

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

STATEMENT OF

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*“Land Based Ranges; Building Military Readiness While Maintaining
Natural and Cultural Resources”*

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BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
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Chairman Garamendi, Ranking Member Lamborn, distinguished members of the Readiness Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department of the Navy's land based ranges. The use of land-based ranges is essential for us to meet critical priorities outlined in the National Defense Strategy, which, among other things, requires us to prepare for peer and near-peer competitors. Congress has placed public lands in our custody for this purpose. To ensure we can train on these lands frequently and repeatedly we protect and manage the natural and cultural resources entrusted to us. We believe that military readiness and good stewardship go hand-in-hand and the Department has an excellent track record of balancing these priorities.

The Department of the Navy conducts training activities on lands and designated airspace across the country with the cooperation of many partners, tribes, and private landowners. In particular, we value our collaboration with the Departments of Interior and Agriculture to allow us to fly over millions of acres they maintain for public or commercial use. In recent years, we have experienced a high level of partnership to balance national security needs with the goals of our country to manage our national resources. When we must protect public safety, the Department has custody of approximately five million acres, which includes about three million acres of land withdrawn from the public domain for military purposes. Most of these lands were set aside for military use as part of the World War II and Korean War build up; their size and configuration reflect the state of technology at that time. The 1990s and 2000s saw a generational change in technology yielding vastly more capable weapon systems. Our ranges, though, did not change to accommodate these more capable weapons systems, and they are quickly outpacing the boundaries of our existing ranges. A result is that, in some cases, the

Department is not able to fully employ the capabilities of many platforms due to limitations presented by ranges fit to match outdated systems.

The importance of our ordnance ranges for naval gunfire, aviation and combined arms cannot be overstated. Training in a real-world environment is essential in ensuring our warfighters are fully prepared to survive in combat. While virtual and constructed training is an important element in building warfighting skills, virtual and constructed training cannot replicate all the skills that must be learned prior to an actual enemy engagement; some of these skills can only be obtained through hands on realistic training.

We recognize that frequent, repeated use of live-fire ranges can affect the environment and those ranges provide important habitat for wildlife, including endangered species, and contain important cultural resources. We consult and partner with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and with State natural resources agencies to prepare and implement robust integrated natural resources management plans. These partnerships have been very effective and beneficial to improving wildlife populations and habitat. For example, with the assistance of all Federal, State and local stakeholders, we are part of the coalition that rescued the endangered Sonoran pronghorn from near extinction on the Barry M. Goldwater Range in Arizona. When we started recovery activities, the population of this species was estimated to be under 20; today, it is over 200. In recognition of our contributions, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission conferred its Award of Excellence to the Marine Corps for stewardship of the natural resources on the Goldwater Range. We have other notable success stories across the nation, including our recovery efforts for the red cockaded woodpecker, desert tortoise, flat-tailed horned lizard and the loggerhead shrike.

With regard to cultural resources, we develop integrated cultural resources management plans in partnership with State Historic Preservation Officers. The Department currently manages over 15,000 archaeological sites and over 20,000 historic structures. We also partner with conservation organizations and States, under the Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (or REPI), to jointly purchase easements over undeveloped land near ranges to prevent encroachment onto military activities. Since 2005, the Department has acquired easements on over 200 thousand acres, including approximately seven thousand acres of easements near Naval Air Station Fallon, and approximately 56 thousand acres of easements around the 37 thousand-acre Townsend Bombing Range in Georgia. I would like to take a moment to thank the Chairman, Mr. Garamendi, and the Ranking Member, Mr. Lamborn, as well as all the members of the committee for your support in the expansion of the Townsend Bombing Range. This range is used by multiple military services and is the premier air-to-ground range for advanced weaponry. With your support, we were able to simultaneously increase the range's training capabilities as well as preserve over 55,000 acres as compatible forests and working lands.

The Department of the Navy is currently working on several withdrawal actions. We are working on a land withdrawal extension for the El Centro Training Range Complex in California with no change in area or purpose. We are also working with the Air Force to extend the land withdrawal for the Barry M. Goldwater Range in Arizona, again with no change in area or purpose. With regard to our land withdrawal proposal for the Fallon Range Training Complex, we are proposing an expansion of the complex and a change in purpose to include tactical ground mobility training for Sea Air Land (SEAL) teams.

The Fallon Range Training Complex (FRTC) is currently operating with significant gaps in air and ground training capability. The size and configuration of existing land and air training space, originally created in 1953, and last updated in 1986, is inadequate, inhibits tactical employment of weapons systems, and prevents aircrews and special operations forces from training in a threat realistic environment.

