

**Scoping Summary Report
Environmental Impact Statement for the
Proposed Twentynine Palms Training
Land/Airspace Acquisition Project**

**Final Report
June 2009**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Scoping Summary Report has been developed by the United States Marine Corps (USMC) to present a summary and overview of the scoping process conducted for the proposed Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) at Twentynine Palms, California. This report discusses the materials prepared as well as public input obtained during the scoping process. Furthermore, the primary issues and concerns raised by the public during the scoping period are identified and discussed.

During the 90-day public scoping period (30 October 2008 through 31 January 2009), the USMC utilized several methods to notify the public of opportunities for involvement and methods to comment during scoping (i.e., publishing a Notice of Intent (NOI), mailing scoping letters and postcards, press releases, newspaper advertisements, and a public website). In addition, three open-house public scoping meetings were held to allow the public the opportunity to review and learn about the USMC's proposal and to express their thoughts regarding the project and alternatives.

A total of 19,244 comments were received through letters (2,330 comments), emails (3,314 comments), written comment sheets (1,337 comments), and speaker cards (24 comments). In addition, two petitions were received during the scoping period. One petition from the Partnership for Johnson Valley contained 3,332 signatures (each signature was counted as one comment). The second petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas contained 8,907 signatures (each signature was counted as one comment). A majority of the letters and emails received by the USMC were auto-generated (i.e., identical or form). Of the 2,330 letters received, 1,566 (67 percent) fall into this auto-generated category and represent only eight distinct letters (of the eight distinct letters, 1,233 letters were one form letter). Similarly, of the 3,314 emails received, 1,523 (46 percent) fall into this auto-generated category and represent only seven distinct email letters (of the seven distinct email letters, 866 were one form email).

A majority of comments were received from off-highway vehicle (OHV) users (approximately 71 percent) and environmental groups (approximately 21 percent). A number of comments were also received from recreational users and property owners in the area. A majority of comments (approximately 85 percent) were distributed between two categories, against western expansion and the 'For Non-Specific/Other' category. The 'Against West' category included the petition from the Partnership for Johnson Valley that contained 3,332 signatures. The 'For Non-Specific/Other' category included the petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas that contained 8,907 signatures. The remaining comments were fairly evenly distributed across the other proposed project areas. Finally, the most frequently raised resource specific issues were in regards to potential impacts on land use/recreation. Other main issues of concern included socioeconomics and biological resources. Furthermore, the public frequently raised concerns regarding purpose and need, project costs, mitigation if Johnson Valley OHV area is closed, project boundaries, air traffic, and safety which were all captured in the 'Other' category. All substantive comments provided by the public will be considered during the technical analysis and preparation of the EIS.

The public also suggested various alternatives and mitigation measures for the proposed project. A range of reasonable alternatives will be evaluated and considered during the EIS process. Furthermore, mitigation measures will be developed to lessen any significant impacts to specific resource areas.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Scoping Summary Report has been developed by the United States Marine Corps (USMC) to present a summary and overview of the scoping process conducted for the proposed Training Land/ Airspace Acquisition Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) at Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MAGTFTC, MCAGCC) Twentynine Palms, California, pursuant to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, 42 United States Code (USC) 4321 et seq.; Executive Orders (EOs) 11514 and 11991; Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508); and the Environmental Quality Improvement Act of 1970, as amended (42 USC 4371 et seq.).

Following this introduction, the report is organized as follows: Section 2.0 discusses the public scoping process, including notification methods utilized by the USMC to inform the public of opportunities for involvement during the scoping period. Section 3.0 summarizes scoping preparation, how the scoping meetings were conducted, the number of attendees, and the number of comments delivered by the public. Section 4.0 summarizes additional public outreach conducted by the USMC. Section 5.0 provides the scoping summary statistics, while Section 6.0 provides a summary of comments received from the public and government agencies during the scoping meetings and scoping period. Section 7.0 describes the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) segregation process. Finally, Section 8.0 summarizes the overall outcome of the scoping process.

1.1 Purpose of Scoping

The CEQ Scoping Guidance Memo of 1981 (in accordance with 40 CFR 1500-1508) defines scoping as the “process by which lead agencies solicit input from the public and interested agencies on the nature and extent of issues and impacts to be addressed and the methods by which they will be evaluated.” NEPA requires scoping as part of the EIS process to involve the public early and solicit public and agency input on the nature and extent of issues and impacts to be addressed in the EIS. The intent of the scoping process is to provide ample opportunity for the public and agencies to learn about and comment on the proposed action and alternatives. This Scoping Summary Report discusses the materials prepared as well as public input obtained during the scoping process. While this report identifies the scoping comments obtained during the scoping period, it does not make decisions regarding the proposed action, nor does it set forth policies.

1.2 Description of Proposed Project

As part of the NEPA process, the USMC is evaluating a range of reasonable alternatives for acquiring land and establishing corresponding airspace around MCAGCC Twentynine Palms. The USMC must be able to provide sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training for a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) of approximately

15,000 Marines. These acquisitions would permit three Marine battalions to simultaneously maneuver for 48 to 72 hours, while converging on a single objective using combined-arms live-fire. Any acquired lands and designated airspace would be used to meet the MEB training requirement.

Several alternatives are being considered involving lands south, east, and west of MCAGCC and other alternatives will continue to be examined. Alternatives approved for study by the Secretary of the Navy, including a No-Action Alternative, will be analyzed in the EIS. During the EIS process, the USMC will work with stakeholders to minimize any disruption to current uses on public lands.

