

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and SEIS Fact Sheet

1. What has happened since the 2012 Land Acquisition EIS?

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the “Land Acquisition and Airspace Establishment to Support Large-Scale Marine Air Ground Task Force Live Fire and Maneuver Training” to meet the Marine Corps’ Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) sustained, combined arms, live-fire and maneuver training requirement took nearly four and one half years to complete, including public review and comment. The Draft EIS was released on February 25, 2011; the Final EIS was released on July 27, 2012; and the Record of Decision (ROD) was released on February 15, 2013. The Final EIS for the land acquisition incorporated consultation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and comments received from Federal, State, tribal and local agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and individual members of the public. The Department of the Navy (DON) selected Alternative 6 in the ROD, which reflected a balance between reducing environmental impacts and meeting mission requirements. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA) authorized the withdrawal of federal land and purchase of non-federal land adjacent to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Combat Center) to meet the Marine Corps MEB training requirement.
- The withdrawal included an Exclusive Military Use Area (EMUA) consisting of two parcels, one to the west and one to the south of the Combat Center, of approximately 107,000 acres. It also included an approximately 56,000-acre Shared Use Area available for public recreation 10 months per year and for military training two months of each year. The NDAA also designated approximately 43,000 acres as the Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area (JVOHVRA) for year round public recreation.
- The expansion of the Combat Center led to the preservation of approximately 15,000 acres of habitat for threatened and/or endangered species within the newly acquired areas. The desert tortoise population within this newly-acquired training land has been identified for translocation in order to sustain their survivability in accordance with the Final EIS.
- The Marine Corps continues to acquire privately-owned parcels, finalize the tortoise translocation plan with the USFWS, and establish new airspace, in order to use the Expansion Areas for eventual MEB training. A Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental EIS (SEIS) was published in the Federal Register on August 24, 2016. As a proven good steward of natural and cultural resources, the Marine Corps is sincere in its desire to facilitate public and agency input through the SEIS process, ensuring a quality environmental document to guide the tortoise translocation process.

2. Why prepare a Supplemental EIS?

- In its Biological Opinion (BO) of the 2012 EIS's proposed actions dated July 17, 2012, the USFWS concluded the proposed action was not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the desert tortoise, nor adversely modify its critical habitat. Since the 2012 FEIS and 2013 ROD were published, the Marine Corps has conducted additional detailed studies and has worked cooperatively with USFWS and the BLM on alternative translocation plans for the desert tortoise, as required in the 2012 BO and 2013 ROD. The BO is currently under revision. This environmental study will not change or amend the land withdrawals that are federal law.
- In light of new information gained from these efforts, the DON has elected to prepare a SEIS focusing on the evaluation of potential impacts of alternative tortoise relocation plans, and environmental effects associated primarily with biological resources, land use, air quality, and cultural resources related to the translocation.
- The purpose of the proposed action evaluated in the SEIS is to study alternative translocation plans in support of the project that was described in the 2012 EIS, selected in the 2013 ROD, and authorized by the Fiscal Year 2014 NDAA.
- The Marine Corps needs to implement the proposed action to satisfy requirements identified in the 2012 Final EIS and associated 2012 BO.
- By supplementing the 2012 Final EIS, the SEIS will advance the NEPA's purpose of informing decision-makers and the public about the environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives.

3. What will the SEIS focus on?

- The SEIS will analyze the potential environmental impacts of alternative plans and locations for implementing a Desert Tortoise Translocation Program in support of MEB-sized training exercises on the newly acquired lands.
- The SEIS will consider a no-action alternative (implement the 2011 General Translocation Plan originally evaluated in the 2012 BO) and two action alternatives for desert tortoise translocation, based upon plans completed in March and June of 2016, respectively. All three alternatives identify recipient sites (to which tortoises would be translocated) and control sites (where the resident tortoise population will be studied to provide comparative data on survival, and threats to survival, habitat stability and changes, and health and disease relative to the translocated tortoise populations at the recipient sites). Each alternative will also include details of the proposed tortoise translocation, including specific handling procedures, fencing, clearance surveys, and post-translocation multi-year monitoring activities. The proposed tortoise translocation plans were developed in consultation with USFWS and BLM.
- The SEIS will analyze in detail the environmental effects associated with biological resources,

land use, air quality, and cultural resources. Other resources that were assessed in the 2012 EIS were considered but not carried forward for further analysis in the SEIS based on the characteristics of the SEIS proposed action. The SEIS will explain the rationale for not carrying forward any specific resources. The analysis of resources in the SEIS will include an evaluation of direct and indirect impacts, and will account for cumulative impacts from other relevant activities.

4. What agencies will take part in the SEIS process?

- The DON is the Action Proponent and Lead Agency preparing the SEIS, in cooperation with the BLM, which is designated as a cooperating agency. A cooperating agency is any federal agency, other than the lead agency, which has jurisdiction by law or special expertise concerning an environmental impact involved in a proposal. Due to the nature and scope of the proposed action, including BLM land ownership, the participation of the BLM as a cooperating agency has been established.
- USFWS and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will support the refinements to translocation methods, recipient sites, and research treatments that are proposed under the SEIS proposed action to better support the goals of the translocation effort.
- Other stakeholders that will be engaged in the environmental process consist of elected officials, government and regulatory agencies, NGOs, the general public, and the media through early and open communication. Affected Federally Recognized Tribes will be formally consulted as appropriate and in compliance with Executive Order 13175.

