

estimated \$2.1 million contracted for maneuver training area improvements at Fort Irwin. Economic impacts on local communities from increased employment and revenue are not considered significant due to the short-term nature of the contracts.

4.14.7 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are anticipated to socioeconomics due to land purchases for mitigation and loss of private land within the alternatives. Due to the large volume of land purchased by the Wildlands Conservancy and past purchases as discussed under the Land Use section 4.9, a cumulatively significant impact will occur due to loss of private lands in the County tax base. Additionally, there will be a lost opportunity for future private development of the transferred lands further increasing the loss of tax base and opportunity for the County to develop in these areas. If the trends discussed under land use - cumulative impacts, continue, there will be a cumulative impact to the County and to the ROI due to this lost opportunity.

4.15 Wilderness Characteristics

Impacts to Wilderness could be considered significant if any of the following occurred:

- ❖ Loss of apparent naturalness,
- ❖ Loss of opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation,
- ❖ Loss of opportunity for solitude, and
- ❖ Disruption of special features, such as bighorn sheep habitat and wild burro management areas.

4.15.1 Alternative I: East/West

4.15.1.1 Impacts

Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) Within SDEIS Study Area

There are no WSAs in the Study Area.

Adjacent Wilderness and WSAs

Avawatz Mountains

None of the 52,330 acres of the Avawatz Mountains WSA occurs within this alternative. However, it is located directly adjacent to the north of the Eastgate portion of the study area. Although, only low to moderate use is projected for the eastern portions of the study area that borders the WSA, due to the proximity, there may be a significant and unavoidable impact on the wilderness values in the southern portion of this WSA. Visitors may be unable to feel isolated in the area. Opportunities for recreation, including primitive or unconfined opportunities, may be disturbed. These impacts will exacerbate the existing condition of the WSA, which is fragmented by roads and inholdings of patented mining claims.

Death Valley National Park Boundary

None of the Death Valley National Park Boundary WSA occurs within this alternative. Military operations in the northern part of Fort Irwin would remain unchanged.

Kingston Range

None of this WSA lies within this alternative. There is no impact.

Soda Mountains

None of this WSA is located within this alternative. However, this WSA does lie directly adjacent to the eastern boundary of the study area only separated by the utilities in the Boulder corridor D. Visitors may be unable to feel isolated in the area. Opportunities for recreation, including primitive or unconfined opportunities, may be disturbed. These impacts will exacerbate the existing condition of the WSA, which is fragmented by roads and in holdings of patented mining claims. Impacts to this WSA will be significant.

4.15.1.2 Mitigation

There may be a significant loss in wilderness qualities in the southern portion of the Avawatz Mountains WSA that borders the eastern expansion on the north and the Soda Mountains WSA to the east of the study area. BLM has determined that the Avawatz Mountains do not meet the criteria for wilderness designation. There are no planned mitigation measures for this impact.

4.15.2 Alternative II: East Gate/South

The environmental impacts under this alternative would be the same as Alternative I.

4.15.3 Alternative III: East Gate

The environmental impacts under this alternative would be the same as Alternative I.

4.15.4 Alternative IV: Southwest/East Gate/UTM 90

The environmental impacts under this alternative would be the same as Alternative I.

4.15.5 Alternative V: East Gate/UTM 90

The environmental impacts under this alternative would be the same as Alternative I.

4.15.6 Alternative VI: No Action

Under this alternative, the Avawatz Mountains WSA, and the South Avawatz Mountains will not be directly impacted by NTC activities. Present boundaries would remain unchanged. Aircraft uses associated with the military maneuvers at Fort Irwin would continue to be evident from within all portions of these WSAs. The Soda Mountains WSA will be subjected to aircraft noise because the civilian corridor follows I-15, parallel to the WSA boundary.

The legislatively designated Avawatz Mountains, Death Valley National Park Boundary, Soda Mountains, and Kingston Range WSAs would remain until Congress either designates them as wilderness or releases all or portions of them.

4.15.7 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts to wilderness within the ROI are not anticipated to be significant. Even though the direct impact to adjacent Wilderness Study Areas is considered significant for the proposed project, wilderness areas throughout the desert are generally located in more remote areas that are not impacted by outside or adjacent stressors. Therefore, the cumulative impacts to wilderness within the West Mojave are likely insignificant.

4.16 Airspace

This section describes the proposed special use airspace configurations that support the five land expansion action alternatives and the no action alternative, and describes the impacts of each proposed special use airspace changes on existing airspace users. The Army does not intend to propose changes or modifications to the existing airspace boundaries for R-2515 and/or R-2524.

The proposed airspace changes outlined in this section are for explanation and environmental analysis purposes only. The FAA must approve all airspace changes. After undergoing the NEPA process, the Army will submit specific airspace changes to the FAA, in accordance with FAA Order 7400.2E (Procedures for Handling Airspace Matters), Part 5, Chapter 21. This document will serve as the NEPA documentation by way of tiering as required by FAA Order 7400.2E in processing Fort Irwin and the NTC's request for changes to Special Use Airspace.

Fort Irwin expansion to the west and southwest will require the Army to closely coordinate NTC operations so as not to negatively impact current Navy, USAF, and NASA mission activity. The Army, Navy, USAF, and NASA will need to establish a mutually agreed upon process to coordinate and schedule military training activity, to minimize impacts and ensure mission deconflictions.

Impacts to airspace could be considered significant if:

- ❖ new restricted airspace eliminates current commercial flights; and
- ❖ new restricted airspace eliminates private planes from reaching authorized destinations.

4.16.1 Maximum and Minimum Release of Airspace

4.16.1.1 Maximum Release of New Restricted Airspace

Under this condition, the new restricted airspace would be released to the FAA under the same conditions now followed for release of R-2502N/E. These airspace release estimates are based on historical use and release data for R-2502N/E, and on expected use of the new restricted airspace (Table 4.16-1).

4.16.1.2 Minimum Release of New Restricted Airspace

Because the new restricted airspace would be restricted from surface to unlimited altitude, it can be assumed that under some circumstances, the participating military forces would need to use the airspace from its altitude floor to unlimited altitude. Historical data shows that R-2502N airspace was released above 24,000 ft (FL240) AMSL at 60 percent of the time, above 29,000 ft (FL290) AMSL at 65percent of the time, and above 41,000 ft (FL410) AMSL at 100 percent of the time; R-2502E airspace was released above 24,000 ft (FL240) AMSL at 99 percent of the time and above