

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SUBJECT: LAND BASED RANGES - BUILDING READINESS WHILE  
PROTECTING NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

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## **Introduction:**

The Air Force's operational capabilities are advancing at a rate that challenges the geographic boundaries of our ranges. These geographic constraints compromise the Air Force's ability to conduct effective test and evaluation and our ability to conduct realistic and relevant live training. One important aspect driving the need for larger training range boundaries is the increasing size of weapon safety footprints. The Air Force calculates those safety footprints, where public safety mandates restricted access, based on the type of weapons employed, combined with the speed, height, and location of the aircraft are used to by the Air Force to calculate the area that must be controlled for public safety reasons. Paradoxically, as precision guided munitions become more accurate and reliable, the safety footprints become larger in part due to design, but also due to greater aircraft employment distances. For ground safety reasons, the Air Force must control, for the duration of a mission, access by non-mission related personnel and the public to areas where debris or components could land if the weapon employment went catastrophically wrong. We are experiencing challenges across our portfolio, even on the Air Force's most capable range, the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR).

## **Overview:**

The NTTR, the preeminent range location for testing and evaluation of weapons systems, tactics development, and advanced training, has reached its limits. In Fiscal Year 19, the NTTR could not accommodate 16 percent of mission requests due to physical capacity constraints. To maximize use, the range is scheduled every day from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., but demand often drives 24 hour operations. The NTTR optimizes efficiency, executing 93% of scheduled missions. However, this efficiency comes at a price to personnel and equipment. In FY19 alone, we required more than 24,000 hours of overtime to meet the mission demands. Additionally, current restrictions on military movement throughout the range, and the inability to place equipment in optimal locations, are causing the range to become inadequate. These limitations will result in the NTTR failing to adequately meet future training requirements. Specifically, under the current configuration, the NTTR will not be able to accommodate the increasing requirements associated with fielding the F-35 and other 5th and 6th generation weapons systems.

## **Way Ahead:**

The Air Force is considering solutions to address these deficiencies through the ongoing land withdrawal renewal legislation. The Air Force is assessing the following two primary changes: 1) allowing enhanced flexibility for military operations and emulation of enemy threats on the Desert National Wildlife Range (DNWR); and 2)

expanding the range to accommodate the larger safety footprints and increased throughput capacity.

First, the Air Force is proposing to allow low-impact ground party access to the current overlapping and co-managed portion of the DNWR. This proposal would also allow the placement of equipment pads along existing roads in the DNWR. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service currently forbids both of these military activity enhancements within the co-managed portion of DNWR. Second, the Air Force is proposing to expand the boundary of the range by up to 300,000 acres. It is important to note that the Air Force is not proposing to expand any of the current bombing areas. In total, the Air Force plans to disturb no more than 35 acres of the 300,000 acre potential expansion. This minor amount of disturbance would be limited to the placement of up to 15 equipment pads, maintenance of existing roads, and the allowance of assault aircraft landings on a dry lakebed to drop off small Special Forces teams for over-land navigation training. The primary use of the expansion would be to create a public weapons safety footprint buffer and would leave the lands untouched and pristine.

Over the past four years, the Air Force examined the potential impact of these actions through the cooperative development of a Legislative Environmental Impact Statement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Bureau of Land Management, the Department of Energy, the Nevada Association of Counties, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. With the completion of this analysis, the Air Force is confident it can accomplish both of the proposed changes with no significant environmental impact to these important conservation lands. As an example, the Air Force proposes to mark boundaries of the proposed expansion using terrain and signage, not through fencing or other additional physical barriers. This will eliminate the potential impacts to species migration patterns caused by construction and maintenance activities.

The land provided to the Air Force is vital to our national security mission and the land is a national treasure that must be protected and preserved. The Air Force sees this protection as an inherent component of our national security mission. Air Force installations document and manage our process for protecting these resources through Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans (INRMPs), and Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plans (ICRMP). The Air Force develops these plans in concert with the public, tribal governments, and other Federal and state agencies to address stakeholder equities.

The INRMP, required by the Sikes Act, documents conservation goals and objectives for natural resources management. It specifically addresses the areas of fish and wildlife protection, habitat management, threatened and endangered species management, wetland protection, and public access to the installation for outdoor recreation activities such as hunting and fishing. Successful implementation of an INRMP ensures no net loss of mission capability while addressing all these issues. The Sikes Act requires that the Air Force develop INRMPs in cooperation with the USFWS and the head of the state fish and wildlife agency. The plans integrate state and

Federal conservation requirements with broader installation planning, funding priorities, and mission requirements. INRMPs, therefore, represent a tripartite agreement on integrated installation land management goals and objectives to sustain mission requirements and protect sensitive natural resources. As a result of the NTTR INRMP implementation, the Air Force spends on average over three and a half million dollars a year directly on Air Force environmental management activities on the range.

The ICRMP describes the significance of archaeological and cultural resources present on the range, and outlines the state and tribal consultation requirements and procedures to manage them appropriately. The Air Force has identified and continues to manage over 4,000 archaeological sites on the NTTR. The security on the bombing range protects these sites protecting them from vandalism and pilferage as public access is strictly prohibited. The Air Force formally consults with sixteen federally-recognized tribes and one state-recognized tribe on all range activities that may impact tribal resources through the Nellis AFB Heritage program. This program arranges for regular tribal member access and the ability to monitor archaeological site conditions. The affiliated tribes at the NTTR also meet semi-annually in Government-to-Government meetings with the commander to discuss ongoing and proposed projects, get the status of natural resources studies, and share any concerns or ask questions. The tribal program at the NTTR is now in its 23rd year and is a model for other Air Force locations and other DoD agencies.

### **Conclusion:**

The NTTR is a unique national asset that, due to its land area, airspace volume, infrastructure, and remoteness enables military test and training activities that cannot be completed in other national training areas or replicated anywhere else in the world. The enhancements proposed by the Air Force through the ongoing land renewal are required to maintain the relevance of the range, meet the existing and future requirements, and build on the billions of dollars already invested in the range. The Air Force proposals are a result of years of detailed analysis with close stakeholder cooperation. They address the Air Force needs while not adversely impacting the treasure that is the Desert National Wildlife Range. This includes continuing to allow access for hunting activities. Without these enhancements, the Air Force will not be able to meet its training requirements which will have a direct negative impact to military readiness. The Air Force looks forward to working with the committee, staff, and all other concerned parties to ensure any final solution correctly balances the competing needs while protecting the national resource.