2.0 SCOPING NOTIFICATION

The USMC utilized several methods to notify the public of opportunities for involvement and to comment during scoping. These methods included:

- a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS announcement in the Federal Register;
- a mailing of public scoping letters and postcards to government agencies, special interest groups, and concerned citizens;
- a public website; and
- press releases and newspaper advertisements to local media.

Details of these notification methods are outlined below and copies of these materials are provided in Appendix A.

2.1 Federal Register Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS

As required by NEPA, an NOI to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on 30 October 2008. A copy of the NOI is contained in Appendix A¹. This notice set forth the USMC's intent to prepare an EIS to evaluate the potential effects of the proposed land acquisition/airspace establishment in support of large-scale live-fire and maneuver training at Twentynine Palms, CA. The NOI announced the proposed action, scoping alternatives, and the purpose and need for the proposed action. The NOI also provided the public scoping meeting times and locations, the hotline number for comments, the project website location, contact information for questions about the proposal, and the closing day of the public comment period.

The 90-day public scoping period (described in more detailed in Section 3.0) for the proposed Twentynine Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition Project EIS officially began on 30 October 2008 with publication of the NOI, and ended on 31 January 2009.

¹ The original NOI was published with the incorrect year for the public scoping meeting dates; therefore, a NOI correction was published on 21 November 2008. The corrected NOI is presented in Appendix A as well.

2.2 Scoping Letters and Postcards

The USMC initiated direct contact with 168 potentially interested and affected government agencies and representatives through the mailing of NOI notification letters. Furthermore, government officials, special interest groups, and citizens (consisting of approximately 900 contacts) were mailed a scoping meeting notification letter and/or postcard inviting them to a public scoping meeting, to provide their input on the project through a written comment, or to make an oral comment via the project “hotline”. The scoping mailing list consists of stakeholders, other interested parties, and all individuals and groups who have requested to be on the list. Private landowners and those with valid land use rights or authorizations within the study areas were specifically sent notification of the scoping period and meetings. The mailing list will continue to be modified throughout the NEPA process to ensure interested parties are informed and incorporated into the mailing list. A copy of the NOI distribution list and public notification documentation described above are contained in Appendix A.

2.3 Press Releases and Newspaper Advertisements

In addition to publication of the NOI, the Headquarters Marine Corps Division of Public Affairs issued a press release on 25 November 2008 announcing the dates, times, locations, and purpose of the scoping meetings. The distribution of this press release included more than 65 media representatives. Furthermore, advertisements announcing the scoping meetings were placed in four local newspapers on four publication dates as described in Table 1 (refer to Appendix A). In addition, the BLM published the Department of Navy NOI online² and issued a news release (#CA-CDD-09-15 on 01 December 2008) announcing the USMC public scoping meeting dates and locations.

Table 1. Scoping Meeting Announcement Publication Dates and Newspapers

Newspaper	Publication dates
Desert Dispatch	31 Oct., 02 Dec., 03 Dec., 04 Dec.
Desert Sun	31 Oct., 01 Dec., 02 Dec., 03 Dec.
Riverside Press Enterprise	31 Oct., 03 Dec., 04 Dec., 05 Dec.
San Bernardino Sun	31 Oct., 03 Dec., 04 Dec., 05 Dec.

2.4 Public Website

In order to provide the public with project information, resources, and updates, the USMC has developed and will continue to maintain a project website (<http://www.29palms.usmc.mil/las/>) throughout the EIS process. Specifically, the website provides relevant studies, press releases and other public notification information, a printable comment sheet for use during the public scoping period ending on 31 January 2009, and scoping meeting displays and handouts. Furthermore, the

² Available at: http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/info/fed_reg_archives/2008/october_2008/Twenty-nine_Palms_withdrawal_NOI.htm. Last Updated: 31 October 2008. Accessed: 21 May 2009.

website provides a link to a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page (refer to Appendix A).

3.0 PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

The intent of the scoping process was to provide the opportunity for local communities, government agencies, special interest groups, and the general public to learn about the Marine Corps' proposal and to offer several ways for those interested to express their thoughts regarding the proposal (i.e., through letters, emails, written comment sheets, and speaker cards). To allow the public the opportunity to review and learn about the USMC's proposal and to express their thoughts regarding the project and alternatives, three open-house public scoping meetings were held from 03 - 05 December 2008.

3.1 USMC Internal Meetings

In preparation for the public scoping meetings, the USMC conducted several internal meetings to ensure the scoping process would be conducted successfully, and to prepare and plan how to best involve the public in the scoping and EIS process. Issues and reasonable alternatives were also internally scoped by the USMC at such meetings.

3.2 Scoping Meeting Attendance

Table 2 summarizes the public scoping meeting times, locations, and the number of attendees. The meetings were held in communities that were centrally located and would serve those areas anticipated to be most affected by the proposed action.

Table 2. Schedule of Scoping Meetings and Attendance

Date	Location	Attendance
03 December 2008	Twentynine Palms, CA	124
04 December 2008	Victorville, CA	189
05 December 2008	Ontario, CA	347

3.3 Scoping Meeting Format

The public scoping meetings were presented as an "open house," a format that was specifically designed to create a comfortable and informative atmosphere. Using this format, public participants could speak individually with Marine Corps personnel and other members of the project team. The goals of these meetings were to introduce the communities to the EIS process, provide available project information, answer questions from community members and solicit public input on important issues and concerns. Nearly 700 community members attended the meetings, presenting important and challenging questions to the project team.

