

TOWNSEND BOMBING RANGE MODERNIZATION



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BACKGROUND

Townsend Bombing Range, and the complex of Special Use Airspace that supports the air-to-ground training at the range, is a vital asset for Marine Corps aviation.

Who owns, operates, and uses Townsend Bombing Range?

Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) is a 5,183-acre federal property owned by the Marine Corps and operated by the Georgia Air National Guard as a part of its Combat Readiness Training Center. TBR is the primary air-to-ground training range for Marine Corps aviation units stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina. In addition to being an essential training asset to U.S. Marine Corps aviation units, the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard, and U.S. Army also train at TBR.

What is the primary purpose of Townsend Bombing Range?

Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) is routinely used by all services to train air crews (e.g., pilots, navigators, etc.) to meet their air combat proficiency requirements. The training range is used for "inert" air-to-ground ordnance including guns, rockets, and bombs, as well as low-angle strafing training (shooting at large "bulls-eye" targets set up on the range), and close air support training exercises. Inert ordnance sometimes will have a small spotting charge that activates upon impact to help score how well the ordnance was delivered on the target but it does not contain explosives. Tracers and flares are not allowed.

What kind of ordnance is currently used at Townsend Bombing Range?

Training at Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) only involves the use of inert munitions, which contain no explosives, but may contain a small smoke charge (spotting charge) to assist in scoring the training event and providing feedback to the aircrew. Munitions that contain explosives are not authorized at TBR.

Where is Townsend Bombing Range located?

Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) is located in McIntosh County in southeast, coastal Georgia, 71 nautical miles southwest of Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, between Darien and Ludowici, Georgia, off Highway 57.

When did Townsend Bombing Range begin its current operations?

Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) was leased for military training beginning in the 1940s. The U.S. Navy operated TBR until 1972, when it was closed along with the closure of Naval Air Station Glynco in Brunswick, Georgia. The current use of TBR began in 1981 when the range was leased from Union Camp and reopened. The Marine Corps purchased the land in 1991.

What are Townsend Bombing Range's hours of operation?

Townsend Bombing Range's (TBR) normal business hours are Monday and Friday 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM and Tuesday through Thursday 8:00AM – 10:00 PM. Any times outside of normal business hours would be coordinated with the Federal Aviation Administration by Notice to Airmen with at least 24 hour notice.

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How is Townsend Bombing Range operated?

Georgia Air National Guard flight controllers direct aircraft to the Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) target area where inert (non-explosive) munitions are delivered to simulated military targets. Inert munitions contain a small spotting charge that activates upon impact to help score the run. Highly sophisticated scoring equipment locates the proximity of the munitions' impact to the target. TBR training involves only the use of inert munitions, which contain no explosives. Munitions that contain explosives are prohibited in training at TBR.

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MARINE CORPS REQUIREMENTS

The Marine Corps is the nation's Expeditionary Force in Readiness.

To maintain readiness, Marine aviators must train as they fight. Realistic training increases skill and the likelihood of mission success, which improves the probability that Marine aviators and the ground troops they support will safely return home.

What initiated the consideration to modernize Townsend Bombing Range?

The Marine Corps Requirements Oversight Council identified a requirement for an East Coast range that can accommodate the use of inert, precision-guided munitions (PGM) to train the Marine Corps aviators of Marine Aircraft Group 31, which is based at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. The Marine Requirement Oversight Council recommended Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) for study for modernization to accommodate PGM training for aviation units. The Department of the Navy then requested that the Department of Defense grant approval to consider land acquisition to augment TBR. The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Logistics, and Technology granted the Marine Corps approval to study potential land acquisition, allowing the modernization study to go forward.

Why is Townsend Bombing Range important to national security?

Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) is the primary air-to-ground training range for Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Beaufort, South Carolina, which is home to Marine Aircraft Group 31 (MAG-31). MAG-31 has six F/A-18 Hornet squadrons. TBR is also used for training by the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard, and the U.S. Army.

To fulfill their responsibilities in the national security strategy, it is critical that our aviators are highly trained, meeting very specific training requirements. These training requirements ensure that combat aviators are mission ready and prepared to meet combat situations with the utmost competence and experience. Aviator training is a continual process, rather than a single-time training experience. Marine Corps aviators must train as they fight, and training at TBR is critical component of that preparation.

What is the Marine Corps training requirement that is driving the need for this project?

