



MITIGATED FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Ongoing and Future Military Training, Support Operations, and Resource Management at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center



INTRODUCTION

The Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command (MAGTFTC) has prepared a Draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) for *Ongoing and Future Military Training, Support Operations, and Resource Management at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center*, which is incorporated by reference into this Mitigated Finding of No Significant Impact (Mitigated FONSI).

The SEA was developed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. Ch. 55), Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) implementing regulations (40 C.F.R. Parts 1500 to 1508), Department of the Navy supplemental regulations (32 C.F.R. Part 775), Marine Corps Order (MCO) 5090.2, Environmental Compliance and Protection Program (2018), CEQ guidance for Mitigated FONSI (January 14, 2011), and other relevant laws and policies cited therein.

A Mitigated FONSI is appropriate because the SEA relies on prior effects analyses, including environmental impact statements (EIS) with some significant impacts; some past disclosed effects would continue to accrue into the future as part of ongoing actions (e.g., military training activities); MAGTFTC is offering improved and increased desert tortoise and cultural resource mitigation to better address and resolve past, present, and future effects; and climate change reduction efforts by the Department of the Navy, U.S. Marine Corps and MAGTFTC would lead to reductions in Combat Center criteria air pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions.

(Draft SEA, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4).

PURPOSE AND NEED

To support military training and readiness at the Combat Center, per current and emerging requirements, MAGTFTC needs to make incremental adjustments to ongoing actions, implement new proposed actions, and obtain advance regulatory coverage for future actions anticipated to facilitate Marine Corps Force Design 2030 and related initiatives permeating the training program. (Draft SEA, Chapter 1).

ALTERNATIVES

The Proposed Action includes changes to the Ongoing Action ("No Action Alternative") and new proposed actions to resolve the stated Purpose and Need. Aspects of the Ongoing Action that would not change would continue to occur in the future per the status quo. Because the Purpose and Need is largely issue- and site-specific, with minor changes to ongoing actions, no true action alternatives exist. Alternatives are limited to mitigation or minor adjustments. (Draft SEA, Chapters 1 and 2).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The SEA includes detailed analyses of the following resources and topics: *Air Quality*, *Biological Resources (Desert Tortoise)*, *Climate Change*, *Cultural Resources*, *Environmental Justice (Noise)*, and *Health and Safety (Herbicides)*. In summary, adverse effects from the Ongoing Action would continue (emissions, ground disturbance, and noise), with incremental increases under the Proposed Action (emissions, ground disturbance, and herbicide exposure). Based on available data, there is no disproportionate effect to environmental justice populations. Long-term beneficial effects to natural resources would result from controlling infestations of invasive plant species with short-term adverse effects from application of herbicides.

Because the Combat Center has been in use for training since the 1940s, with expeditionary training starting in the 1950s, potential effects from the Ongoing Action and Proposed Action would not occur on a blank slate as areas of the Combat Center that are suitable for training have already been disturbed from past and ongoing actions, including associated facilities and infrastructure.

Considering the effects of other relevant projects (most effects mitigated and no environmental justice concerns), the potential for adverse cumulative effects would not be increased by MAGTFTC activities under the Ongoing Action or Proposed Action. MAGTFTC's ongoing, in-progress, and future mitigation would address adverse effects due to air pollutant emissions, greenhouse gas emissions, and ground disturbance affecting the desert tortoise as well as known and unknown cultural resources. MAGTFTC's innovative approach to Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance is anticipated to benefit the military mission, the desert tortoise, and may serve as mitigation for the effects of other projects occurring outside of the Combat Center. MAGTFTC's proposed mitigation under the Draft Programmatic Agreement seeks to improve National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) compliance for ongoing and future training activities and bolster cultural resource management at the Combat Center.

(Draft SEA, Chapters 3 and 4).

AUTHORIZATIONS

MAGTFTC will continue to comply with all applicable laws, policies, authorizations, and continue to seek innovative solutions for common issues in the Mojave Desert to ensure the military mission at the Combat Center is sustained into the future. (Draft SEA, Chapters 1, 2 and 5).

MITIGATION & MONITORING

In addition to the military mission, MAGTFTC is committed to environmental conservation and human health and safety. Based on available information, there is no risk to the public from Combat Center operations and training activities occurring under the Ongoing Action (Draft SEA, Sections 1.7 and 3.5). The requirements along with the future studies listed in the Draft SEA (Section 2.3) would inform future management of the Combat Center and ensure resulting effects remain at acceptable levels. In addition, MAGTFTC is improving and increasing mitigation for effects to cultural resources and the desert tortoise due to the incremental increase in effects that would likely continue indefinitely. However, if the California State Historic Preservation Officer does not approve the Draft Programmatic Agreement discussed in the Draft SEA, MAGTFTC would continue to implement cultural resource management to mitigate for effects based on current funding levels.

CONCLUSION

Based on my review of the Draft SEA, I conclude that the Ongoing Action and Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to the human environment (per individual resource or cumulatively) so long as the required mitigation and monitoring is implemented. While some of these effects were previously disclosed in a prior EIS, the incremental increase in effects into the future may arguably present a potential for significant cumulative impacts given the continued population decline of the desert tortoise and the difficulty of assessing potential impacts to cultural resources due to lack of baseline data. Therefore, considering mitigation, further analysis in an EIS is not required to continue with the Ongoing Action or to implement any aspect of the Proposed Action.

DECISION

Based on the content of the SEA:

- I authorize the continuation of the Ongoing Action and implementation of the Proposed Action subject to the required mitigation and monitoring (Draft SEA, Chapters 2 and 5).

- I authorize the adoption of the 2022 King of the Hammers EA to support authorization of future organized OHV events at the Combat Center, so long as the events and potential effects remain within scope of the 2022 EA.
- I authorize the update of the Combat Center Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan for the use of herbicides to treat invasive plant infestations subject to input by the relevant consulting parties.
- I direct MAGTFTC staff to track future actions conducted under this SEA to ensure continued compliance with applicable laws and policies (Draft SEA, Section 1.7) and inform the need for future NEPA supplementation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Proposed Action may be implemented any time after this Mitigated FONSI is signed and so long as applicable requirements (Draft SEA Section 2.3) are resolved and ESA and NHPA consultations are completed.

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Commanding General
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Date