The meeting format consisted of a sign-in table at the scoping facility entrance and several information stations, each staffed by knowledgeable Marine Corps personnel and/or other members of the project team to provide technical expertise in their subject matter area. Information station topics included Importance of Training at MCAGCC,

Purpose and Need, Proposed Action and Scoping Alternatives, NEPA Process, and Environmental Stewardship. Materials presented and available at the public scoping meetings continue to be available at the project website and are contained in Appendix B.

4.0 ADDITIONAL PUBLIC OUTREACH

4.1 Meetings and Briefings

As listed in Table 3, the USMC has attended various regional and local interest group meetings and accepted invitations for briefings to various groups, associations and councils. In addition, Base tours have been given and there is continual correspondence with agency representatives, legislators, and stakeholders. These include, but not are limited to, representatives for Western Lands Project, Center for Biological Diversity, Cadiz, America Mine, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), Blue Ribbon Coalition, and San Bernardino County 1st District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt.

4.2 Newsletters

The BLM publishes current news about BLM California in News.Bytes, a free weekly email newsletter published by the Bureau of Land Management, California State Office (Sacramento, CA). Public subscription, free of charge, to BLM News.Bytes is available through their online website³. During the course of the USMC public scoping comment period, there were numerous references to the proposed military land withdrawal, public land segregation, October 2008 BLM public meetings (refer to Section 7.0), regional newspaper articles, and the December 2008 scoping meetings. The BLM's News.Bytes is circulated to over 25,000 email addresses.

4.3 Cooperating Agencies

The land considered for the proposed Training Land/Airspace Acquisition EIS is predominantly managed by the BLM, while the airspace is controlled by the FAA. Therefore, at the beginning of the EIS process the USMC requested that these entities become cooperating agencies. Each agency agreed and signed a cooperating agency letter (Appendix C). The USMC will coordinate with the cooperating agencies regularly throughout the EIS process.

Furthermore, in support of the BLM's proposed public land withdrawal, the USMC participated in their public meetings held on 23 October 2008 in Twentynine Palms and 24 October 2008 in Victorville (refer to Section 7.0).

³ Archives of News.Bytes are located at: <http://www.blm.gov/ca/news/newsbytes/index.html> and <http://www.blm.gov/ca/news/newsbytes/archives.html>

Table 3. USMC Public Outreach Meetings and Briefings

Date	Public Outreach
15 February 2008	BLM Barstow briefing
22 March 2008	Information gathering from Congressman Duncan Hunter, El Cajon Town Hall
26 March 2008	Briefing to BLM Managers in Moreno Valley at California Desert District Office
04 April 2008	Partnership for Johnson Valley meeting
29 April 2008	MCAGCC tour for BLM Managers
29-30 April 2008	Desert Managers Group meeting at MCAGCC
13 May 2008	California Off-Road Vehicle Association (CORVA) meeting in Barstow
28-29 May 2008	Desert Managers Group meeting
30 June 2008	Public tour of MCAGCC, included numerous OHV and BLM representatives
10 July 2008	OHV Coalition meeting
10 September 08	Partnership for Johnson Valley meeting
22 October 2008	Dan Wessel, Veterans' Affairs and Military Advisor to Senator Diane Feinstein visits the Combat Center
23-24 October 2008	BLM Open House Meetings, Twentynine Palms and Victorville, CA
12 November 2008	Partnership for Johnson Valley meeting
15 November 2008	Briefing to the California Desert District in Moreno Valley
19 November 2008	Meeting with Native American Tribal Conservation Council
02 December 2008	Airspace briefing to the FAA
03-05 December 2008	USMC Public Scoping Meetings, Twentynine Palms, Victorville, and Ontario, CA
09 December 2008	Meeting with Ed Batalla (FPL Energy)
09 December 2008	29 Palms City Council meeting
13 December 2008	USMC rep attended the Save Johnson Valley Fun Run
08 January 2009	Partnership for Johnson Valley meeting
13 January 2009	General Aviation Pilot Group meeting
22 January 2009	Meeting with FAA Western Operations Service Center Environmental staff, Seattle
27 January 2009	29 Palms City Council meeting
27 January 2009	Lucerne Valley Municipal Advisory Council meeting

5.0 PUBLIC SCOPING STATISTICS

5.1 Public Scoping Meetings

The public was offered the opportunity and encouraged to provide their verbal comments directly to a court reporter during each public scoping meeting for inclusion in the official scoping record. Transcripts from each of the scoping meetings are presented on DVD in Appendix D. Comment forms were also available for attendees to submit written comments. Written comments were accepted at the scoping meetings and by mail throughout the public scoping comment period. The number of written and oral comments received at each meeting is presented in Table 4 and contained in Appendix D (on DVD).

Table 4. Public Comments Received at the Public Scoping Meetings

Meeting	Written Comments Received	Oral Comments Received
Twentynine Palms, CA 03 December 2008	29	11
Victorville, CA 04 December 2008	100	35
Ontario, CA 05 December 2008	254	50
Total Comments Received	383	96

5.2 Entire Scoping Period

In addition to the scoping meetings, the USMC provided various methods for the public to comment on the land and airspace acquisition proposal, including by email, mail, phone, and fax. The USMC advertised these methods in the NOI, the scoping letter, project website, press releases to the local media, display advertisements in local newspapers, and on the scoping meeting comment sheets and display boards.