The modernization at Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) supports the training needs of the Marine Aircraft Group 31 (MAG-31) based at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. MAG-31 currently flies the F/A-18 Hornet. The Commandant of the Marine Corps' intent for aviation training is achieved, in part, by conducting air-to-ground training exercises and ensuring Marine forces have access to ranges and airspace. This training is for developing and maintaining skills critical for wartime missions and conducting training with various weapons. Marine Corps aviators must train and be highly skilled in multiple mission areas, which include the delivery of precision-guided munitions (PGM) and use of air-to-ground weapons against a range of target types. PGM are a modern class of weapons that permits Marine aviators to attack specific threats and isolate targets.

What are precision-guided munitions?

Precision-guided munitions (PGM) are guided, advanced weapons that are designed to precisely hit a specific target. They are made with laser or global positioning system guidance systems with operable fins that correct the munitions' trajectory.

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Because of the ability to correct itself in-flight to the target, PGM are often referred to as “smart bombs.” Unguided munitions are free-falling when released from the aircraft and they descend toward the target with no ability to change their trajectory. Therefore, unguided weapons are often referred to as “dumb bombs.” Unguided munitions are released at lower altitudes and at a closer distance to the target. Dumb bombs lack the potential to stray far from their initial trajectory or line of release. By comparison, PGM are released from higher altitudes and at greater distance from the target than unguided weapons. A PGM’s guidance system ensures a high level of accuracy; however, if the guidance system malfunctions, the higher altitudes and greater distance from which these weapons are employed give them the potential to stray further from the intended target than their unguided counterparts.

Why do precision-guided munitions require more range land area?

Although very accurate, precision-guided munitions (PGM) are released to their target from much greater distances and altitudes than other ordnance. To train as they fight, Marines must practice releasing PGM from combat distances, altitudes, and airspeeds. If a PGM were to malfunction – either the guidance or a mechanical system – its potential impact area is much larger than ordnance released from lower altitudes and shorter distances. Therefore, the weapon danger zones, which are also informally referred to as “safety zones”, at Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) must be sized to ensure that any errant bomb would safely land within TBR. To modernize TBR to meet this requirement, additional land must be acquired. If TBR is not modernized, Marine Corps units must continue to deploy to California and Arizona to conduct PGM training.

What is a weapon danger zone?

A Weapon Danger Zone (WDZ) footprint represents a specific area drawn about a target based on weapon containment. Containment is defined as all weapon impacts, including ricochets, occurring within the WDZ. As outlined above, although precision-guided munitions are more accurate and have lower failure rates than unguided weapons, the WDZ requirements are much larger because the WDZ must contain the area within which the weapon could impact the ground if the guidance system failed. WDZs are sometimes informally known as “safety zones.” By definition, a WDZ is a three-dimensional zone that encompasses the ground and airspace for lateral and vertical containment of projectiles, fragments, debris, and components resulting from the firing, launching, and/or detonation of air-to-ground ordnance. WDZs are developed for a specific air-to-ground munitions-delivery training event. The modeling software, WDZ Tool, which is a standard tool across the Department of Defense, considers the weapon’s dynamics (accuracy and fail rates), release parameters (airspeed, altitude, dive angle, and run-in heading), target material, and soil types to develop the WDZs.

Why is Townsend Bombing Range currently unable to meet current Marine Corps aviation training requirements?

Due to its current size, Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) can only support 47% of the required air-to-ground training listed in the training syllabus for Marine Corps F/A-18 aircrews. TBR cannot support training with precision-guided munitions (PGM), which are key components of Marine Corps war fighting. Modernization of TBR would allow aircrews to meet up to 85% of their air-to-ground training requirements, including training with PGM.

If Townsend Bombing Range is only able to support 47% of air-to-ground training in the F/A-18 training syllabus for the Marine Aviators at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, where has the rest of the training occurred?

At present, the Marine Corps’ East Coast ranges cannot accommodate realistic, precision-guided munitions (PGM) training. Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) in its current configuration can only meet 47% of the air-to-ground training requirements of

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the aircrew training syllabus for the F/A-18. If PGM could be used for training at TBR, Marine Corps F/A-18 aircrews could meet up to 85% of the air-to-ground portion of their training syllabus. Therefore, in order to train to the level required by the Marine Corps, the aviators stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort deploy to the West Coast ranges (in Arizona and California) to train with PGM and complete the remainder of the training. This reliance on the West Coast ranges renders Marine Corps aviation training, overall, suboptimal and less efficient because it detracts from the West Coast ranges' focus on advanced-level and higher skills training for which those ranges are uniquely suited. The proposed expansion and modernization of TBR would allow training at TBR to fulfill up to 85% of the air-to-ground training requirements specified in the current F/A-18 individual aircrew training syllabus and enable more efficient utilization of the other Marine Corps training ranges to achieve unit readiness in support of national defense.

