



**What Is The Proposed 29Palms Training
Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment Project?
Frequently Asked Questions—Airspace Related
February 14, 2013**



RECORD OF DECISION (ROD) SIGNED BY SECRETARY OF THE NAVY FEBRUARY 11, 2013

1. **The ROD selects Alternative 6, the Preferred Alternative, to meet the Marine Corps Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirement.**
 - After careful consideration of the purpose and need for the proposed action, the analysis contained in the Final EIS, further consultation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and comments received on the Draft and Final EIS from Federal, State, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individual members of the public, the Department of the Navy selected Alternative 6.
 - Alternative 6, while not the best alternative from either an operational or environmental impact perspective, is the optimal alternative given both the operational and environmental impact factors considered together. This determination is based on the training value afforded by Alternative 6 and the amount of land area that will still be available and accessible to the public for recreational purposes.
 - The Department of the Navy (DoN) has submitted a withdrawal application to BLM and will submit a proposal for lands in the Alternative 6 footprint to Congress for the purposes of military training (and the shared use of 43,049 acres of these lands with the public for recreation 10 months of the year).
 - DoN will also seek to secure appropriations to pay fair market value for non-federal lands in the Alternative 6 footprint, to implement mitigation measures, and to prepare and equip the new lands for training purposes.
 - DoN will also submit an airspace proposal to the Federal Aviation Administration for establishment and modification of the Special Use Airspace required to meet the MEB exercises and MEB Building Block Training.
2. **Additional recreation acreage made available as mitigation in the ROD.**
 - The ROD recommends further mitigation for recreation impacts by including an additional 4,912 acres to a Shared Use Area available for public recreation 10 months of the year. This recommended adjustment would expand the Shared Use Area to a total of 43,049 acres.
 - By not selecting Alternative 1, the best alternative from a military training perspective, 42,803 acres in the Johnson Valley OHV area remains available to the public year round.
 - If withdrawal is approved by Congress, the Combat Center would enter into a written agreement with BLM to implement the management and control of the Shared Use Area.
 - If the withdrawal is approved by Congress, the Marine Corps and BLM will establish a Resource Management Group to address all issues associated with the Shared Use Area and will implement an effective community/public outreach plan to ensure the public is given every opportunity to understand the change in land use and potential dangers.

For Further Information Please Contact

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3. Why did the Marine Corps and the DON select Alternative 6?

- Alternative 6 was selected in the Draft EIS as the preferred alternative because it is the optimal alternative considering operational and environmental impact factors together. With slight changes in response to public comments on the Draft EIS and the Final EIS, it remains the preferred alternative.
- Alternative 6 was developed in response to public comments and was designed to preserve public access to important off-road recreation areas during periods when Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) training did not require use of those lands. It would allow for reopening 43,049 acres of the acquisition area to public recreation use for 10 months a year.
- Alternative 6 does not meet the MEB training operational requirements as well as Alternative 1, but Alternative 1 does not provide for public access to any of the training lands that would be acquired. *(From an operational perspective, Alternative 1 is the best alternative.)*
- While Alternative 5 is the environmentally preferred alternative, it is a very poor alternative from an operational perspective due to terrain restrictions that would limit training activities.

4. Is this a done deal?

- Congress and the President will have to approve the withdrawal. Any non-federal lands would be purchased at fair market value and Congress and the President will have to approve the appropriation of the funds to purchase those lands.
- The FAA will have to make a formal decision on the DoN airspace request after receiving further public comment during its own processes and EIS preparation.

**FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (FINAL EIS) WAS MADE AVAILABLE FOR
PUBLIC REVIEW ON JULY 27, 2012**

1. Major changes between the Draft EIS and the Final EIS based on further study and public comment.

- An additional mitigation measure for recreation was developed and added. A Displaced Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Study was added in response to public comments.
- Four additional special conservation measures for biological resources were added that include new Special Use Areas and discussion of a tortoise translocation plan.
- Airspace sections were revised and updated per coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration.
- An analysis of air quality impacts to sensitive receptors was added in response to public comments.
- Analyses of single-event noise and noise-generated vibrations results were undertaken and added in response to public comments.

