

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and SEIS Fact Sheet**

### **1. What happened since the 2012 Land Acquisition EIS?**

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment to meet the Marine Corps Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) sustained, combined arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirement took nearly four and one half 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; and the ROD was released on February 15, 2013. The Final EIS for the land acquisition incorporated further consultation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and comments received from Federal, State, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, and individual members of the public. The Department of the Navy (DoN) selected Alternative 6 in the Record of Decision (ROD), which reflected a balance between reducing environmental impacts and meeting mission requirements. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA) authorized the withdrawal of federal land and purchase of non-federal land adjacent to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (the Combat Center) to meet the Marine Corps MEB sustained, combined arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirement.
- The withdrawal included an Exclusive Military Use Area west and south of the Combat Center 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 for year round public recreation.
- The expansion of the Combat Center led to the preservation of approximately 15,000 acres of habitat for threatened and/or endangered species within the newly acquired areas, as well as neighboring Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The desert tortoise population within this newly-acquired training land has been identified for translocation in order to sustain their survivability in accordance with the Final EIS.
- The Marine Corps continues to acquire privately-owned parcels, finalize the tortoise translocation plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and establish new airspace, in order to utilize the Shared Use Area for eventual MEB training. A Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental EIS (SEIS) was published in the Federal Register on August 24, 2016. As a proven good steward of natural and cultural resources, the Marine Corps is sincere in its desire to facilitate public and agency input through the SEIS process, ensuring a quality environmental document to guide the tortoise translocation process.

## **2. Why prepare a Supplemental EIS?**

- In its Biological Opinion (BO) of the 2012 EIS's 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 adversely modify its critical habitat. Since the 2012 FEIS and 2013 ROD, the Marine Corps has conducted additional detailed studies and has worked cooperatively with USFWS and the BLM on alternative translocation plans for the desert tortoise, as required in the 2012 BO and 2013 ROD. The BO is currently under revision. This environmental study will not change or amend the land withdrawals that are federal law.
- In light of new information gained from these efforts, the DoN has elected to prepare a SEIS focusing on the evaluation of potential impacts of alternative tortoise relocation plans, and environmental effects associated primarily with biological resources, land use, air quality, and cultural resources related to the translocation.
- The purpose of the proposed action evaluated in the SEIS is to improve the long-term success of desert tortoise translocation in support of the project that was described in the 2012 EIS, selected in the 2013 ROD, and authorized by the Fiscal Year 2014 NDAA.
- The Marine Corps needs to implement the SEIS proposed action to satisfy requirements identified in the 2012 BO.
- By supplementing the 2012 Final EIS, the SEIS will advance the NEPA's purpose of informing decision-makers and the public about the environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

## **3. What will the SEIS focus on?**

- The SEIS will analyze the potential environmental impacts of alternative plans and locations for implementing a Desert Tortoise Translocation Program in support of MEB-sized training exercises on the newly acquired lands.
- The SEIS will consider a no-action alternative (implement the 2011 General Translocation Plan originally evaluated in the 2012 BO) and two action alternatives for desert tortoise translocation (plans completed in March and June of 2016, respectively). All three alternative plans identify recipient sites (to which tortoises would be translocated) and control sites (where the resident tortoise population will be studied to provide comparative data on survival, and threats to survival, habitat stability and changes, and health and disease relative to the translocated tortoise populations at the recipient sites). Each alternative will also include details of the proposed tortoise translocation, including specific handling procedures, fencing, clearance surveys, and post-translocation multi-year monitoring activities. The proposed tortoise translocation plans were developed in consultation with USFWS and BLM.
- The SEIS will analyze in detail the environmental effects associated with biological resources,

land use, air quality, and cultural resources. Other resources that were assessed in the 2012 EIS were considered but not carried forward for further analysis in the SEIS based on the characteristics of the SEIS proposed action. The SEIS will explain the rationale for not carrying forward any specific resources. The analysis of resources in the SEIS will include an evaluation of direct and indirect impacts, and will account for cumulative impacts from other relevant activities.

**4. What agencies will take part in the SEIS process?**

- The DoN is the Action Proponent and Lead Agency preparing the SEIS, in cooperation with the BLM, which is designated as a cooperating agency. A cooperating agency is any federal agency, other than the lead agency, which has jurisdiction by law or special expertise concerning an environmental impact involved in a proposal. Due to the nature and scope of the proposed action, including BLM land ownership, the participation of the BLM as a cooperating agency has been established.
- The Final Desert Tortoise Translocation Plan is being developed in consultation with USFWS. Details on the methods, recipient/control sites and research treatments will be included in the Biological Opinion and SEIS.
- Other stakeholders that will be engaged in the environmental process consist of elected officials, government and regulatory agencies, NGOs, the general public, and the media through early and open communication. Affected Federally Recognized Tribes will be formally consulted as appropriate, and in compliance with Executive Order 13175.