As shown in Table 5, a total of 19,244 comments were received through letters (2,330 comments), emails (3,314 comments), written comment sheets (1,337 comments), and speaker cards (24 comments). In addition, two petitions were received during the scoping period. One petition from the Partnership for Johnson Valley contained 3,332 signatures (each signature was counted as one comment). The second petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas contained 8,907 signatures (each signature was counted as one comment). The public comments are contained in Appendix D (on DVD).

Table 5. Public Comments Received During the Public Scoping Period

Type of Letter/Form	Number Received
Emails	3,314
Letters	2,330
Written Comment Sheets	1,337
Speaker Cards (from Lucerne Valley MAC Meeting)	24
Petition from Partnership for Johnson Valley	3,332
Petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas	8,907
Total Comments Received	19,244

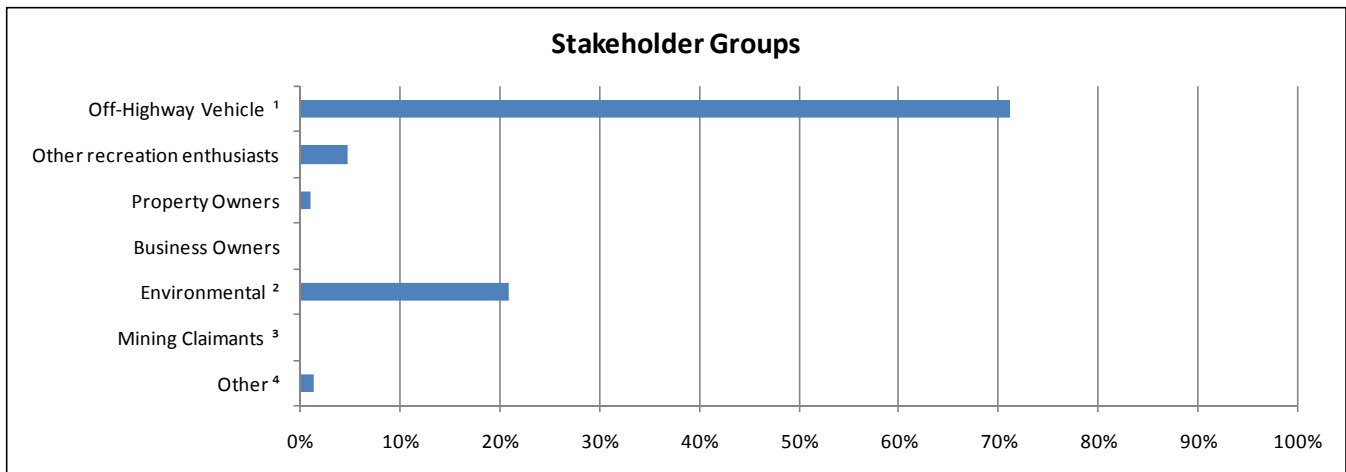
A majority of the letters and emails received by the USMC were auto-generated (i.e., identical or form). Of the 2,330 letters received, 1,566 (67 percent) fall into this auto-generated category and represent only eight distinct letters (of the eight distinct letters, 1,233 letters were one form letter). Similarly, of the 3,314 emails received, 1,523 (46 percent) fall into this auto-generated category and represent only seven distinct email letters (of the seven distinct email letters, 866 were one form email).

6.0 SUMMARY OF SCOPING COMMENTS

Comments received during the public scoping period for the proposed Twentynine Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition EIS were received from a variety of stakeholder and interest groups and focused primarily on the proposed alternatives and/or specific resource issues, as discussed in more detail below.

6.1 Stakeholder Groups

Comments were received from a diversity of groups, including regional and local governments, environmental groups, off-highway vehicle (OHV) users, lawyers, and private citizens. The majority of comments were received from OHV users (approximately 71 percent) and environmental groups (approximately 21 percent), as shown in Figure 1. A number of comments were also received from other recreational users and property owners in the area.



Note: ¹ Includes the petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas containing 8,907 signatures.

² Includes the petition from the Partnership for Johnson Valley containing 3,332 signatures.

³ 15 mining claimants (0.16% of total stakeholder group).