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- Impacts from ordnance on water wells analysis was undertaken in response to public comments and added.
- Agency correspondence with the California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), California Native American Heritage Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District has been added.
- Public comments and the USMC responses to comments were added.

2. What does the Final EIS show about the impacts to the environment of the proposed action?

- As analyzed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) guidelines, the Final EIS shows that the alternatives studied would have less than significant impacts on air quality (except for Alternative 3), socio-economics (except for Alternative 3 cumulative impacts), public health and safety, visual resources, transportation (except for Alternative 3), noise, geological resources and water resources (except for Alternative 3).
- As analyzed under NEPA and CEQ guidelines, the Final EIS shows that the alternatives studied would have significant impacts on land use, recreation (except Alternative 3), airspace management, and cultural and biological resources. The Marine Corps continues consultation with the Federal Aviation Administration on airspace configurations and use that would sufficiently support MEB and MEB-building block training while allowing for effective overall management of the national air space.
- As analyzed under NEPA and CEQ guidelines, the Final EIS shows that for all alternatives studied, the direct and indirect environmental impacts to cultural resources are less than significant. However, when cumulative environmental impacts were assessed (which includes known other projects) the environmental impacts to cultural resources became significant under all alternatives.
- The Marine Corps is proposing mitigation measures for five resource areas, as appropriate to the Alternative, including special conservation measures developed in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for impacts to biological resources, especially the desert tortoise.
- The Marine Corps and US FWS have completed formal consultation under the Endangered Species Act regarding effects to the threatened Desert tortoise. In its Biological Opinion (BO) of the proposed actions dated July 17, 2012 the USFWS concluded the proposed action was not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the desert tortoise, nor destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat. The BO also identifies specific avoidance, minimization and conservation measures, as well as required terms and conditions.

3. Would additional noise impact the outlying communities?

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- The Marine Corps has studied potential noise impacts in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement analysis and the study has determined that noise impacts of any land acquisition or airspace establishment would likely remain on board the installation. This does not mean that some noise would not be heard off base, but the noise would not be significant.
 - In response to public comments on the Draft EIS, additional noise studies were undertaken to complete the Final EIS, including for single-event noise and for noise-generated vibrations.
- 4. What is the significance of impacts to resources like recreation, species and habitat, use of airspace, land use, transportation, health and so forth?**
- The two tables below and on the following page show a comparison of the impacts by resource type and alternative, both as direct and indirect effects (first table) and as cumulative effects (second table).

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SUMMARY OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES						
ALTERNATIVE	1	2	3	4	5	6 (PREFERRED)
CHANGE IN CONDITIONS						
LAND ACQUIRED (ACRES)	201,657	134,863	198,580	201,657	180,353	167,971
SHARED USE AREA	No	No	No	YES – ON 180,353 ACRES	YES – ON ALL	YES, ON 43,049 ACRES
UNDERTAKE MEB BUILDING BLOCK TRAINING IN NEW AREAS	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	YES, ON 103,618 ACRES
CHANGE IN PERSONNEL	70	65	59	77	77	77
RESOURCE AREA IMPACTS						
LAND USE	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
RECREATION	SI	SI	LSI	SI	SI	SI
SOCIOECONOMICS	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
VISUAL RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
TRANSPORTATION	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI
AIRSPACE MANAGEMENT	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
AIR QUALITY	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI
NOISE *	---	---	---	---	---	---
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
CULTURAL RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
GEOLOGICAL RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
WATER RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI

NOTES: SI = SIGNIFICANT IMPACT; LSI = LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT IMPACT; NI = NO IMPACT.

*THE NOISE SECTIONS OF THIS EIS DESCRIBE ONLY THE POTENTIAL CHANGES IN NOISE LEVELS UNDER EACH ALTERNATIVE. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANY NOISE-RELATED IMPACTS IS ASSESSED AS A FUNCTION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES THAT MAY BE AFFECTED BY NOISE (E.G., BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES, LAND USE, ETC). THEREFORE, NOISE-RELATED IMPACTS ARE ASSESSED AS APPROPRIATE IN THE RELEVANT IMPACT SECTIONS FOR THOSE OTHER RESOURCES.