After Townsend Bombing Range is modernized, will Marine aviators stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort continue to deploy to the West Coast ranges for training?

The West Coast ranges are uniquely suited for complex unit and higher skills training. Training at Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) is restricted to inert munitions, which contain a small spotting charge to help score the aircrew's run on the target. Under the proposed modernization, TBR will continue to offer air-to-ground training with inert munitions only. The West Coast ranges, on the other hand, can accommodate air units and ground units at the same time in one combined training exercise as well as live-fire training. These characteristics provide invaluable training opportunities to the warfighter. Individual aircrews who have trained with inert precision-guided munitions at TBR would then train in large-scale (unit) exercises with live ordnance, simulating realistic combat scenarios, at the West Coast ranges to achieve unit readiness for deployment.

Are there other locations that the Marines can use for the training?

The Marine Corps conducted a multi-step screening process. As a part of this process, the Marine Corps developed range evaluation criteria by identifying key physical and operational attributes required to support training with precision-guided munitions (PGM) and identified seven existing candidate Department of Defense ranges in the Southeastern United States that were then evaluated using the range evaluation criteria. TBR is the only range of these seven to meet all of the range evaluation criteria and was determined to have the greatest potential to meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action. Fort Stewart was one of the seven candidate ranges that were evaluated in this process. Although, the Army and the Marine Corps often serve side-by-side, they have different training requirements in order to complete their different missions. The air-to-ground training required for the Marine Corps aviators, particularly training with PGM, conflicts with the training needs at Fort Stewart. As a result, Fort Stewart cannot support the training requirements that drive the proposed modernization at TBR.

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ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The decision to potentially expand and modernize Townsend Bombing Range involves a process based on careful study and public participation.

How was the determination made regarding whether to modernize Townsend Bombing Range? How does the process to develop an Environmental Impact Statement work?

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Council on Environmental Quality guidelines and Department of the Navy (DON) policy require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the solicitation of public input through public meetings and comment periods when a project may have a significant impact on environmental resources, including socioeconomic resources. A Final EIS studying a range of reasonable alternatives to achieve the modernization of Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) and considering public comments offered throughout the process has been prepared in accordance with these regulations. It was produced to examine alternatives to meet the requirement for precision-guided munitions (PGM) training. The Final EIS, which was published on March 22, 2013, evaluated and discusses the environmental effects of a range of reasonable alternatives to meet this requirement at TBR. Other sites than TBR were considered, but they could not meet the training requirement for various reasons.

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to produce an EIS on the project was published in the *Federal Register* on August 6, 2010, officially initiating the Public Scoping Period. A key component of the EIS process is providing opportunities for public review and comment. The first of these opportunities occurred during the 30-day Public Scoping Period in Fall 2010, from August 6 to September 7, 2010. An additional scoping period occurred from October 10 to November 8, 2010. Two public meetings were held during the initial Public Scoping Period, on August 24 and 26, 2010. The first was in Long County, Georgia, and the second was in McIntosh County, Georgia. Comments on the proposed alternatives and issues that were studied in the EIS were submitted during the scoping periods helped to shape the issues and alternatives studied throughout the development of the Draft EIS.

A Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft EIS was published on July 13, 2012, which officially initiated a 45-day Public Comment Period from July 13 to August 27, 2012. This period was extended to September 27, 2012. Two public meetings were also held during the Public Comment Period. The first meeting occurred on August 7, 2012 in McIntosh County, Georgia. The second public meeting took place on August 9, 2012 in Long County, Georgia. Following the Public Comment Period, the Marine Corps reviewed the public comments submitted on the Draft EIS in preparation of the Final EIS.