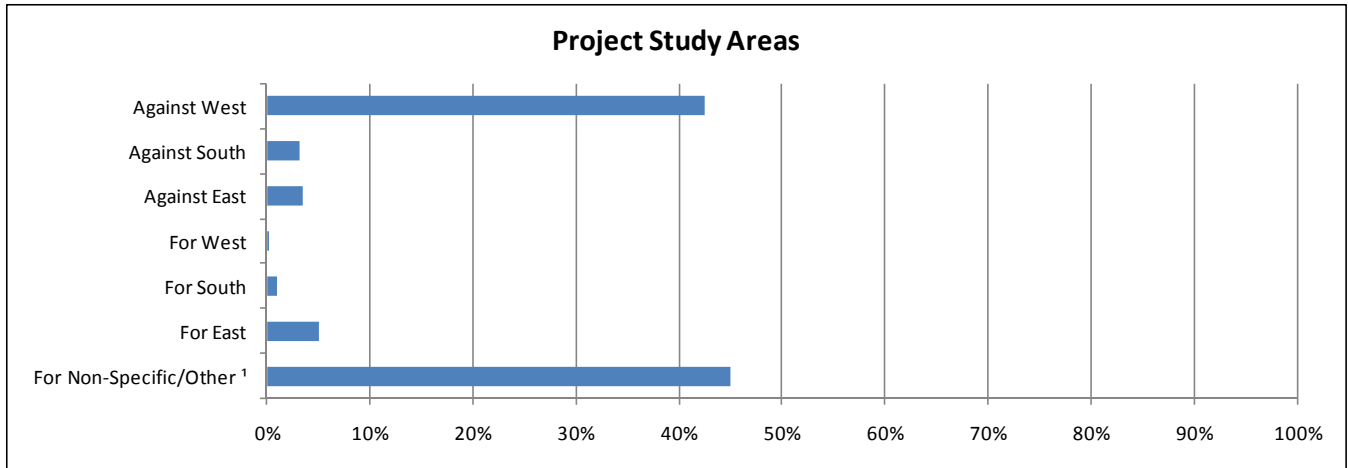
⁴ Includes alternative energy developers, utility companies, resolutions passed by Yucca Valley and Apple Valley, etc.

Figure 1. Summary of Public Comments in Regards to the Interested Stakeholder Groups.

6.2 Project Study Areas

Under the proposed Training Land/Airspace Acquisition EIS, the Department of Navy is expected to study a range of reasonable alternatives related to lands and associated airspace to the west, south, and east of the installation. Figure 2 depicts the percentage of comments received in favor or against each of the scoping alternatives, including a category for non-specific or other alternatives (e.g., co-use or de-designation of wilderness areas). The primary issues raised for each category are summarized in Table 6 below. A majority of comments (approximately 85 percent) were distributed between two categories, the 'Against West' and the 'For Non-Specific/Other' categories. The 'Against West' category included the petition from the Partnership for Johnson Valley

that contained 3,332 signatures. The ‘For Non-Specific/Other’ category included the petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas that contained 8,907 signatures. The remaining comments were fairly evenly distributed across the other proposed project areas.



Note: ¹ Includes comments regarding co-use and de-designation of wilderness areas.

Figure 2. Summary of Public Comments in Regards to the Project Study Areas.

Table 6. Summary of Public Comments Regarding the Proposed Project Area

Project Study Area	Public Comments
Against West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in area for off-road and outdoor recreational opportunities • Reduction in area for the film industry • Negative impact on the economy • May impact public health and safety of surrounding communities • May affect Southern California Edison (SCE) electric transmission facilities and/or distribution facilities • May promote illegal riding • Potential impact on groundwater supplies and quality • Potential impact on biological resources (e.g., desert tortoise and prairie falcon)
Against South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May affect SCE electric transmission facilities and/or distribution facilities • May reduce surrounding property and land value • May impact cultural resources • May impact listed, sensitive, or rare species • May impact water resources
Against East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May impact chloride mineral properties • May impact planned Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) solar projects and other alternative energy development (wind, solar, etc.) in that area • May impact desert tortoise habitat and areas of critical environmental concern • May impact groundwater • May impact traffic circulation • May impact private and commercial airspace use • May impact property and land value, cultural resources, endangered species, water resources

For West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less impact to chloride mineral properties • Support for USMC to meet training requirements
For South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less impact to chloride mineral properties • Less impact to OHV and recreational opportunities
For East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No impact to OHV opportunities in Johnson Valley • More compatible areas with the proposed action • Less impact to local business owners • Less impact to recreational opportunities • Less populated • Has been used in the past by the military • Economy will be less affected
For Non-Specific/ Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative use would keep a significant portion of the land proposed for withdrawal open to the public, where it can be used cooperatively by both the military and private citizens • Use areas that are already reserved for military training e.g., Fort Irwin, Barry Goldwater Bombing Range, Yuma Proving Grounds, etc. • De-designation of wilderness area: Sheephole Valley, Cleghorn Lakes and Cadiz Dunes wilderness areas turned over to the military so that OHV riders can still use Johnson Valley

6.3 Resource-Specific Issues

The comments received were organized into the following main topics: land use/recreation, socioeconomics, biological resources, cultural resources, mining/mineral, noise, utility/infrastructure, air quality, aesthetics/visual resources, and water resources. An “other” category was developed to capture all other concerns that do not fit into the above categories. The main public concerns for each category are summarized below.

Land Use/Recreation: Decrease in area available for recreational activities, including OHV and hiking areas. Possible prevention of other development opportunities (e.g., solar and wind energy generators as well as geothermal exploration) on the lands being studied. Decrease in property value of homes and land located near the expansion area. Impacts to other current land uses (e.g., SCE distribution lines and facilities). Potential impacts on farmland used for agriculture/grazing, rights-of-way, easements, and other land uses and authorizations/designations.

Socioeconomics: Impacts to the economy from a decrease in revenue/employment and associated tax revenue from the tourism, recreational, and film industries. Calcium chloride/sodium chloride facilities may be acquired/closed resulting in loss of revenue and jobs. Possible loss of future mining opportunities. Potential devaluation of surrounding private property. Increased costs to the airline industry from flight corridor alteration and/or scheduling restrictions and conflicts. Increased costs with installing proper signage in limited use areas and implementing an education campaign regarding location of remaining OHV areas. Increased law enforcement costs to federal, state, and local jurisdiction with respect to enforcing trespassing on private property and other areas where OHV travel is not allowed. Economic impact on the larger Southern California region from reduced sales of motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), utility

terrain vehicles(UTVs), dune buggies, rock crawlers, motor homes, trailers, and their associated tow vehicles.