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SUMMARY OF CUMULATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS						
ALTERNATIVE	1	2	3	4	5	6 (PREFERRED)
CHANGE IN CONDITIONS						
LAND ACQUIRED (ACRES)	201,657	134,863	198,580	201,657	180,353	167,971
SHARED USE AREA	No	No	No	YES – ON 180,353 ACRES	YES - ALL	YES – ON 43,049 ACRES
MEB BUILDING BLOCK TRAINING	YES	YES	YES	No	No	YES – ON 103,618 ACRES
CHANGE IN PERSONNEL	70	65	59	77	77	77
RESOURCE AREA IMPACTS						
LAND USE	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
RECREATION	SI	SI	NI	SI	SI	SI
SOCIOECONOMICS	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI
PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
VISUAL RESOURCES	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	LSI
TRANSPORTATION	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI
AIRSPACE MANAGEMENT	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI
AIR QUALITY	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI
NOISE*	---	---	---	---	---	---
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
CULTURAL RESOURCES	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI
GEOLOGICAL RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI	LSI
WATER RESOURCES	LSI	LSI	SI	LSI	LSI	LSI

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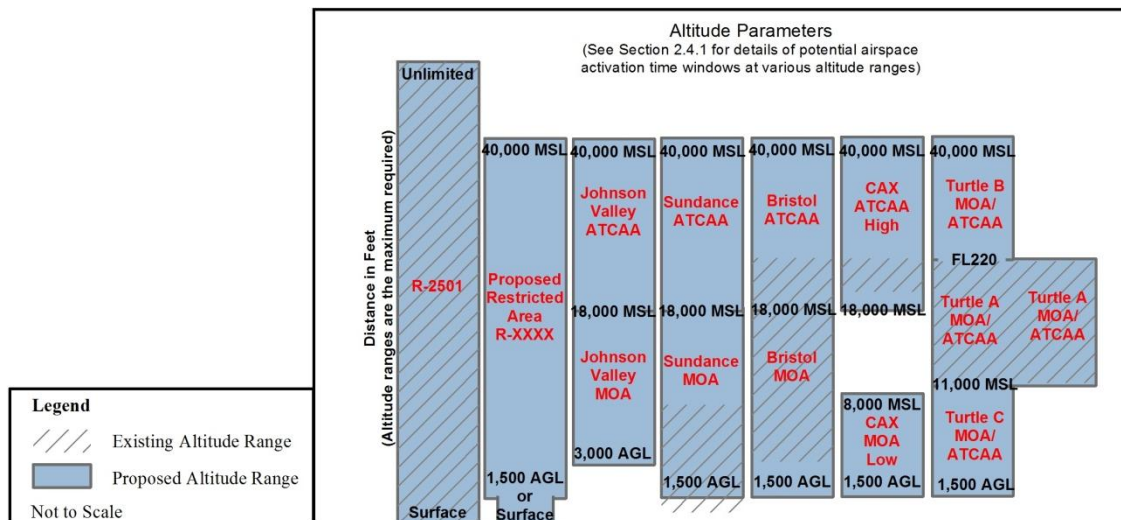
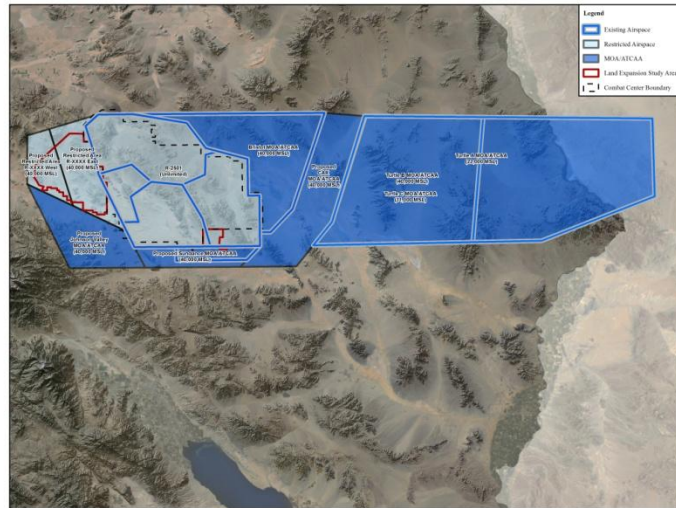


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5. What Special Use Airspace is proposed for establishment or modification in Alternative 6, the Preferred Alternative?