**5. Will the outcome of the SEIS affect current established boundaries of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, the Shared Use Area, or the Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area?**

- No, the SEIS seeks only to address tortoise translocation alternatives to meet the purpose and need of the proposed action and to assess any environmental effects associated primarily with biological resources, land use, air quality, and cultural resources related to the translocation. Boundaries of the Combat Center, the Shared Use Area, and the Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area will not be affected.

**6. Has the Combat Center ever conducted tortoise translocation?**

- Yes, successful translocation has taken place in the past. In 2006, the Combat Center translocated 17 adult tortoises to support construction of Range 220. Of the 17 animals there was only one mortality during the three years of post-translocation monitoring, which equates to 98% annual survivorship. Additionally, no impacts were detected on resident tortoises monitored in the recipient population.
- Over 475 desert tortoises have been hatched and reared at the Combat Center's desert tortoise Headstart Facility, a program undertaken in cooperation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service

and academic researchers. Young tortoises remain at the Combat Center's Tortoise Research and Captive Rearing Site (TRACRS) until they grow large enough to better survive on their own.

- The program is a long-term assessment of how to protect nests, hatchlings and juveniles until they grow resilient enough to endure the harsh physical environment, resist most predation by Common Ravens and Coyotes, and mature to fully-functional adults that produce offspring that also support the population.
- The Combat Center's Headstart program generated annual survivorship between approximately 80 and 96% (compared to about 40% or less in the wild), and released the first cohort of juveniles (35 nine-year olds, 110 to 140 mm or 4 to 5 inches long) to the wild in the Fall of 2015. Collecting and analyzing survivorship data for released tortoises is the next major phase in our headstart commitment to support the recovery of the desert tortoise.

#### **7. Does the SEIS consider previous efforts to translocate?**

- Yes, along with the lessons learned from the 2006 translocation, the DoN has adapted lessons learned from other translocation projects from across the Mojave Desert. Selected recipient sites assessed in the SEIS show low coyote/dog predation rates and are far from human habitation. By selecting recipient sites based on habitat quality, similar topography/terrain, and by releasing translocated tortoises in groupings spatially and socially similar to the sites from which they were removed, stress will be reduced. Also, the animals will be handled and transported only within temperature guidelines approved by the USFWS, and they will be hydrated before release.
- The Marine Corps, the BLM, and USFWS are taking measures to ensure the success of the translocation and mortality is not expected to exceed what the species is experiencing in the Mojave Desert.
- The Department of Defense, the U.S. Marine Corps, and the Combat Center's well-recognized environmental program understand that the lands they use for training are a part of the public trust and are committed to being good environmental stewards of the lands placed under their management.

#### **8. Will management of the Shared Use Area be affected by the outcome of this SEIS?**

- No, consistent with federal law, BLM will continue to manage the nearly 56,000 acre Shared Use Area for 10 months of the year during which it is available to the public for recreational use. The Marine Corps will manage the land during two 30-day periods of the year for military training. The proposed action will not change or amend the land withdrawal.

#### **9. How can the public be involved in this process?**

- The public will have the opportunity to review the Draft SEIS, scheduled for public release in October 2016 and available for a 45-day public review. The DoN will issue a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register when the Draft SEIS is complete.

- A public information meeting will be held in the communities of Joshua Tree, Palm Springs, and Barstow.
- Public comments are invited during the 45-day public review period via the SEIS project website: [www.SEISforLAA.com](http://www.SEISforLAA.com)
- Further background and historical documents, including the 2012 Final EIS, can be found on: <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff/G4InstallationsandLogistics/LandAcquisition.aspx>

**10. Besides the websites, where else can I read the SEIS or related documents?**

Documents and other public materials can be obtained at the following locations:

**Newton T. Bass Apple Valley Library**

14901 Dale Evans Parkway  
Apple Valley, CA 92307

**Victorville City Library**

15011 Circle Drive  
Victorville, CA 92395

**Barstow Branch Library**

304 E. Buena Vista St.  
Barstow, CA 92311

**Yucca Valley Branch Library**

57098 Twentynine Palms Highway  
Yucca Valley, CA 92284

**Palm Springs Public Library**

300 S. Sunrise Way  
Palm Springs, CA 92262

**Joshua Tree Library**

6465 Park Blvd.  
Joshua Tree, CA 92284

**Stanley Mosk Library and Courts Building**

914 Capitol Mall  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Lucerne Valley Janice Horst Branch Library**

33103 Old Woman Springs Road  
Lucerne Valley, CA 92356

**San Bernardino County Library**

**Administrative Offices**

777 E. Rialto Avenue.  
San Bernardino, CA 92415

**Needles Branch Library**

1111 Bailey Ave.  
Needles, CA 92363

**Twentynine Palms Library**

6078 Adobe Road  
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277

**Ovitt Family Community Library**

215 E. C St.  
Ontario, CA 91764

In addition, persons who wish to be added to the mailing list may send a request to the SEIS project manager at the address below or call 760-830-3737.

29Palms SEIS Project Team  
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