Biological Resources: Direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to listed, rare, and sensitive species; habitat loss; loss of wildlife corridors/linkages; and potential take of threatened and endangered species. Violation of existing plans and policies for biological resources management on lands proposed for acquisition, as well as adjacent wilderness areas. Potential impacts on cryptobiotic soils.

Cultural Resources: Impacts to cultural resources of the region, including artifacts, historic cabins, and historic mining/freighting sites. Potential destruction or elimination of significant archaeological and religious sites. Violation of tribal concerns and rights, which includes the access to culturally significant sites and the compromise of culturally significant sites and their settings. Possible destruction or elimination of historic structures and/or districts, including potentially historically important mines. Potential impacts to various plant species historically used by Native Americans for subsistence.

Mining/Minerals: The proposed land withdrawal may close federal lands that would be needed for mine development under any viable mine plan and limit access to current mining resources. Potential halting of mining operations, impacts to mining sites, and reduction in viability of mining sites and mineral deposits.

Noise: Noise impacts from additional training exercises and military activities.

Utilities/Infrastructure: Increased usage of utility and infrastructure may impact current systems (e.g., disruption to traffic circulation, impacts to existing communications and energy transmission lines and pipelines, damage to utilities/infrastructure from vehicle movements). Potential impacts to Fire and Police Department response times and their ability to provide coverage for acquired lands. Increased waste disposal requirements and the potential for the requirements to be unfulfilled. Impacts on roadways, railroads, and airspace from movement of equipment and personnel to/from the installation for training events. Injuries or impacts from convoy crossings of public roads.

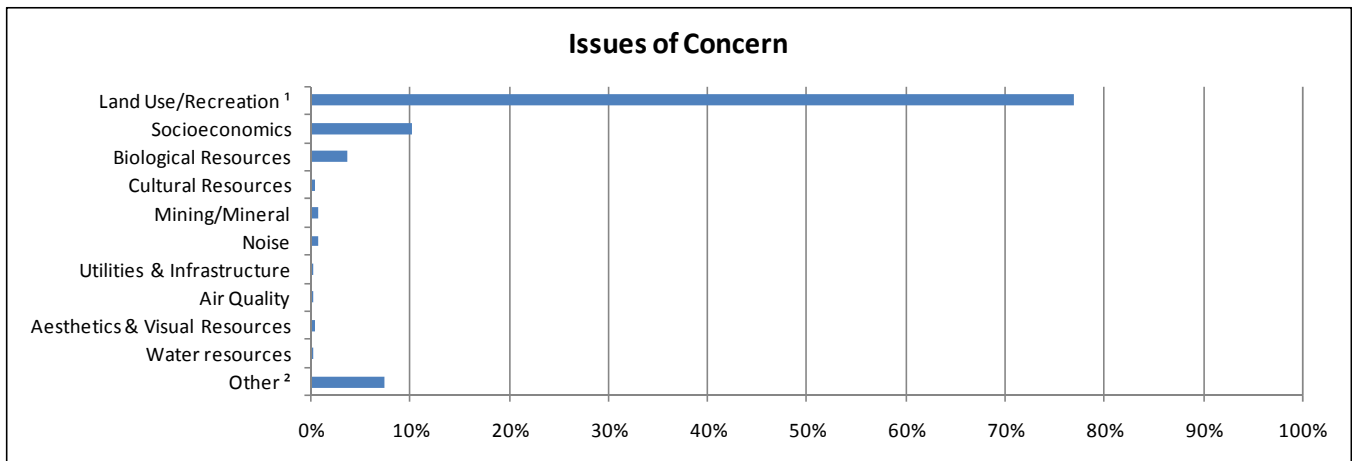
Air Quality: Air quality impacts related to increased air emissions, carbon footprint, cumulative impacts in concert with localized droughts and global climate change, ground disturbing activities contributing to existing air quality problems, greenhouse gas emissions that may contribute to global warming, increase in dust and other particulate matter from increased military activity. Potential for increased regional haze, particularly at Joshua Tree National Park.

Aesthetics/Visual Resources: Loss of natural vistas, major visual resources, and open desert habitat. Potential visual impacts resulting from equipment and support structures used during training exercises. Reduced availability of public lands that can be used by the film industry for outdoor scenery. Littering from military activities, including ordnance, unexploded ordnance, and releases of fuel.

Water Resources: Impacts to the limited potable water supply and the potential to overdraft the aquifer from the accelerated growth that would take place from the expansion. Concern regarding the potential for hazardous materials to enter groundwater aquifers, changes to groundwater flow patterns, and impacts to groundwater recharge potential. Concerns regarding surface water impacts, including erosion and sedimentation, contamination from fuel spills and leaks, contamination from ordnance, and reduction in riparian systems and ephemeral streams. Potential increased water withdrawal and acquisition of adjudicated water rights associated with private lands acquired. Potential impacts to floodplains. Potential loss of lives and assets from flash flooding. Potential impacts of ordnance to aquifers and geologic faults.

