

Executive Summary

ES.1 Introduction

This document is being prepared as a supplement to the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Army's Land Acquisition Project for the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California* published in 1996 by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). As such, this is a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS). The analysis of alternatives contained within the 1996 DEIS, are incorporated herein by reference as alternatives no longer under consideration. All other information contained within the 1996 DEIS is replaced with information presented within this supplement, as such all information in the 1996 DEIS, with the exception of the analysis of alternatives in the 1996 DEIS, has been superseded by more current information in the SDEIS.

This SDEIS addresses the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed addition of maneuver training land at Fort Irwin, California within 6 alternatives. This document may also serve in the future, by way of teiring, as part 6 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation required by Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Order 7400.2E (Procedures for Handling Airspace Matters) in processing Fort Irwin's request for changes to Special Use Airspace if an alternative is chosen that requires airspace to be altered.

ES.1.1 Lead and Cooperating Agencies

A substitution has been made in the lead agency since the 1996 DEIS. The Army, as the project proponent, has assumed the lead agency role from the BLM. The BLM has accepted a cooperating agency role, as they administer a vast majority of the lands within the study area. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has also accepted a cooperating agency role. Because some of the alternatives involve possible changes to airspace, the FAA is a cooperating agency. China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS China Lake) and Nellis Air Force Base (NAFB) have participated in reviews and meetings but decided not to take formal cooperating agency status.

ES.1.2 Public Involvement Process

The first public involvement in this project occurred in 1988. Several public scoping meetings were held at that time. A summary of the prior scoping efforts is set out in the 1996 DEIS and is discussed in detail in the Scoping Report, which can be found on the web at: <http://www.fortirwinlandexpansion.com/scopingreport.htm>.

When the DEIS was published in 1996, seven public hearings were held and comments were received. The comments from the public hearings on the DEIS have been considered in the formulation of this SDEIS where applicable. In addition to the previous scoping meetings, five scoping sessions were held beginning in November 2001 and ending in January 2002, and those comments have also been considered in the formulation of this SDEIS.

A 90-day public review of this SDEIS will begin with the publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA). The public comment period will include hearings at various locations throughout

southern California where deemed necessary and appropriate. Written comments, and other forms of comment, submitted by public and private persons and entities received will be addressed in the final SDEIS.

ES.1.3 Study Area

The study area for the SDEIS consists of all the acreage in the various alternatives; the total acreage of the study area is less than the total acreage of the 1996 DEIS study area. The study area in the 1996 DEIS consisted of approximately 950,000 acres; the current study area is approximately 249,000 acres. The current study area falls predominantly to the south, east and west of Fort Irwin. Areas considered in the 1996 DEIS but no longer considered in the current SDEIS include the area directly north of Fort Irwin, the lands to the east of Highway 127, and any land to the east of the utility lines within BLM Utility Planning Corridor D along the eastern edge of Fort Irwin. The study area also includes two parcels of land on Fort Irwin collectively known as the "UTM 90" area that had not been considered as part of the study area in the 1996 DEIS. These areas lie in general south of the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) 90 gridline but also include an additional parcel of land to the northwest of that coordinate. These lands were formerly used for heavy mechanized training but were set off-limits in 1991 due to the presence of the desert tortoise, a species that had been emergency listed as endangered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). These areas were subsequently designated as desert tortoise critical habitat.

ES.1.4 Background

The proposed project has been the subject of several Congressional actions and inter-agency coordination efforts. Public Law 106-554, H.R. 5666, Section 323, required the production of several documents in compliance with Congressional requirements. Pursuant to this law, several documents were generated and submitted to Congress. First, a Key Elements Report was submitted to Congress on the 4 January 2001, identifying the history of efforts to expand Fort Irwin, identification of the issues in regard to threatened and endangered (T&E) species, and the need for expansion, as well as elements of the project. Second, the USFWS provided a Preliminary Review of the effects of the proposed expansion on threatened and endangered species on the 28 March 2001. Finally, a Proposed Expansion Plan was submitted to Congress on the 13 July 2001. This plan combined the findings and recommendations of the prior two reports and set forth a plan to complete the expansion process. These documents can be found on the web at: <http://www.fortirwinlandexpansion.com/Documents.htm>

In 2001, the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2001 (Public Law 106-554) was enacted transferring approximately 118,000 acres of federal land from BLM administration to that of the Army. The land withdrawn by this law is the land that is the footprint of the Army's preferred alternative, Alternative I. The use of the withdrawn land is contingent upon full compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as required by the legislation. This law also requires the reviews of the Army's proposed project be coordinated with the reviews of the West Mojave Plan (WMP).

