

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL
LANDS

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

ON

THE BARRY M. GOLDWATER RANGE LAND WITHDRAWAL

JULY 13, 2023

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, we are thankful for the opportunity to present this statement regarding the continuing provision of withdrawal of the lands of the Barry M. Goldwater Range (BMGR) for use by the Department of Defense (DOD).

The Marine Corps remains the Nation's force-in-readiness—a naval expeditionary force ready to deter adversaries, respond to crisis and conflict, and contribute to Naval and Joint Force operations. Our identity as Marines centers on being ready to deter, fight, and win. As individuals, as units, and as a Corps, everything we do is in support of warfighting advantage and being most ready when the Nation is least ready. This is our obligation to the American people.

A key element in providing ready forces is the availability of suitable and sustainable training areas, ranges, airspace, and sea space. Readiness requires a combination of people, assets, ranges, training, and experimentation to meet force development objectives in support of both current and future challenges. Our ongoing readiness to meet force design initiatives will require critical ranges and training areas be available for the Marine Corps to conduct live, virtual, and constructive training. One of the centerpieces for that advanced training capability for the Marine Corps is the BMGR in Southwest Arizona. The collective ranges and training areas in California and Arizona managed by Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma comprise over 1.1 million acres of land area, approximately 7,397 square nautical miles of airspace, making it the Marine Corps' largest training complex, and the BMGR West (BMGR-W) falls under its purview.

The Marine Corps portion of BMGR-W, comprised of approximately 693,619 acres and consisting of three subranges that support aviation training, including Tactical Aircrew Combat Training Systems (TACTS) High, TACTS Low, and Cactus West, which provide for Air to Air,

simulated Air to Ground, scored Air to Ground, supersonic flight, Low Altitude Training and Tactics (LATT), Electronic Warfare, Laser Certified Ranges, Field Carrier Landing Practice (FCLP), Forward Arming and Refueling Points (FARP), Assault Landing Zone (ALZ) training, Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), Counter UAS and Aerial Delivery (AD) operations. Additionally, approximately 50 different types of aircraft (military and government agency) utilize the BMGR-W on an annual basis.

Significant portions of BMGR-W contain multiple live-fire training areas for individual and crew served weapons training, convoy operations training, Explosive Ordnance Disposal training, and limited new systems test, development, and experimentation. The BMGR also provides necessary ground maneuver area for ground combat elements operating in support of aviation training, to include the biannual Marine Corps Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) course, which is supported by a ground element of more than 1,200 personnel for each course.

These courses are critical to Marine Corps aviation training and readiness, which require access to the BMGR – West and East. The biannual WTI courses facilitate the development of aviation tactics, techniques, and procedures through tactical experimentation in realistic combat training scenarios and produces over 300 military occupational specialty Weapons and Tactics Instructors annually. WTI qualified instructors return to their home unit and serve as squadron training officers who use their skills to act as aircraft and weapons subject matter experts to provide their units with the proper training and evaluation to ensure exceptional combat readiness. As such, loss of access to the BMGR would have profoundly negative effects on both Marine Corps aviation readiness and Force Design (FD) 2030 experimentation and implementation.

The BMGR also provides the venue for USMC readiness and pre-deployment training, for up to 20 deployable units per year. Additionally, many other MCAS Yuma tenants, including the Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron 1 (VMX-1), Marine Aircraft Group 13 (MAG-13), Marine Air Control Squadron 1 (MACS-1), Marine Fighter Training Squadron 401 (VMFT-401), Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1 (VMU-1), and Combat Logistics Company 16 (CLC-16), utilize BMGR-W year-round to train and maintain operational readiness. The BMGR also provides critical support to the mission readiness of the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW) units located at MCAS Miramar and MCAS Camp Pendleton, as well as numerous Navy and Marine Corps units that deploy to the region for individual, unit level, and large-scale exercise training.

The BMGR functions as part of a system of ranges in conjunction with all Marine Corps Installations West's (MCIWEST's) installations, ranges, and training facilities, as well as multiple Navy Operating Areas and other DOD installations and airspace within the southwest of the United States. As an example, the Navy's Southwest Tactical Training Range and Tactical Combat Training System (TCTS) ranges includes MCAS Yuma's BMGR-W, in addition to other Navy and Marine Corps range complexes, providing critical training and readiness support to the Naval operating forces, aviation training commands, and other Service units. In addition to BMGR-W range areas, the eastern portion of the BMGR managed by the U.S. Air Force and Luke Air Force Base provides surface-to-air threat simulators and training systems that are integral to Marine Corps aviation training during WTI and for advanced systems training by Marine Corps and Navy F-35 aircrew.