Other: Concern that the loss of OHV area would lead to future degradation of resources on public lands elsewhere and illegal riding in non-designated areas. Potential impacts to the Special Use Airspace for private and commercial pilots. Impacts on future development potential for local and regional airports. Health and safety concerns from unexploded ordnance and ordnance fragments. Increased costs of enforcing OHV laws. Public desire for more clear information on the proposed action and purpose and needs due to the magnitude of the project. Evaluation and disclosure of the costs of the proposed expansion. The USMC must comply with NEPA and CEQA requirements.

As shown in Figure 3, the most frequently raised resource-specific issue was in regards to potential impacts on land use/recreation. This category included the two petitions received during the public scoping period (i.e., a petition from the Partnership for Johnson Valley containing 3,332 signatures and a petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas containing 8,907 signatures). Other main issues of concern included socioeconomics and biological resources. Furthermore, the public frequently raised concerns regarding purpose and need, project costs, mitigation if Johnson Valley OHV area is closed, project boundaries, air traffic, and safety which were all captured in the ‘Other’ category.



Note: ¹ Includes the petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas containing 8,907 signatures and the petition from the Partnership for Johnson Valley containing 3,332 signatures

² Other issues include: purpose and need, project costs, mitigation if Johnson Valley OHV area is closed, project boundaries, air traffic, and safety.

Figure 3. Summary of Public Comments in Regards to the Resource Issues of Concern.

6.4 Proposed Alternatives and Mitigation Measures

During the scoping period, the public suggested various alternative actions the USMC could consider, as well as suggested modifications to the currently proposed scoping alternatives. A range of reasonable alternatives will be evaluated and considered during the EIS process. The public suggestions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Consider compatible or joint use of the proposed expansion areas for both military and solar energy power development uses.
- De-designate existing wilderness areas to facilitate USMC expansion towards areas with little conflict with desert residents, including de-designation for Sheephole Mountains (Area #21) and Cadiz Dunes (Area #24).
- Reconfigure the proposed expansion areas to avoid the area encompassing OptiSolar's requested ROW approval from the BLM.
- Identify alternative locations outside the Mojave Desert.
- Move the northwest corner of the western expansion area approximately a mile back from the edge of SCE's transmission line ROW so as to remove the transmission facilities from the expansion area.
- Consider joint use of other nearby bases such as Fort Irwin and the use of lands outside the area for training purposes.
- PG&E requested that the eastern expansion area exclude the land along the northern border due to its many constraints including railroad, natural gas pipelines, areas of critical environmental concern, desert tortoise habitat, and PG&E's proposed solar energy project.
- Modernize existing facilities at Twentynine Palms to optimize available space.
- Allow controlled periodic access for occasional activities in the expansion area (similar to the controlled access at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, which allows for Petroglyph Tours, chukar hunts, rockhounding, occasional races or equestrian events).
- Consider a "No Military Expansion Alternative". Rather than adding 421,270 acres of public land to Twentynine Palms, the Marine Corps should investigate upgrading and revamping the 596,000 acres of desert they already control. Many of the Base's structures were built between the late 1950's and early 1980s. Redistribution and improvements of older infrastructure would free up vast amounts of acreage on the base.
- Consider a "joint training" alternative. The army currently houses a large Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain ("MOUT") training facility and multi-range training areas at Fort Ord in Northern California, and a massive National Training Center at Fort Irwin near Barstow, California, which encompasses 1,000 square miles for maneuver and ranges, an uncluttered electromagnetic spectrum, airspace restricted to military use, and is isolated from densely populated areas. These facilities, already owned and developed by the U.S. Government, could be utilized in lieu of building new facilities, by either temporarily "renting" the facilities from the Army for training operations, or for joint training operations with the Army. The cost to transport troops and equipment from Twentynine

Palms to Fort Irwin would still be less than the cost to purchase this land and develop infrastructure.

- Construct the MOUT Training Facility at MCAS Miramar.
- Use an alternative site for MOUT and Multi-Range Training Centers, such as Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake.
- Identify an eastward-only expansion alternative that would have no impacts on Johnson Valley.
- Evaluate alternatives that would release for public use other DOD and/or BLM land currently not open to recreation, such as northern or eastern expansion of the Spangler Hills Open Area, opening the area south of Spangler Hills Open Area, converging the open area between Jawbone and Dove Springs, opening the El Paso limited use area, opening the limited use area north of Dove Springs, expanding the Olancho Dune open area to the south, expanding the Johnson Valley Open Area to the east and north, open the Soda Mountain Wilderness study area, expand the Stoddard Valley OHV area to the south, expand the Razor OHV area to the north and west, etc. Return the Johnson Valley OHV Area back to the public once it has fulfilled its usefulness to the military.
- Use existing military facilities for integrated training.
- Use other public lands outside of Johnson Valley.
- Develop a co-use alternative so that the area will not be completely removed from the public domain.
- Expand the base entirely to the east including eighteen complete townships starting with 5N11E and running eastward to include 5N12E, 5N13E, 5N14E, 5N15E, and 5N16E; also expand into the townships of 4N11E, 4N12E, 4N13E, 4N14E, 4N15E, and 4N16E; and including the townships of 3N11E, 3N12E, 3N13E, 3N14E, 3N15E, and 3N16E.
- Consider zoning of land parcels to provide for multiple uses.

