



# TOWNSEND BOMBING RANGE MODERNIZATION



FACT SHEET — *March 2013*

## MARINE CORPS TRAINING REQUIREMENT:

The Marine Corps is the nation's expeditionary force in readiness and must be prepared to deploy as an air-ground task force. The Marine Corps continues to successfully deter threats, prevent conflict, and provide humanitarian assistance because it conducts realistic training exercises. This realistic training, which includes air-to-ground training exercises and training exercises with various weapons systems, is essential for developing and maintaining the combat skills critical for wartime missions and real-world events. The Marine Corps requires that its aviators have access to ranges and airspace for training.

Marine Corps aviators must train to be highly skilled in multiple mission areas, including the delivery of precision-guided munitions (PGM) and use of air-to-ground weapons against a range of target types. PGM is a modern class of weapons that permits Marine aviators to attack and isolate specific targets. Currently, there are no Marine Corps air-to-ground training ranges on the East Coast with the capability to accommodate realistic PGM training. As a result, Marine aviators who are based on the East Coast must travel to ranges on the West Coast to train with PGM.

The inability to train with PGM at Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) has resulted in units at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Beaufort having to deploy to ranges on the West Coast to train with PGM. The ranges on the West Coast are more suited for large-scale, live-fire training. The inability to train with PGM at TBR detracts from the Marine Corps' ability to fully utilize the ranges on the West Coast to meet more advanced training requirements. This degrades the efficiency of these larger ranges by committing precious training time to more basic training. Individual aircrew training with inert PGM is more appropriately and efficiently performed at ranges within training flight distance of the home station.

## PROPOSED ACTION:

The nature of modern combat and warfare technologies (including weapons) is evolving; the training ranges that prepare Marine aviators for these scenarios must also adapt to meet and to anticipate these changes. Current and future Marine Corps operations require aircrew expertise in the use of PGM. The Marine Corps proposes to modernize and expand TBR through the acquisition of land adjacent to the current range. This modernization would provide an up-to-date air-to-ground training range within the local flying area (165 nautical miles) of MCAS Beaufort that could safely accommodate the use of inert (non-explosive) PGM in addition to the inert weapons currently used at TBR. A sufficiently sized land area at TBR would maintain public safety, enable the required training delivery of inert PGM, and allow for more realistic and effective training on a wider array of target types for greater aircrew competency.

### Five Elements of the Proposed Modernization:

1. Acquisition of land
2. Acquisition of a timber easement
3. Modification of existing airspace
4. Construction of infrastructure to support PGM training
5. Improvement of training capabilities

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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## BACKGROUND:

TBR is the primary air-to-ground training range for aviation units stationed at MCAS Beaufort, home to Marine Aircraft Group 31 (MAG-31) and its six operational F/A-18 squadrons. TBR is located within the local flying area of MAG-31, an area defined as the maximum distance an aircraft can travel, complete its mission, and return to base without refueling or landing. MAG-31 utilizes the air-to-ground training range at TBR to remain the aviation force-in-readiness. TBR also supports training for other aviation units in the Marine Corps, as well as the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Army, the U.S. Navy, and the Air National Guard.

TBR currently allows Marine aviators to accomplish less than half of their air-to-ground training requirements for the F/A-18 and does not allow for delivery of PGM under realistic training scenarios. The proposed expansion and modernization of TBR would allow training at TBR to fulfill up to 85% of the air-to-ground training specified in the current individual aircrew F/A-18 training syllabus, as opposed to TBR's present capacity of 47% of that training. The proposed expansion and modernization at TBR would provide aviators with the ability to train with inert PGM at TBR and conduct follow-on large-scale unit exercises with live ordnance at the ranges on the West Coast. This expansion would lead to more efficient Marine Corps training overall.