ES.1.5 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide an expanded battle-space environment for training Army brigade-sized units according to the Army's training and combat operations doctrines. The proposed action satisfies the need to train soldiers in the most realistic environment possible. The National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin is a Combat Training Center for the Army, which trains ten armored brigades each year in exercises called rotations. Rotations last for 28-35 days and involve approximately 9,000 soldiers and Department of the Army (DA) civilians. The training at Fort Irwin is designed to provide soldiers the experience needed to excel at their missions. The advancements in military technology and the need to address those advancements are a driving factor for this expansion; today's Army can drive faster, operate in wider ranges, and shoot farther. Operation Desert Storm, the current war on terrorism, and Operation Iraqi Freedom illustrate the necessity of such training.

In order to identify the amount of additional land needed to provide the best training for soldiers, a Land Use Requirement Study (LURS) was conducted in 2002. This study was based on new information regarding the Army's changing mission and technology and identified an average land use need based on those requirements. The LURS found that approximately 642,471 net maneuverable acres were required to meet Army training requirements. The current maneuverable training area on Fort Irwin is approximately 350,300 acres; this leaves a shortfall of approximately 274,160 acres.

ES.2 Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

The proposed action is to acquire additional lands to expand the maneuverable training area on Fort Irwin. There are six alternatives considered in this SDEIS, including the no action alternative. Maps of the different alternatives are illustrated in Figure 2.2-1, *Alternatives Considered in this SDEIS*.

ES.2.1 Alternative I - East/West Alternative (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative I, the East/West Alternative, consists of approximately 141,890 acres. This includes the reintroduction of UTM 90 area to mechanized training. The eastern portion of this alternative includes the southern portion of the Avawatz Mountains and runs parallel northeast to southwest along the utilities in the BLM Utility Planning Corridor D. The southern portion consists of the UTM 90 area. The western area includes a portion of the Paradise Mountains and two of the Superior dry lakes. As part of Alternative I, a three-mile transit route through NASA's Goldstone Complex would be improved for use by Fort Irwin for access to the Superior Valley.

On March 1, 2004, USFWS issued a Draft No Jeopardy/No Adverse Modification Biological Opinion for the preferred alternative, Alternative I.

ES.2.2 Alternative II - East Gate/South Alternative

Alternative II, the East Gate/South Alternative, consists of approximately 156,300 acres, including the reintroduction of the UTM 90 area to mechanized training. The eastern portion of this alternative includes the southern portion of the Avawatz Mountains and the South Avawatz Mountains and is and runs parallel northeast to southwest along the utilities in the BLM Utility

Planning Corridor D and is bounded on the on the south by the BLM Planning Corridor Q. The southern portion of this alternative encompasses the Alvord Mountains and Coyote Dry Lake. This western boundary of this alternative is Fort Irwin Road.

ES.2.3 Alternative III - East Gate Alternative

Alternative III, the East Gate Alternative, consists of approximately 48,630 acres. This alternative consists of the southern portion of the Avawatz Mountains and runs parallel northeast to southwest along the utilities in the BLM Utility Planning Corridor D.

ES.2.4 Alternative IV - Southwest/East Gate/ UTM 90 Alternative

Alternative IV, the Southwest/East Gate/ UTM 90 Alternative, consists of approximately 183,160 acres, including the UTM 90 area. The eastern portion of this alternative includes the southern portion of the Avawatz Mountains, and runs parallel northeast to southwest along the utilities in the BLM Utility Planning Corridor D. The southwestern portion includes the northern part of Coyote Dry Lake Paradise Mountains and the Superior dry lakes. As part of Alternative IV, a three-mile transit route through NASA's Goldstone Complex would be improved for use by Fort Irwin to provide access to Superior Valley.

ES.2.5 Alternative V - East Gate/UTM 90 Alternative

Alternative V, the East Gate/UTM 90 Alternative, consists of approximately 71,840 acres, including the UTM 90 area. The eastern portion of this alternative includes the southern portion of the Avawatz Mountains and runs parallel northeast to southwest along the utilities in the BLM Utility Planning Corridor D.

ES.2.6 Alternative VI - No Action Alternative

Alternative VI, the No Action Alternative, adds no additional maneuverable land to Fort Irwin. The UTM 90 area would continue to be off-limits to mechanized training. The Congressionally withdrawn lands would continue to be managed by the Army pursuant to the existing interim management plan until additional Congressional action is taken to return administration of the land to the Bureau of Land Management or some other action is approved for use.