- The graphics to the right and on the following pages below depict the Special Use Airspace proposed for establishment and modification in Alternative 6—selected in the ROD, including the days and hours of proposed use.
- When Special Use Airspace associated with the installation is not needed for military training, it will be returned to the National Airspace system for use.
- Special Use Airspace is required both for aviation training and ground training. Restricted Airspace is used for airborne weapons, such as guns, missiles and bombs, as well as for the use of artillery, mortars, ground-launched missiles, tank guns, small arms and other ground-based weapons.



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R-XXXX parameters:			Johnson Valley MOA/ATCAA parameters:			Sundance MOA/ATCAA parameters:			Bristol MOA/ATCAA parameters:			CAX Corridor MOA/ATCAA parameters:			Turtle MOA/ATCAA parameters:
Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days	Alt	Hours	Days	Turtle A MOA/ATCAA from 11,000 feet MSL to FL220 from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Mon-Fri; other times by NOTAM
FL180	8	160	FL180	8	160	FL180	12	28**	FL180	12	28+	FL180 - FL270	24	6++	Turtle B and C sectors from 1,500 feet AGL to FL270 for up to 24 hours per day for 6 days.++
	12	28		12	28				FL270	24	6++	FL180 - FL400	12	6+++*	Turtle B and C sectors from 1,500 feet AGL to FL400 for up to 12 hours per day for six days.*
FL270	24	6	FL270	24	6	FL270	24	6	FL270	24	6++	1,500 – 8,000 feet			
FL400	12	6	FL400	12	6*	FL400	12	6*	FL400	12	6+++*	MSL24FL270	24	6++	
												1,500 – 8,000 feet			
												MSL24FL270	12	6+++*	

Days are per year.

*not to exceed 40 hours per year

**1,500 feet AGL to 10,000 feet MSL intermittently by Notice to Airmen (NOTAM)

+5,000 feet AGL to FL220 from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday-Friday, others times by NOTAM;

++ by NOTAM

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MARINE CORPS REQUIREMENTS DRIVE THE 29 PALMS LAND/AIRSPACE STUDY

1. What is the training requirement driving the project?

- A MEB training exercise requires sustained (48-72 hours), continuous offensive action (combined arms, live fire and maneuver) with three battalions moving abreast—in three different corridors—and with, at a minimum, two battalions converging on a single objective. The MEB includes a Ground Combat Element, an Air Combat Element, a Command Element and a Combat Logistics Element.
- The MEB elements constitute about 15,000 personnel.
- Combined arms means that ground-based and airborne weapons systems, including direct and indirect fire, will be used in the training exercise.

2. What do you mean by “Marines must train as they fight?”

- Training is mission rehearsal. To meet training requirements, Marines must train under conditions that closely approximate those of the battlefield.
- By training as they fight, Marines become proficient in tactics, techniques, and procedures both as individuals and as units. This training concept is as essential for success in military operations as it is in nearly all other team activities.
- Marines will instinctively do as they are trained. Because Marines are equipped and deployed to combat as a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), they must train to the MAGTF training standards before deployment.
- Marines need to train as a MAGTF to succeed. Doing less will jeopardize their safety and degrade mission readiness. A MEB, one type of MAGTF of about 15,000 Marines, is the Marine Corps’ primary contingency response force.
- A MEB must train realistically, with all elements – ground combat, air combat, logistics and command – involved in the sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training exercise.

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POTENTIAL SPECIAL USE AIRSPACE RESPONDS TO TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

1. Why did the Marine Corps study the establishment or modification of Special Use Airspace?

- Advanced weapons systems now provide military forces with greater capabilities for detecting and countering enemy threats at greater distances. This has required that range and airspace areas be expanded, where necessary and feasible, to enable these forces to train in an environment that is more representative of realistic combat conditions. For that reason, the Marine Corps requires corresponding training airspace to support MEB training.
- A Restricted Area is used to contain the effects of ground-based and airborne weapons systems to ensure public safety. Military Operations Areas (MOAs) provide airspace where attack maneuver and other activities can be carried out, but no live fire occurs in an MOA. Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA), which normally overlays an MOA (at altitudes above 18,000 feet) is like an MOA in that it allows non-military aircraft to be vectored through at the discretion of the local air traffic control authority.
- A MEB is a combined-arms force known as an Air Ground Task Force. The Marines deploy to combat as a combined-arms unit, which includes air and ground combat elements (along with command and logistics elements).
- To ensure that MEB training requirements are fulfilled, both training lands and training Special Use Airspace must be sufficient to provide for sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver and provide sufficient buffer for public safety.