On March 22, 2013, the NOA for the Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register*. The Final EIS remains fundamentally unchanged from the Draft EIS. The adjustments made for the Final EIS improved the clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness of the analysis presented in the Draft EIS. No changes were made to conclusions in the analysis concerning the nature or magnitude of impacts on any resources. The Final EIS analyzes land near TBR's boundaries for possible acquisition, as well as the slight modification to current Special Use Airspace associated with TBR. Multiple configurations were evaluated, and environmental impacts were assessed for a range of reasonable alternatives. The Final EIS identified Alternative 4 as the Preferred Alternative. The Final EIS was publicly distributed and made available to the public on the project Web site, as well as in various libraries (please see the project Web site or the Final EIS Project Update for more information concerning the public locations where the Final EIS may be located). The public was afforded an opportunity to submit comments on the Final EIS during a 30-day waiting period from March 22 to April 22, 2013. No issues arose during this period that warranted changes to the Final EIS.

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The DON published its Record of Decision (ROD) for the Proposed Expansion and Modernization of TBR in McIntosh and Long Counties, Georgia, in the *Federal Register*, on January 31, 2014. The ROD documents the DON's decision to approve the Proposed Action through Alternative 4, the Preferred Alternative, as described in the Final EIS. The DON reached this decision after careful consideration of the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, the analysis and conclusions presented in the Final EIS, and comments received from federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, tribal nations, and members of the public. The full version of the DON's ROD can be found on the project Web site: www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com.

As described in the Final EIS, this selected alternative expands TBR by acquiring 28,630 acres of land in McIntosh and Long Counties (Acquisition Areas 1B and 3); purchases the 3,007-acre timber easement held by McIntosh County on the existing range; seeks modification of existing restricted airspace; and constructs range infrastructure to support PGM training. Land acquisition requires Congressional approval and funding through the Military Construction program. Any lands or property interests acquired as a result of this project will be purchased at fair market value. The Federal Aviation Administration will undertake its established processes to determine whether to modify the current Special Use Airspace, Restricted Area R-3007, by extending the current 100-foot floor to ground level only over the land to be acquired (Acquisition Areas 1B and 3) to match the existing restricted airspace over the current range.

Were there any major changes from the Draft Environmental Impact Statement to the Final Environmental Impact Statement?

On March 22, 2013, the Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in the *Federal Register*. The resource analysis and conclusions published in the Final EIS remain fundamentally unchanged from the Draft EIS. The Marine Corps received 100 comments during the Draft EIS Public Comment Period. Input and comments were submitted from federal, state, local, and tribal governments; resource, regulatory, and planning agencies; and other interested parties. Comments on the Draft EIS identified specific areas in the analysis or topics of environmental concern that are addressed in the Final EIS. The most commonly noted comments submitted on the Draft EIS referenced socioeconomic issues (loss of tax revenue, effects to property taxes/values), public safety issues, training concerns, cultural resources, noise, natural resources, road closures, alternatives, real estate, forest management, impacts to hunting/recreation, and water quality/water control concerns. The Public Comment Summary Report, available as Appendix B to the Final EIS, describes the Draft EIS review process and summarizes the comments received and the Marine Corps' response.

Finalizing the EIS in response to comments resulted in no changes in the analysis concerning the nature or magnitude of impacts on any resources, and therefore, none to the conclusions. The Final EIS analyzes land near TBR's boundaries for possible acquisition, as well as the slight modification to current Special Use Airspace associated with TBR. The Final EIS identifies Alternative 4 (Acquisition Areas 1B and 3) as the Preferred Alternative. The adjustments made for the Final EIS improved the clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness of the analysis presented in the Draft EIS. For example, 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, Acquisition Area 3 increased in size by 194 acres, from 23,480 acres to 23,674 acres. Acreage numbers and each resource analysis are updated in the Final EIS, with no change to the conclusions concerning the magnitude of impacts on any resources. The public was afforded the opportunity to submit comments on the Final EIS during a 30-day wait period from March 22 to April 22, 2013. No issues arose during this period that warranted any changes to the Final EIS.

