

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS
ON
LAND WITHDRAWALS
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Good day, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am Major General Robert Magnus, Commander Marine Corps Air Bases Western Area. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today concerning Marine Corps issues pertaining to Public Law 99-606 land withdrawal renewals.

My statement covers a number of areas:

- Marine Corps readiness
- The Barry M. Goldwater Range (BMGR)
- Management of the BMGR
- The Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge
- Stewardship of the land and its cultural and natural resources

MARINE CORPS READINESS

The Marine Corps is assigned the unique defense mission among the nation's armed services of being able to field, on virtually immediate notice, a self-sufficient air and ground combat force trained to fight as an integrated combined arms air-ground team under a single command. This team, known as the Marine Air Ground Task Force is the fundamental cornerstone of modern Marine Corps combat doctrine, and the Marine Air Ground Task Force is one of the first front-line combat forces that the nation turns to in times of crisis. The 82nd Congress saw a vital need for the Marine Corps to provide strong forces in readiness...versatile, fast-moving, and hard hitting. The Congress mandated that the Marine Corps be organized, trained and equipped to provide forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components...ready when the Nation may be least ready. To be ready, Marine forces must train for combat as they would fight. The ranges under consideration for renewal of land withdrawal under Public Law 99-606

as well as other range withdrawals the Administration proposes to renew are crucial to ensuring Marine Corps units have locations to train and maintain their combat readiness.

Although the Marine Corps through the Department of the Navy (DON) does not have any ranges withdrawn by Public Law 99-606, the Barry M. Goldwater Range (BMGR) specifically, and the other ranges in general are critical to Marine Corps training and combat readiness. Marine aviators train daily on the BMGR. Additionally, Marines regularly attend Topgun and other training courses at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada and participate in exercises with sister services at Nellis AFB, Nevada. If for some reason these ranges were to become unavailable, Marine aviation training and Marine Air Ground Task Force combat readiness as we know it today would cease to exist.

The fundamental purpose for renewing the land withdrawals to the military departments is to preserve a component of the national defense-training base that is indispensable to the continued and future readiness of American forces. The need for training that realistically approximates the way tactical forces are required to fight in actual combat is an unquestionable lesson learned from the history of warfare. Therefore it is critical that the land withdrawal not be allowed to expire. Expiration of the withdrawal and the resultant suspension of all training activities on these ranges would have an immediate negative effect on USMC training and readiness. To the extent possible, military training activities would be relocated to other installations with weapons range support, which are already close to maximum training capacity. This would result in higher training costs, lost residual training capacity, and reduced flexibility to meet emerging training needs and real world commitments around the globe.

For example, Marine Topgun and Weapons Tactics Instruction graduates would not be able to continue through the training pipeline, and this in turn would result in a degradation of unit and

individual training and combat readiness. Units would be required to deploy in carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups without the benefit of aviators fully trained across the full aviation spectrum as a cohesive fighting unit. Combat flying skills are highly perishable and can be effectively developed and maintained only through an ongoing program of frequent training that is realistic to the tactical missions. And nowhere is the importance of training as a team more evident than in Marine Air Ground Task Force operations especially those units operating from the sea. The very nature of amphibious warfare makes it the most complicated of military operations. Lost training time would have a disastrous effect.

THE BARRY M. GOLDWATER RANGE

Withdrawn to the Secretary of the Air Force (SAF), the BMGR, inclusive of the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, is the single most important range now and into the future for Marine Corps aviation training and combat readiness. Through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Air Force, the Marine Corps operationally schedules the western portion of the range. The Marine Corps conducts its semi-annual Weapons Tactics Instruction course (the Marine Corps' train the trainer course) and daily training involving east and west coast Marine Corps units, units from our sister services, and various allied nation's air forces on this range. Our inability to use this range for our operational readiness training would rapidly jeopardize the combat readiness of Marine and other U. S. tactical air forces.

The primary objective of the range is to allow Marine and other service commanders the diversity and flexibility necessary to exercise their units in all phases of tactical aviation to the fullest extent, both day and night, and under conditions that realistically simulate combat. In fact, the training benefits and popularity of this range complex are such that Marine Corps and Navy units come from all areas of the country as well as aircraft carriers of our Pacific Fleet. As

a result, Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, which has five tenant 3d Marine Aircraft Wing attack squadrons, has become the most used deployment site for Marine Corps aviation units from both the east and west coasts.

Marine Corps activities on the BMGR encompass training across the full spectrum of aviation and Marine Air Ground Task Force requirements which include but are not limited to: anti-air warfare; offensive air support; assault support; aerial reconnaissance; electronic warfare; control of aircraft and missiles; and logistics associated with supporting these training evolutions. Such training involves operating sophisticated aircraft and weapons systems in realistic conditions which include the actual firing of aircraft guns, missiles, rockets; aerial bombing; air-to-air simulated combat; aerial refueling; the insertion of infantry, ground based radar units, and STINGER teams; and ground based logistics support.