Through the EIS process, mitigation measures will be developed to reduce or eliminate any significant impacts to specific resources areas. The public suggestions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Purchasing fee-owned properties and reserved mineral interests in the proposed expansion area.
- Make available the numerous isolated properties owned by the BLM to those owners of private property who stand to lose their properties in the expansion effort.
- Identify specific replacement habitat to compensate for loss of wildlife and plant habitat.
- Permanently protect any identified significant biological resources with fencing and other safeguards.
- Consider buying out the nearby Ord Mountain cattle allotment and the Stoddard and Shadow Valley sheep allotments so they can be permanently retired to mitigate for residual impacts to desert tortoise, bighorn sheep, and sensitive plants.

- Identify compensation for regulatory and processing fees for the relocation of SCE facilities.
- Consider provisions for future access and underground mining of iron ore in the proposed expansion area.
- Purchase privately-owned property, in San Bernardino County and other surrounding counties, to compensate the OHV community for lost opportunity in Johnson Valley.

As discussed above, the public has suggested various alternatives and mitigation measures for the proposed project. A range of reasonable alternatives will be evaluated and considered during the EIS process and mitigation measures will be developed to lessen any significant impacts to specific resource areas. Furthermore, the USMC will continue to provide a high level of demonstrated environmental stewardship of resources throughout the proposed project and into the future.

6.5 Comments Beyond the Scope of the EIS

A total of 13 comments received (< 1 percent) were beyond the scope of this EIS. These included comments that recommended an alternative project location be Oklahoma, Iraq, or phrased as “anywhere but here.” These suggested alternatives are beyond the scope of the EIS because they do not meet the purpose and need or selection criteria for alternatives.

6.6 Incorporation of Substantive Public Comments, Issues, or Concerns into the Draft EIS

Scoping comments have been provided to the EIS interdisciplinary team and subject matter experts for the Draft EIS preparation. The technical staff will evaluate and consider the public’s information, comments, and concerns in the EIS analysis. All comments, both written and verbal, will receive the same consideration during the preparation of the EIS.

7.0 BLM SEGREGATION PROCESS

In accordance with 43 CFR §2310, the USMC submitted a land withdrawal application to the Barstow Field Office of the BLM on 14 August 2008. A land withdrawal, or segregation, refers to public lands that a federal agency requests from another federal agency (in this case the BLM) for a specific use. While the land title remains with the Federal Government, the acreage associated with the withdrawal or segregation would no longer be available for public use. The application was submitted as part of the formal process for the proposed land acquisition at MCAGCC Twentynine Palms. The application is to withdraw 365,906 acres of public lands, and approximately 507 acres of Federal subsurface mineral estate from all forms of appropriation under the public land laws, including surface entry, mining, mineral leasing under the Mineral Act of 1947.

Subsequently, in accordance with 43 CFR §2310.2(a) and §2310.3-1(b), the BLM published a *Notice of Proposed Legislative Withdrawal and Opportunity for Public Meeting*:

California on 15 September 2008. The Notice provided a 90-day comment period, from 15 September 2008 through 15 December 2008, for stakeholders to express their views on the impacts of the proposed land withdrawal and expansion. In addition, the BLM held three segregation meetings to inform the public of the BLM's responsibility related to the segregation request. These meetings were announced in the Federal Register and local newspapers. One open house format meeting was held in Twentynine Palms, CA on 23 October 2008 and two open house format meetings were held in Victorville, CA on 24 October 2008. Marine Corps representatives were present at the meetings to provide information and answer questions at various information stations, with maps, posters and displays. A summary of the actions that took place as part of the BLM's segregation process for the Proposed Expansion of MCAGCC at Twentynine Palms, California is contained in the BLM *Application Summary of Proposed Expansion*, presented in Appendix E.

Attendance of interested parties at each meeting ranged from 50 to 150 people. Interested parties were provided the opportunity to submit written comments at each meeting and were also provided with a physical address and an email address where they were able to submit comments at a later date. The BLM received a total of 2,283 comments during their public comment period on the segregation process. Comments were received through emails, letters, hand-written comments, and faxes. The comments received are presented in Appendix F (on DVD). A majority of the comments were from the OHV community in opposition to the expansion, individuals concerned about their mining leases, residential property owners concerned about noise and dust, and alternative energy companies who were concerned about the potential impacts to their pending energy projects. At the request of the BLM, comments received during the BLM segregation process were considered in the USMC scoping process as well.

8.0 SUMMARY

During the 90-day public scoping period for the proposed Twentynine Palms Training Land/Airspace Acquisition EIS, a total of 660 people attended the three scoping meetings and a total of 19,244 comments were received through letters (2,330 comments), emails (3,314 comments), written comment sheets (1,337 comments), and speaker cards (24 comments). In addition, two petitions were received during the scoping period. One petition from the Partnership for Johnson Valley contained 3,332 signatures (each signature was counted as one comment). The second petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV through de-designation of wilderness areas contained 8,907 signatures (each signature was counted as one comment).

As part of the segregation process for the Proposed Land/Airspace Acquisition Project, the BLM (a cooperating agency) conducted a public comment period for stakeholders to express their views on the impacts of the proposed land withdrawal. At the request of the BLM, comments received during the BLM segregation process were considered in the USMC scoping process as well.

The interdisciplinary EIS team will consider and address relevant scoping comments during preparation of the Draft EIS. When the Draft EIS is published, the public will

have an opportunity to review the document and provide comments. The Draft EIS public comments will be reviewed and responded to by the EIS interdisciplinary team during preparation of the Final EIS.

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