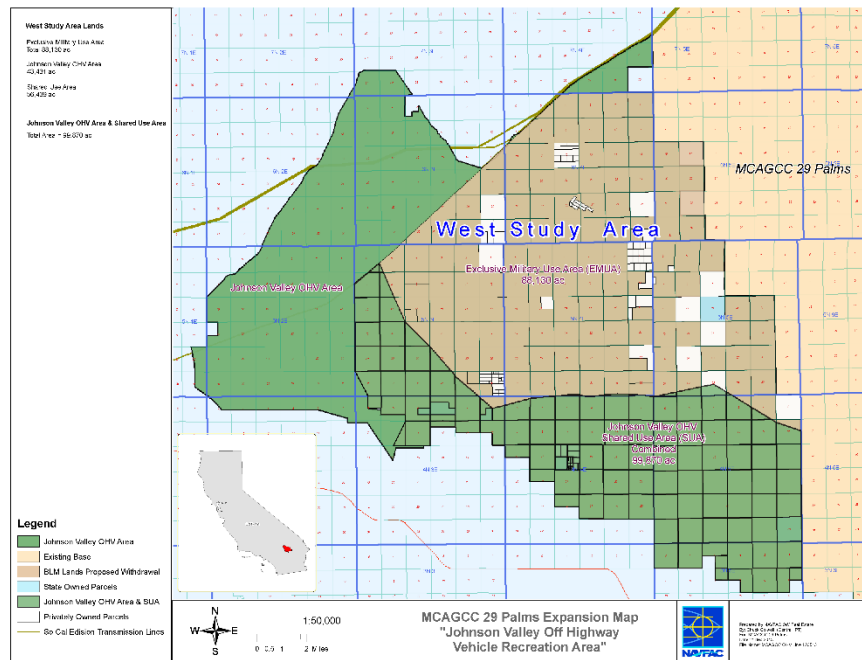
### Moving Forward

Following the ROD, in the spring of 2013 the DoN submitted a completed application to Congress to withdraw public lands in order to support Marine Corps training requirements. The proposal was received, modified and incorporated by Congress into the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 (NDAA). In December of 2013, the President signed the NDAA into law. The legislation modified the Selected Alternative to enable the Marine Corps to conduct MEB level live-fire training while also preserving more land to be available for recreation in the Shared Use Area from the original approximately 43,000 proposed acres to approximately 53,000 acres, and expanded the base by an additional 98,000 acres for exclusive military use. Additionally the legislation designated approximately 43,000 acres as the Johnson Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area, available for recreation year-round.

## 29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project Project Description Paper Number 9

The map to the right outlines the congressionally designated areas as a result of the NDAA slightly modified from the Selected Alternative of the ROD.

- The Congressional alternative allows for the Marine Corps to meet training requirements while preserving land for recreational use
- 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 into the 56,000 acre Shared Use Area in the south of the west study area
- Shared Use Area open 10 months of the year for public use when MEB training not required.



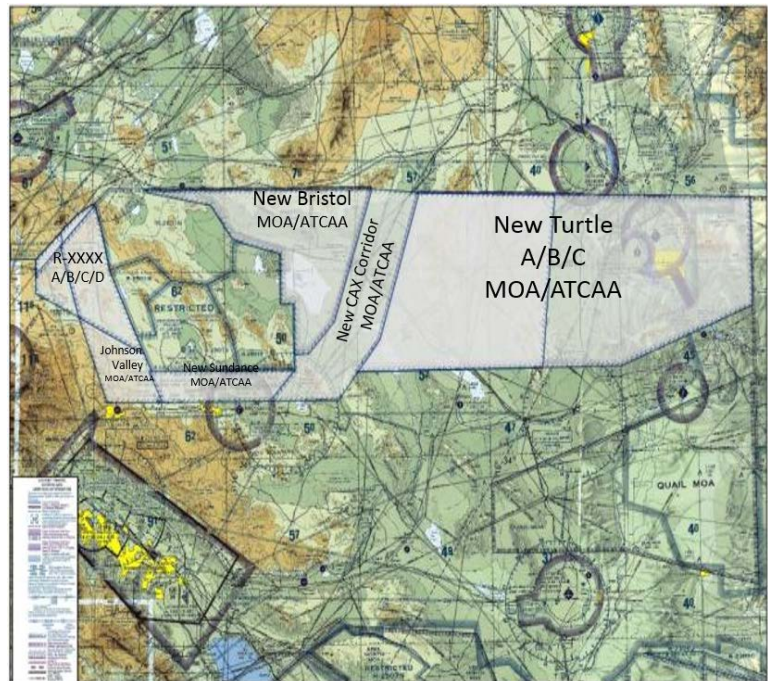
The Congressional decision for these land use changes also necessitated the purchase of non-federal lands that were within the acquisition area, for which Congress appropriated funds. All private or state lands within the plan area have been evaluated for fair market value and are already acquired or in negotiations.

Additionally, mandated by the legislation was the establishment of the Resource Management Group (RMG), for the cooperative management of the Shared Use Area, and to solicit input from stakeholders as to the management and facilitation of public recreation and other uses when military training is not occurring. The RMG was activated via Charter in June 2014, and is a collaborative effort between the MCAGCC and BLM. The RMG is required 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, and meet at least once per year.

Once the footprint of the land acquisition was enacted into law, the Department of the Navy submitted proposals to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to establish new and modify current SUA to support the MEB training and MEB Building Block training that will occur on the

**29Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project  
Project Description Paper Number 9**

newly acquired lands. This proposal is currently being reviewed by the FAA under its established processes. The chart to the right depicts the aggregate SUA proposal that would provide for additions to the current SUA at MCAGCC to support MEB and MEB Building Block training. As noted above, please see the information at the web site noted above for details on the longitudes, latitudes, altitudes and times of use for each of the SUA components.



**Conclusion**

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 will continue to cooperate with stakeholders to allow appropriate, continuing public use of withdrawn public lands. Listening to stakeholder comments throughout the NEPA process, the Marine Corps, Department of the Navy, and Congress identified 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 as balanced against other resources requirements. We will continue to be good neighbors in the High Desert and will work in collaboration with BLM, local communities and the off-highway vehicle recreationalists to make the continued recreational enjoyment in the Shared Use Area a hallmark

of collaboration and partnership.



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

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