The criticality of the BMGR-W for training use by the DOD is evident in the training usage numbers generated on an annual basis. On average, BMGR-W is utilized for training more

than 317 days per year, supporting over 16,500 aviation flights (sorties) and 335 annual ground training events. Absent the BMGR-W, the aforementioned training would have to be absorbed by other training locations, a near impossibility due to cost, competing timelines, and capacity, all resulting in lost training and significant negative impact to combat readiness.

The Department of the Navy (DON) and the Marine Corps have made substantial investment in MCAS Yuma's ranges and training infrastructure resources, including range instrumentation, target systems, and simulation technologies within BMGR-W. Over the last ten years this investment has totaled approximately \$193.5M. Annually, the DON and Marine Corps invests over \$10M, plus extensive staff hours and labor costs, to ensure MCAS Yuma achieves an appropriate balance between realistic, effective training and training capability resources including extensive use of the BMGR-W complex. This investment centers around four cornerstone objectives; Sustain Range and Training System Capabilities, Maximize Training Capacity, Modernizing Ranges, and Preserving the Natural Environment and Mitigating Encroachment.

As government stewards of this range, the Marine Corps is responsible for managing all natural and cultural resources within the BMGR-W. Thus, the Marine Corps participates in local and regional partnerships and organizations such as the Barry M. Goldwater Executive Council (BEG), the Intergovernmental Executive Committee (IEG), and the Western Regional Partnership (WRP). The goal of these partnerships is to address issues of mutual concern with states and federal agencies, including enhancing access with the local and visiting communities for public recreation activities, as well as the quality of military test and training ranges. Additionally, in managing the resources of the BMGR, the Marine Corps also has close working relationships with many other key local, state, and federal partners including Arizona Game and

Fish Department, Arizona Land and Water Trust, Compatible Lands Foundation, Mojave Desert Land Trust, the Conservation Fund, and Yuma County, Arizona.

The range is home to numerous special status species which are endemic to the region, including the flat-tailed horned lizard (FTHL) and the endangered Sonoran pronghorn. The Marine Corps manages 114,800 acres of FTHL habitat as part of the Yuma Desert Management Area, which represents 88% of the protected habitat for this species remaining in Arizona. MCAS Yuma personnel are actively engaged in the management decisions regarding the species through representation on both the FTHL Management Oversight Group (MOG) and the Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC). Utilizing the collective expertise of the MOG and ICC, MCAS Yuma's management efforts across the FTHL's range within BMGR-W have contributed significantly to precluding federal listing of this species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), thus avoiding additional regulatory encroachment on military training while ensuring long-term sustainability for this species. Additionally, BMGR-W provides substantial habitat for the ESA listed Sonoran Pronghorn. In 2002, severe drought nearly caused eradication of the U.S. population, leaving just 21 animals remaining. After two decades of interagency collaboration the Sonoran Pronghorn population in the U.S. has rebounded to over 500 animals. Further, MCAS Yuma has developed an Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan (ICRMP) and routinely consults with thirteen Native American Tribes and the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding the projection of cultural resources and archeological sites. The installation conducts annual surveys to mitigate impacts to cultural sites. Thus far, approximately 625 sites onboard BMGR-W have been identified and are being protected.

Approximately 75 percent (nearly 500,000 acres) of the BMGR-W is open to regulated public use by the local and visiting community. Popular activities include camping, hunting, wildlife photography, hiking, and off-highway vehicle use on designated roads and trails. MCAS Yuma annually issues over 12,000 public recreation permits, which are required for range access. Providing recreational access that does not conflict with military training allows MCAS Yuma to generate support from the greater Yuma community for the Marine Corps and its mission. In addition, MCAS Yuma works collaboratively with other state and federal partners including Customs and Border Protect (CBP), AGFD, and Bureau of Reclamation to allow these agencies to pursue their mission objectives on military lands.

To meet the current and future mission requirements, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen must be able to “train as they fight” through a robust and sustainable training capability and supporting infrastructure. The BMGR is extremely critical to addressing these challenges to ensure Marine Corps and Air Force aviation and ground training and operational readiness meets required thresholds of today and in the years to come. The Marine Corps remains committed to protecting the natural and cultural resources onboard BMGR-W while achieving the readiness to enable the Marine Corps to prevail in any future conflict. With the renewal of the BMGR we look forward to a continuing, productive relationship in our use of public lands which balances the readiness of our nation’s combat forces and the protection of its natural resources.