

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
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ON YUMA PROVING GROUND LAND WITHDRAWAL

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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

Introduction

Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting us here today to discuss the proposed withdrawal and reservation of public lands adjacent to the U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground (YPG) in Arizona. Enhancing the testing capabilities on YPG will allow the Army to provide the most effective weapons and equipment to our warfighters possible. The Army supports withdrawing and reserving approximately 22,000 acres of land along Highway 95 and adjacent to YPG for military purposes for an indefinite period to support this enduring mission.

In preparation for this proposed withdrawal, the Army has worked extensively with the Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Native American Tribes, and the public. We have successfully completed the processes set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, culminating in a Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) and a formalized Findings and Recommendations report that supports this withdrawal.

Yuma Proving Ground: History and Mission

Originally established in 1951 as the Yuma Test Station and renamed in 1963, Yuma Proving Ground is the U.S. Army's premier Natural Environments Test Center. Located in southwestern Arizona, the installation currently encompasses 829,565 acres of land withdrawn under Public Land Order 848. For over seven decades, YPG has served as a multi-purpose test center responsible for the vast majority of the nation's artillery testing, as well as the testing of armored vehicles and cargo airdrops supporting the Army, Joint services, and other federal agencies. A notable recent example is the testing of the Orion capsule parachute assembly, part of the Artemis program. Today, YPG leads the nation in these test mission areas, directly improving the quality, capabilities, and safety of equipment utilized by America's combat forces.

Highway 95 Withdrawal and Mission Benefits

The primary purpose of the proposed withdrawal is to expand YPG's Cibola Range high-altitude airdrop testing capabilities while ensuring public safety. The bill proposes the withdrawal of approximately 21,782 acres of federal land located west of Highway 95, adjacent to YPG's Cibola Range. The location of these lands is in proximity to existing parachute drop zones on YPG that are currently used for air cargo delivery testing and would provide a valuable safety buffer for critical testing activities.

This expansion is critically needed to support current and emerging testing and training requirements for advances in Global Positioning System (GPS)-guided parachute air

delivery technology. Modern tactical scenarios necessitate higher airdrop altitudes, greater target offsets, and increased aircraft speeds.

Testing and training exercises from these higher altitudes and airspeeds require significantly larger Surface Safety Zones (SSZs)—areas in space and on the ground that provide essential safety buffers in the event of a system failure. Advancements in air delivery technologies have exceeded the test capabilities that can currently be safely performed within the existing Cibola Range footprint. By securing this withdrawal, the Army will obtain the adequate SSZs necessary to contain potential equipment failures that could drift off course, allowing us to restrict public access during testing, thereby reducing safety risks. The current boundary of YPG only allows guided parachute releases up to 25,000 feet. With the additional area, that elevation can increase to 35,000 feet and still contain the SSZ. Without this withdrawal, air delivery systems cannot be tested to their full capabilities for altitude and precision, degrading our operational readiness.

Howard Cantonment Area

In addition to the Highway 95 lands, the bill proposes the withdrawal and reservation of approximately 249 acres adjacent to the YPG Howard Cantonment Area. The Army has been utilizing the Howard Cantonment Area as a continuous, integral part of the YPG installation since 1955 under various interim Department of the Interior authorizations, the most recent being a 1983 withdrawal (PLO 6475) that expired in 2003. Incorporating the Howard Cantonment Area into this legislative withdrawal streamlines tracking of the land status and provides the permanent authorization appropriate for lands that have supported military testing and training for nearly 70 years.

Environmental and Cultural Stewardship and Management

The Army recognizes the importance of the natural and cultural resources located within the withdrawal area. In collaboration with the BLM, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army would manage these lands through our Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP). This plan ensures the continuous conservation of resources and addresses provisions for public access and hunting. Furthermore, we maintain an Integrated Cultural Resource Management Plan (ICRMP) to facilitate ongoing cooperation and engagement with affected Tribes.

We have also closely coordinated with the BLM regarding the Parker-Blaisdell Utility Corridor, which overlaps with the easterly boundary of the withdrawal area. We recognize the importance of this corridor for national energy security and the regional grid. The Army fully supports provisions allowing the Secretary of the Interior to issue utility rights-of-way within this corridor, provided that, in consultation with the Army,

conditions are incorporated as much as practicable to minimize impacts to the military mission.

Conclusion

The public lands proposed for withdrawal offer essential testing environments that are vital for the advancement of our aerial delivery systems. An indefinite withdrawal aligns with our long-term planning and the existing YPG footprint, ensuring we can meet the emerging needs of our Soldiers well into the future. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. The Army looks forward to working with this Committee to ensure continued and expanded access to these critical testing lands.