2. How will this airspace decision be made?

- In preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), both land and airspace issues and resource impacts were evaluated through the analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), as the civil aviation authority, was an important cooperating agency in the project EIS.
- Throughout the EIS process, the FAA cooperated with the Department of the Navy during study of alternatives to establish, expand or modify Special Use Airspace. With the FAA's cooperation and expertise, the Department of the Navy was able to prepare an EIS that should provide significant analysis and information to support subsequent FAA decision making.
- The ROD determined that Special Use Airspace needs to be established and modified to meet the MEB training requirements. DoN will submit an airspace proposal to support training land acquisition. The FAA will then conduct formal airspace customer feasibility forums, and undertake the appropriate processes, including formal, established procedures to analyze the airspace proposal request.
- If the FAA concludes that additional Special Use Airspace should be established, or current airspace modified, at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) to support

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MEB training requirements, it would establish or modify such Special Use Airspace per its published process.

3. Would this program result in any new restrictions being placed on commercial airline or civil aviation over flights?

- Through its long-standing working relationship with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Marine Corps will continue to work to minimize disruption to the National Airspace System.
- Existing Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) airspace impacts on commercial or civil aviation flights over or near MCAGCC might be extended over any newly-acquired land due to safety issues involved with live-fire, combined arms air-ground task force training.
- The Marine Corps will work with the FAA and aviation stakeholders on issues examined during the Environmental Impact Statement.
- The Marine Corps supports FAA efforts to optimize the safe use of airspace over the installation by commercial and civil aviation.

4. What types of airspace are used to support military training at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)?

- Restricted Area (RA): Non-military aircraft are prohibited from entering during military training activities that involve live fire; MCAGCC releases it for use by all aircraft in the National Airspace System when not needed for military training.
- 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): Similar to an MOA (and usually overlaying an MOA) within Class A airspace (18,000-60,000 feet), non-military aircraft may fly in ATCAA during military training so long as air traffic controllers can maintain IFR separation from military aircraft; only non-hazardous military activities may be undertaken in ATCAA.

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THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS ENSURES PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND INPUT

1. How long has this potential acquisition been in the works?

- The Marine Corps' Requirements Oversight Council (MROC) initiated the effort in 2002 by asking for a study to determine how best to meet future training requirements. Once MROC determined the requirement to provide sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training for a Marine Expeditionary Brigade, they initiated further studies to see how to meet those training requirements. A study, conducted by the Center for Naval Analyses, showed that the ranges in the southwest United States provided the training area for a MEB, and that an expanded Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) was the best location to meet the training requirement. The MROC authorized a study to look into potential land acquisition at MCAGCC. That decision has been reviewed at various levels within the Department of the Navy and the Department of Defense since, and has received validation and confirmation through all echelons.

2. How has the public expressed its views of the project alternatives? To what extent is the Marine Corps currently coordinating with the public? What other opportunities for public comment will exist?

- Nearly 1,000 comments were received on the Final EIS and evaluated in the preparation of the ROD.
- Nearly 22,000 comments were received from the public on the Draft EIS, and over 650 people attended three meetings to review the Draft EIS analysis of the environmental impacts, on both natural and socio-economic resources, of the various alternatives. Stakeholder comments – including from public agencies; state, local and tribal governments; businesses, non-governmental organizations such as conservationists, recreation enthusiasts and developers and individuals, for example – were studied during preparation of the Final EIS.
- Nearly 20,000 public comments were also received during the three-month EIS scoping period that ended January 31, 2009. These comments helped to shape the studies and analyses, and led to the development of a sixth alternative – which has become the Marine Corps' Preferred Alternative.
- The Marine Corps worked closely with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Federal Aviation Administration throughout the EIS process. These cooperating agencies helped to ensure that all stakeholder concerns were addressed during preparation of the EIS.
- Representatives of the Marine Corps, including Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) personnel, regularly met with stakeholders to discuss issues, both aboard Marine Corps installations and in community forums, to draw community perspectives into the planning processes.
- The public will be able to comment to Congress during the legislative withdrawal process for public lands and during the FAA process to establish and/or modify Special Use Airspace.