MANAGEMENT OF THE BMGR

The BMGR is currently withdrawn and reserved to SAF for military use. The Air Force administers the entire range and operationally schedules the eastern side. Through a 1982 Memorandum of Agreement with the Air Force the Marine Corps operationally schedules the western side. The Marine Corps preferred alternative would renew the BMGR as two military reservations: one reserved for use by the Secretary of the Air Force, the other for use by the Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV). Under this split military administration scenario, the Air Force would be the designated using and scheduling agency for the eastern section of the BMGR and associated airspace. The Marine Corps would be designated by the SECNAV as the using and scheduling agency for the western section.

Split administration would not negatively affect integrated use of the entire range. The reciprocal scheduling privileges and procedures that the Air Force and Marine Corps share under the 1982 Memorandum of Agreement would continue.

Independent management administration of the western section of the BMGR by the Marine Corps would end the management control authority and the environmental compliance approval responsibility for Marine Corps land use and activities that the Air Force now holds. The Marine Corps would assume full responsibility for such management and documentation in accordance with current laws and regulations.

Natural and cultural resource management would become a service responsibility under current laws and regulations, specifically the Sikes Act. However, the Marine Corps would support an updated, structured, collaborative management plan similar to the BMGR Executive Council currently in use by the Air Force and Marine Corps, providing each agency retains its statutory authority under current law.

Finally, the services would have first right of refusal on the other service's land section if that service determined that it was no longer required.

THE CABEZA PRIETA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Marine Corps needs to ensure the future of military activities over the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge as part of the BMGR.

The Refuge is an essential part of the entire training experience on the BMGR. Its varied terrain provides Weapons Tactics Instruction student pilots with a variety of options when planning their exercises thus preventing "canned scenarios." The full operational dimension of the BMGR inclusive of the Refuge provides invaluable training flexibility and thus the size of the restricted land and airspace of the BMGR is its most important attribute.

Current activities in the Refuge are restricted to: aircraft flights no lower than 1500' above ground level (AGL) except during the semi-annual Weapons Tactics Instruction course when fixed wing aircraft can fly down to 200' AGL and helicopters down to 50' AGL maintenance of existing telemetry sites; and no ground activities without the permission of the Refuge Manager. It is important to note that our cumulative annual flight time over the Refuge below 1500' AGL is less than 24 hours, less than the equivalent of one day a year. The Refuge also serves as a safety buffer for the employment of long range aerial weapons of today and the future.

The Department of Interior (DOI) and Department of Defense (DOD) recognize the importance of the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge to the Marine Corps' capability to conduct realistic aviation training. DOI and DOD are currently engaged in negotiations to write alternate legislation that would exclude the Refuge from the renewal of the land withdrawal while at the same time guaranteeing the Marine Corps the training opportunities it requires. This alternate legislation would be submitted as part of the renewal of the land withdrawal legislative package.

The Marine Corps must retain the ability to train over the Refuge as it currently does in order to guarantee realistic combat training in the future. If alternate legislation cannot be agreed to, the Marine Corps recommends including the Refuge in the land withdrawal renewal.

STEWARDSHIP

Congress has entrusted the Marine Corps with lands that contain priceless natural and cultural resources, and we are committed to protecting these resources with the assistance of our federal and state partners. While providing for our training needs, these ranges play a key role in the ecological health of the region. Conservation and management of natural and cultural resources

are best served by implementing long-term programs that promote resource understanding, protection, and improvement.

The Marine Corps has adopted measures to protect the resources of its ranges in general and the BMGR specifically. These measures include protocols for appropriate waste disposal, restrictions on off-road vehicle use, spill containment, and explosive ordnance disposal sweeps. To mitigate impacts resulting from the actions being taken, the Marine Corps initiated a number of measures including: exercise control groups that ensure compliance of Standing Operating Procedures for use of the training areas; establishment of an office to receive and investigate reports of unauthorized use of airspace and ground training area; and hosting annual conferences involving land and resource management of the ranges.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, and Arizona Department of Game and Fish have joined forces to study noise and risk effects on Sonoran pronghorn within the BMGR. This three-year study, which began in 1997, will assess the long-term noise effects of military overflight and ordnance delivery on the Sonoran pronghorn habitat. This program is in addition to the Marine Corps continuing involvement in many aspects of the Sonoran pronghorn recovery since 1993 to include free standing water studies, range distribution, and movement patterns.

The Sonoran pronghorn recovery program is only one of many natural and cultural programs the Marine Corps is involved in on the BMGR. Recognizing the importance of stewardship of the range, the Marine Corps has budgeted for additional civilian specialists to assist in natural and cultural resource management beginning in fiscal year 2001. The Marine Corps is committed to maintaining and improving its stewardship of the lands it manages.

SUMMARY

“Train like you fight, fight like you train.” This warrior’s maxim has become the creed of Marines past, present and future. The repeated lessons of history have shown it to be the essential path to success in combat. The diversity and flexibility of the BMGR and other ranges associated with Public Law 99-606 have kept these ranges as jewels in the nation’s crown of military training installations, fundamental to the evolution of our tactics and technology...and to our combat readiness.

I ask for your full support of the land withdrawals that ensure Marine Corps readiness and warfighting capability.

That concludes my statement. I appreciate the support that this Committee and its Staff have given the Marine Corps in the past, and I look forward to continued close cooperation in the future.