5. Will the outcome of the SEIS affect currently established boundaries of the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, the Shared Use Area, or the Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area?

- No, the SEIS seeks only to address tortoise translocation alternatives to meet the purpose and need of the proposed action and to assess any environmental effects associated primarily with biological resources, land use, air quality, and cultural resources related to the translocation. Boundaries of the Combat Center, the Shared Use Area, and the JVOHVRA will not be affected.

6. Has the Combat Center ever conducted tortoise translocation?

- Yes, successful translocation has taken place in the past. In 2006, the Combat Center translocated 17 adult tortoises to support construction of Range 220. Of the 17 animals translocated, only one mortality occurred during the three years of post-translocation monitoring, which equates to 98% annual survivorship. Additionally, no impacts were detected on resident tortoises monitored in the recipient population.
- Over 475 desert tortoises have been hatched and reared at the Combat Center's desert tortoise Headstart Facility, a program undertaken in cooperation with the USFWS and academic

researchers. Young tortoises remain at the Combat Center's Tortoise Research and Captive Rearing Site (TRACRS) until they grow large enough to better survive on their own.

- The Combat Center's Headstart program is a long-term assessment of how to protect nests, hatchlings and juveniles until they grow resilient enough to endure the harsh physical environment, resist most predation by common ravens and coyotes, and mature to fully-functional adults that produce offspring that also support the population.
- The Combat Center's Headstart program generated annual survivorship between approximately 85 and 96% (compared to about 40% or less in the wild), and released to the wild in the Fall of 2015 the first cohort of juveniles: 35 nine-year olds with carapace dimensions of 4 to 5 inches (110 to 140 millimeters) long . Collecting and analyzing survivorship data for released tortoises is the next major phase in our headstart commitment to support the recovery of the desert tortoise.

7. Does the SEIS consider previous efforts to translocate?

- Yes, along with the lessons learned from the 2006 translocation, the DON has adapted lessons learned from other translocation projects from across the Mojave Desert. Selected recipient sites assessed in the SEIS show low coyote/dog predation rates and are far from human habitation. By selecting recipient sites based on habitat quality, similar topography/terrain, and by releasing translocated tortoises in groupings spatially and socially similar to the sites from which they were removed, stress will be reduced. Also, the animals will be handled and transported only within temperature guidelines approved by the USFWS, and, if necessary, they will be hydrated before release.
- The Marine Corps, the BLM, and USFWS are taking measures to ensure the success of the translocation and mortality is not expected to exceed what the species is experiencing in the Mojave Desert.
- The DoD, DON, the Marine Corps, and the Combat Center, through its well-recognized environmental program, all understand that the lands they use for training are a part of the public trust and are committed to being good environmental stewards of the lands placed under their management.

8. Will management of the Shared Use Area be affected by the outcome of this SEIS?

- No, consistent with federal law, BLM will continue to manage the nearly 56,000 acre Shared Use Area for 10 months of the year during which it is available to the public for recreational use. The Marine Corps will manage the land during two 30-day periods of the year for military training. The proposed action will not change or amend the land withdrawal.

9. How can the public be involved in this process?

- The public now has the opportunity to review the Draft SEIS, which was released to the public in October 2016, and is available for a 45-day public review. The DON issued a Notice of Availability and Notice of Public Meetings on September 30, 2016 in the Federal Register.

- Public information meetings will be held in the communities of Joshua Tree, Palm Springs, and Barstow on October 25, 26, and 27 2016, respectively.
- Public comments are invited during the 45-day public review period via the SEIS project website: www.SEISforLAA.com
- Further background and historical documents, including the 2012 Final EIS, can be found on: <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff/G4InstallationsandLogistics/LandAcquisition.aspx>

10. Besides the websites, where else can I read the SEIS or related documents?

Documents and other public materials can be obtained at the following locations:

Newton T. Bass Apple Valley Library

14901 Dale Evans Parkway
Apple Valley, CA 92307

Victorville City Library

15011 Circle Drive
Victorville, CA 92395

Barstow Branch Library

304 E. Buena Vista St.
Barstow, CA 92311

Yucca Valley Branch Library

57098 Twentynine Palms Highway
Yucca Valley, CA 92284

Palm Springs Public Library

300 S. Sunrise Way
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Joshua Tree Library

6465 Park Blvd.
Joshua Tree, CA 92284

Stanley Mosk Library and Courts Building

914 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814

Lucerne Valley Janice Horst Branch Library

33103 Old Woman Springs Road
Lucerne Valley, CA 92356

San Bernardino County Library

Administrative Offices

777 E. Rialto Avenue.
San Bernardino, CA 92415

Needles Branch Library

1111 Bailey Ave.
Needles, CA 92363

Twentynine Palms Library

6078 Adobe Road
Twentynine Palms, CA 92277

Ovitt Family Community Library

215 E. C St.
Ontario, CA 91764

In addition, persons who wish to be added to the mailing list may send a request to the SEIS project manager at the address below or call 760-830-3737.

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