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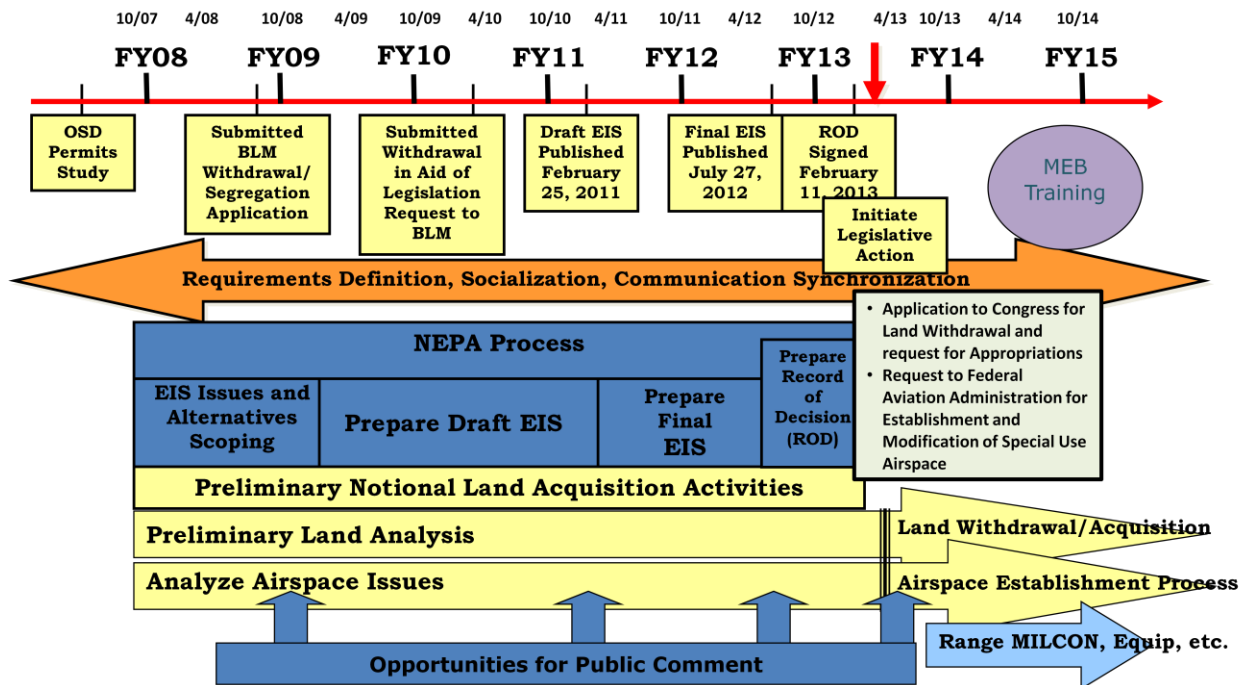
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3. What is the Project timeline?

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) development process took more than four years to complete, including public review and comment. The Draft EIS was released on February 25, 2011; the Final EIS was released on July 27, 2012. The NEPA process has taken almost four and one-half years, culminating in the signing of the ROD on February 11, 2013.
- The ROD selects Alternative 6, which purchases non-federal lands and recommends to Congress the withdrawal of Department of Interior lands, and submits a proposal to FAA for the establishment and modification of Special Use Airspace.
- DoN has submitted a withdrawal application to BLM and will submit a proposal for lands in Alternative 6 for Congress to consider. The Navy hopes that Congress will include the land withdrawal in the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act.
- DoN will request the FAA to undertake its formal process to consider establishment or modification of Special Use Airspace, which should conclude in 2014.
- The goal is to have Marines training in these new training lands and airspace in 2014, and to undertake a MEB training exercise in 2015.

4. The timeline below displays those objectives.



For Further Information Please Contact

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