ES.3 Alternatives No Longer Under Consideration

Alternatives considered in the 1996 DEIS are illustrated in Figure 2.4-1. These alternatives have not been carried forward for further review in this document, as they are no longer considered feasible alternatives. The alternatives proposed in the 1996 DEIS did not meet the objectives of the proposed project and had too high an impact on recreation, public utilities and transportation. Additionally, alternatives considered in the 1996 DEIS were considered duplicative of currently proposed alternatives as they only involved minor changes in land configurations. Joint use with NAWS China Lake was eliminated as an alternative due to incompatible mission requirements with the requirements of the U.S. Navy. Increased simulation, clearing of Leach Lake Bombing Range, and relocation of the NTC to another military facility were all eliminated due to a variety of military requirements and restrictions relating to feasibility and impacts on current uses.

ES.4 Summary of Impacts

The most significant impact of all alternatives, other than the no action alternative, is the potential loss of desert tortoise individuals, habitat, and critical habitat. Alternative I, the East/West alternative and alternative IV, the Southwest/Eastgate/UTM 90 alternative, also have significant impacts to Lane Mountain milk-vetch individuals and habitat. In addition, significant impacts have been identified within all alternatives, other than the no action alternative, to soils, other biological resources including sensitive plant and wildlife species, land use, recreation, mining, socio-economics, wilderness and cumulative impacts. In all alternatives, impacts to the following resources are either not significant or can be reduced to a less than significant level with mitigation: geology, air space, air quality, utilities, water resources, noise, transportation, hazardous materials and solid waste, cultural resources, health and safety, and environmental justice.

Other required NEPA analysis includes an examination of short-term uses of the environment vs. maintenance and enhancement in the long term on productivity. The SDEIS concludes that a long-term impact will occur to maintenance and enhancement of the environment but that the impact will be offset by the value added to the NTC's training mission. Additionally, the proposed mitigation measures should have a net increase productivity of the region as a whole. An irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources will occur in three resource areas: geology, land use and energy resources. Unavoidable significant adverse impacts will occur from loss of federally listed threatened and/or endangered wildlife species and their habitat. There will be a loss of vegetative cover, loss of wilderness characteristics, loss and disruption of soil surfaces, loss of mining resources and loss of recreation opportunities. This loss will be offset by the proposed mitigation measures, which may result in a long-term benefit to conservation of these species and their habitat. There are no impacts to Global Commons pursuant to EO 12114.

A summary of each significant impact before mitigation is located in Table ES 1.1-1 below.

ES.5 Summary of Mitigation

Depending upon the final project design and choice of alternative, the Army has proposed a variety of mitigation measures to reduce, eliminate or offset direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the proposed project including:

- ❖ Creation of off-limits conservation areas for desert tortoise and Lane Mountain milk-vetch on Fort Irwin;
- ❖ Translocation of desert tortoises to areas off of the training area;
- ❖ Purchase of mitigation land, as identified in the Biological Opinion from USFWS. This will include private lands within desert tortoise critical habitat and within Lane Mountain milk-vetch habitat for permanent protection from private development;
- ❖ Purchase and voluntary retirement of cattle grazing allotments within desert tortoise habitat within the West Mojave;
- ❖ Contribution towards the BLM West Mohave Plan Route closure program, particularly I the proposed Lane Mountain milk-vetch ACEC;

- ❖ Fitting abandoned mines that are inhabited by bats with bat grates to allow bats to fly in and out;
- ❖ Use of existing roads in all areas possible;
- ❖ All playas off-limits with a 25 meter buffer zone set back from lake edges;
- ❖ All perennial water sources off-limits;
- ❖ Establishment of new air quality monitoring stations (at locations established by the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District (MDAQMD));
- ❖ Installing K-rails and or tetrahedrons to protect susceptible utility lines and/or sensitive off-limits areas;
- ❖ Construction of berms and fences along boundaries to keep the public from entering the base boundaries, and to keep the soldiers from inadvertently straying from the training area;
- ❖ Installation of aerial balls on utility lines in the Eastgate area; and
- ❖ Installation of aerial warning lights on utility towers.

Specific mitigation measures are detailed at the conclusion of each section within Chapter 4. The following three tables summarize the impacts before mitigation, mitigation proposed, and impacts after mitigation.