## TBR MODERNIZATION IN BRIEF:

- The Marine Corps and its partner, the Georgia Air National Guard, are committed to working with federal, state, and local leaders; resource and regulatory agencies; neighbors; and public stakeholders to keep them informed of project developments.
- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) assesses the potential impacts the proposed alternatives have on the human environment. Land acquisition to provide for new training capabilities would include sufficient lands to protect public safety.
- Only minor modification to the current Restricted Airspace would be made in order to eliminate the current gap from 100 feet above ground level to the surface of the ground over the areas that would be proposed for any land acquisition.
- The land studied is largely industrial forestland. Fair market value would be offered for land or property interests identified for acquisition.
- As a part of this project, the Marine Corps proposes to purchase a timber easement from McIntosh County, Georgia, on approximately 3,007 acres of land within the current TBR boundary.
- Any land acquisition and training operations conducted in any new training range area would ensure sufficient safety zones to allow for the public's continued safe use of Highway 57.
- The EIS process provides multiple opportunities for public comment. The Public Scoping Period was held in Fall 2010 and included two public meetings and resulted in modifications to the alternatives studied and identified a new alternative for study. The Public Comment Period on the Draft EIS, which also included two public meetings, occurred in Fall 2012.
- The Marine Corps received 100 comments during the Public Comment Period for the Draft EIS. All comments that were received on the Draft EIS are included and addressed in the Final EIS.
- Finalizing the EIS in response to these comments resulted in no changes in the analysis concerning the nature or magnitude of impacts on any resources, and therefore, none to the conclusions. Any adjustments that were made for the Final EIS improved the clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness of the analysis presented.
- It was discovered that the shared power line and natural gas right-of-way that serves as the eastern boundary of proposed Acquisition Area 3 was not shown in the correct location. Once corrected, Area 3 increased by 194 acres (to a total of 23,674 acres).

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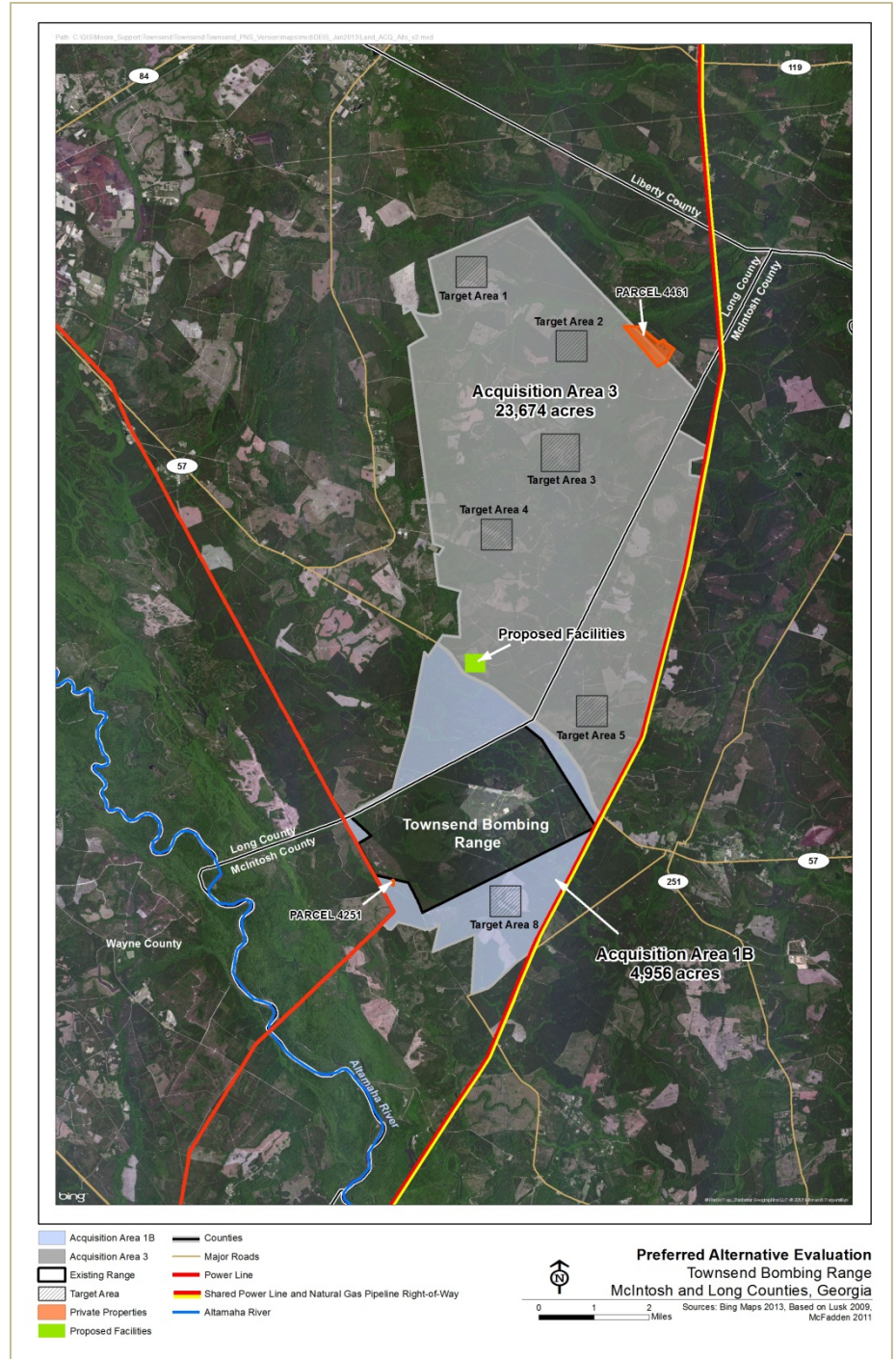
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## ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN THE FINAL EIS:

Four alternatives and a "No Action" alternative were studied in the Final EIS. The Marine Corps reduced its study area for potential land acquisition of up to 51,580 acres, as announced during Public Scoping, to a maximum potential acquisition of 34,861 acres in the Final EIS.

The Marine Corps identified Alternative 4, Area 1B and Area 3 (28,630 acres), as the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS. Alternative 4 offers the best balance of operational capability and environmental impact.

*The Marine Corps and its partner, the Georgia Air National Guard, are committed to working with federal, state and local leaders; resource and regulatory agencies; neighbors; and public stakeholders throughout the process to keep them informed of project developments.*



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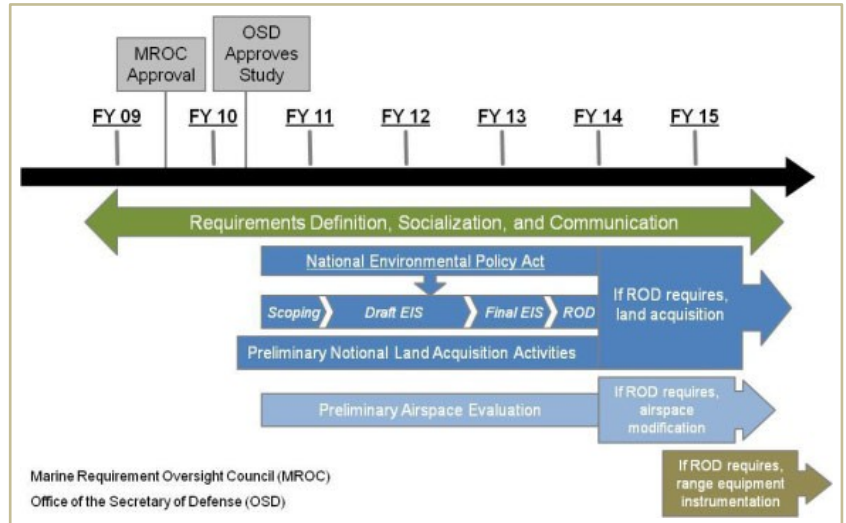


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### PROJECT SCHEDULE:

#### Completed Milestones:

- The Notice of Intent was issued in the Federal Register on August 6, 2010.
- The publication of the Notice of Intent officially began the Public Scoping Period. The initial scoping period ran from August 6 to September 7, 2010. An additional scoping period occurred October 10 to November 8, 2010.
- Two public meetings were held during the Public Scoping Period on August 24 and 26, 2010. The first was in Long County, Georgia, and the second was in McIntosh County, Georgia.
- On July 13, 2012, the Notice of Availability for the Draft EIS was published in the *Federal Register*.
- The Marine Corps conducted a Public Comment Period from July 13 to September 27, 2012.
- Two public meetings were held during the Public Comment Period. The first was on August 7, 2012 in McIntosh County, Georgia. The second public meeting occurred on August 9, 2012 in Long County, Georgia.
- Following the comment period, the Marine Corps reviewed the public comments submitted on the Draft EIS to prepare the Final EIS. The comments and the Marine Corps' responses to these comments are published in the Final EIS.



#### Current Status:

- On March 22, 2013, the Notice of Availability for the Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register*. A copy of the Final EIS has been provided to requesting individuals, agencies, and organizations, and is available to the public on the project web site.
- Regulations provide for a 30-day waiting period after the Final EIS is published before the agency may take final action. During that period, in addition to the Marine Corps' own internal review, the public and other agencies can comment on the Final EIS.

#### Next Steps:

- The Department of the Navy will determine the best modernization option based on the Final EIS, training requirements, cost, and other relevant factors. This decision will be published in a Record of Decision, which is anticipated in Summer 2013.
- If approved in the Record of Decision, any land acquisition would require Congressional approval and funding through the Military Construction program.

*The Department of the Navy will determine the best modernization option based on the Final EIS, training requirements, cost and other issues. This decision will be published in a Record of Decision, anticipated in Summer 2013.*

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