The Fallon range complex consists of four ordnance ranges and one electronic warfare range, and is currently about 230 thousand acres in size. We are proposing to increase its size to approximately 899 thousand acres. When the range was last modernized in 1986, we were using “gravity” bombs. This type of ordnance has limited or no guidance systems and is essentially unchanged from the Vietnam War era. Gravity bombs are typically dropped one to two miles from the target at an altitude of 12,000 feet and at an airspeed of 300 knots. The introduction of Precision Guided Munitions to the fleet in the early 2000’s fundamentally changed how aviation ordnance is delivered because they have controllable flight surfaces and guidance systems, such as laser and global positioning systems. These controllable flight surfaces and guidance systems allow us to launch ordnance 10 to 12 miles from the target at an altitude of 30,000 feet and at an airspeed of 600 knots. Though counterintuitive, Precision Guided Munitions require greater safety zones than gravity bombs. Hence, the modern range must be significantly larger than before in order to accommodate a larger weapons safety zone. If the flight surface or guidance system of a Precision Guidance Muniton fails, then it essentially acts as a “gravity” bomb dropped from a very long-distance. The risk of a Precision Guided Muniton failing is extremely low; however, the outcome of such failure can be catastrophic. Because of our unwavering commitment to range safety, we currently launch Precision Guided Munitions under constraints that require us to essentially treat them like gravity bombs. As a result, naval aircrews are only

able to train to 50 percent of required capabilities for laser-guided bombs, 40 percent for joint direct attack munitions, and 40 percent for Hellfire Missiles. Accordingly, we must have sufficient range area to accommodate the rare instance when a Precision Guidance Munition fails so that naval aircrews can train to the full capability of the Precision Guidance Munitions they will employ during real world combat. Our proposal for the Fallon complex includes the land necessary to safely accommodate the use of Precision Guided Munitions to allow Navy aviators to train as they would fight.

Although the expansion would increase our training capabilities, it is only about half of the acreage that would be required to optimize training with these weapons systems. We configured the land withdrawal to accommodate 180 degrees of attack; this allows for weapons launch either with or into the prevailing wind, multiple attack angles, and allows us to develop different training scenarios for aircrews. Ideally, we would have a range complex capable of supporting 360 degrees of attack. We recognize, though, that under current circumstances, such expansion would have unacceptable regional, economic and environmental impacts that would be unacceptable to a broad range of stakeholders.

Though much of our proposal is focused on naval aviation, a key component of our proposal was developed to satisfy live-fire requirements for SEALs during tactical ground mobility training. Currently, SEALs can only meet 17 percent of their required training capabilities for use of 7.62 mm weapons for 360-degree live-fire, and 0 percent for use of 50-cal weapons for 180 degree live-fire during tactical mobility training. Our proposal would provide 100 percent of the capability necessary for SEAL tactical mobility training using all their weapons.

We recognize that our proposal will have significant impacts on the local and regional economy and to the environment; we are working with stakeholders to reduce these impacts so that we can achieve a win-win solution. In support of our potential legislative proposal to modernize the Fallon Range Training Complex and in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Navy developed an environmental impact statement. During this process, we held over 300 meetings in the last three years with Federal, State, Counties, Tribes and other stakeholders. As a result of these meetings, we modified our proposal to reduce the land withdrawal acreage to lessen the economic and environmental impacts as much as possible while still meeting critical mission needs. For instance, our proposal includes the creation of a Military Spectrum Management Area adjacent to one of our bombing ranges and to the electronic warfare range. This land would remain open to economic use, including all forms of mining, and would be managed by the Bureau of Land Management. However, prior to issuance of a permit for any use, including mining, the Bureau of Land Management would consult with the Navy to develop a means by which the permit could be issued while preserving the training environment.

In addition, we are partnering with the State of Nevada to accommodate bighorn sheep hunting, fire management and restoration activities, and to conduct sage grouse noise impact studies. We are working closely with affected tribes to ensure they have access to important cultural sites within the expanded range footprint. We are also partnering with the tribes, State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to memorialize a range expansion and modernization process that ensures compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act.

In closing, the Department has a proven track record of environmental stewardship and, working with our partners, we are confident that we can modernize the Fallon range complex in a manner that protects natural and cultural resources. We recognize the economic and environmental impacts our proposal has on our northern Nevada neighbors. We have and will continue to work with all stakeholders to achieve the win-win that all deserve. We believe this is possible and look forward to continuing our partnership with our host community.