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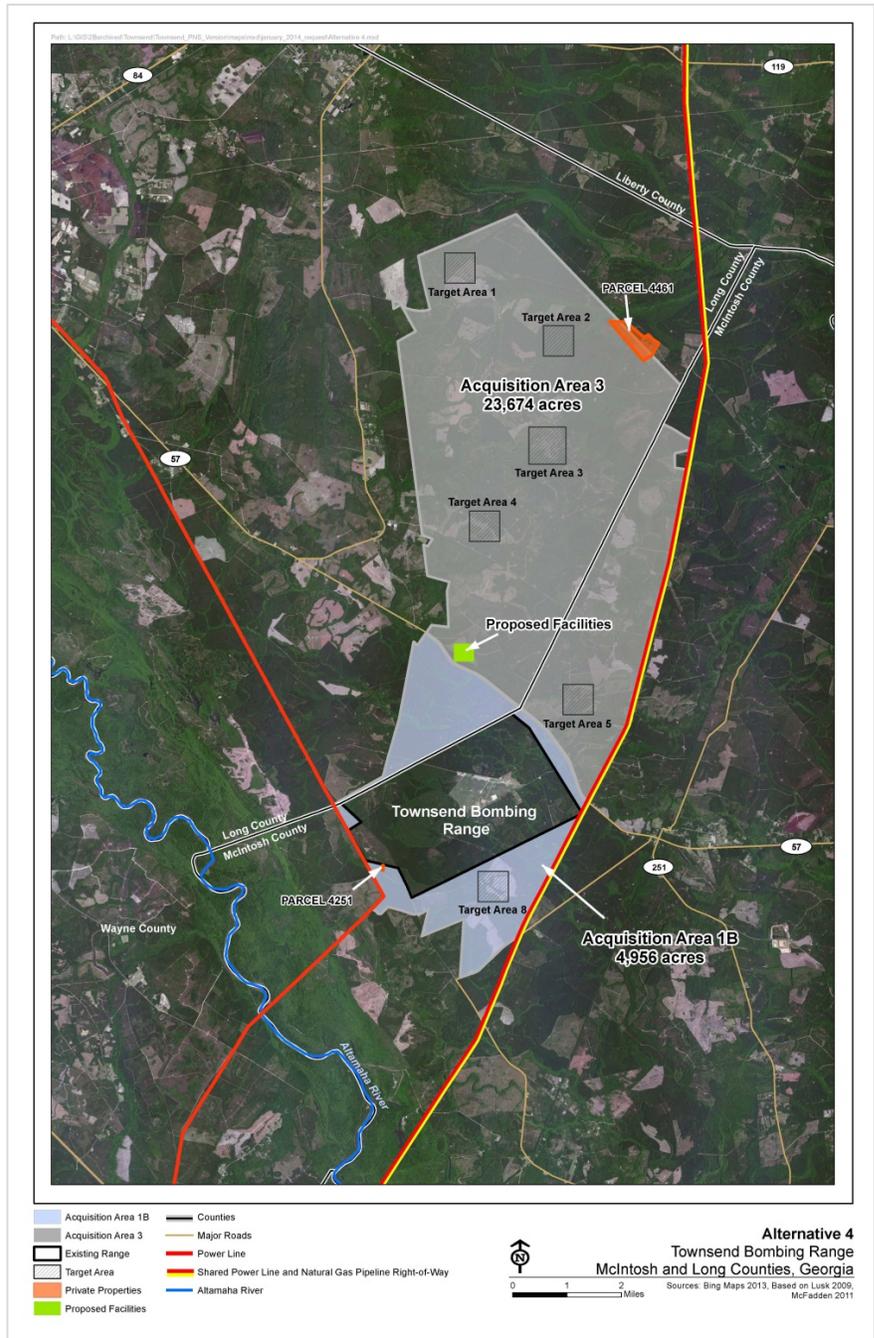
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What is the final decision?

The Department of the Navy (DON) published its Record of Decision (ROD) for the Proposed Expansion and Modernization of Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) in McIntosh and Long Counties, Georgia, in the *Federal Register*, on January 31, 2014. The ROD documents the DON's decision to approve the Proposed Action through Alternative 4, the Preferred Alternative, as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). The DON reached this decision after careful consideration of the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, the analysis and conclusions presented in the Final EIS, and comments received from federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, tribal nations, and members of the public. The full version of the DON's ROD can be found on the project Web site: www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com.

As described in the Final EIS, this selected alternative expands TBR by acquiring 28,630 acres of land in McIntosh and Long Counties (Acquisition Areas 1B and 3); purchases the 3,007-acre timber easement held by McIntosh County on the existing range; seeks modification of existing restricted airspace; and constructs range infrastructure to support PGM training. Land acquisition requires Congressional approval and funding through the Military Construction program. Any lands or property interests acquired as a result of this project will be purchased at fair market value. The Federal Aviation Administration will undertake its established processes to determine whether to modify the current Special Use Airspace, Restricted Area R-3007, by extending the current 100-foot floor to ground level only over the land to be acquired (Acquisition Areas 1B and 3) to match the existing restricted airspace over the current range.



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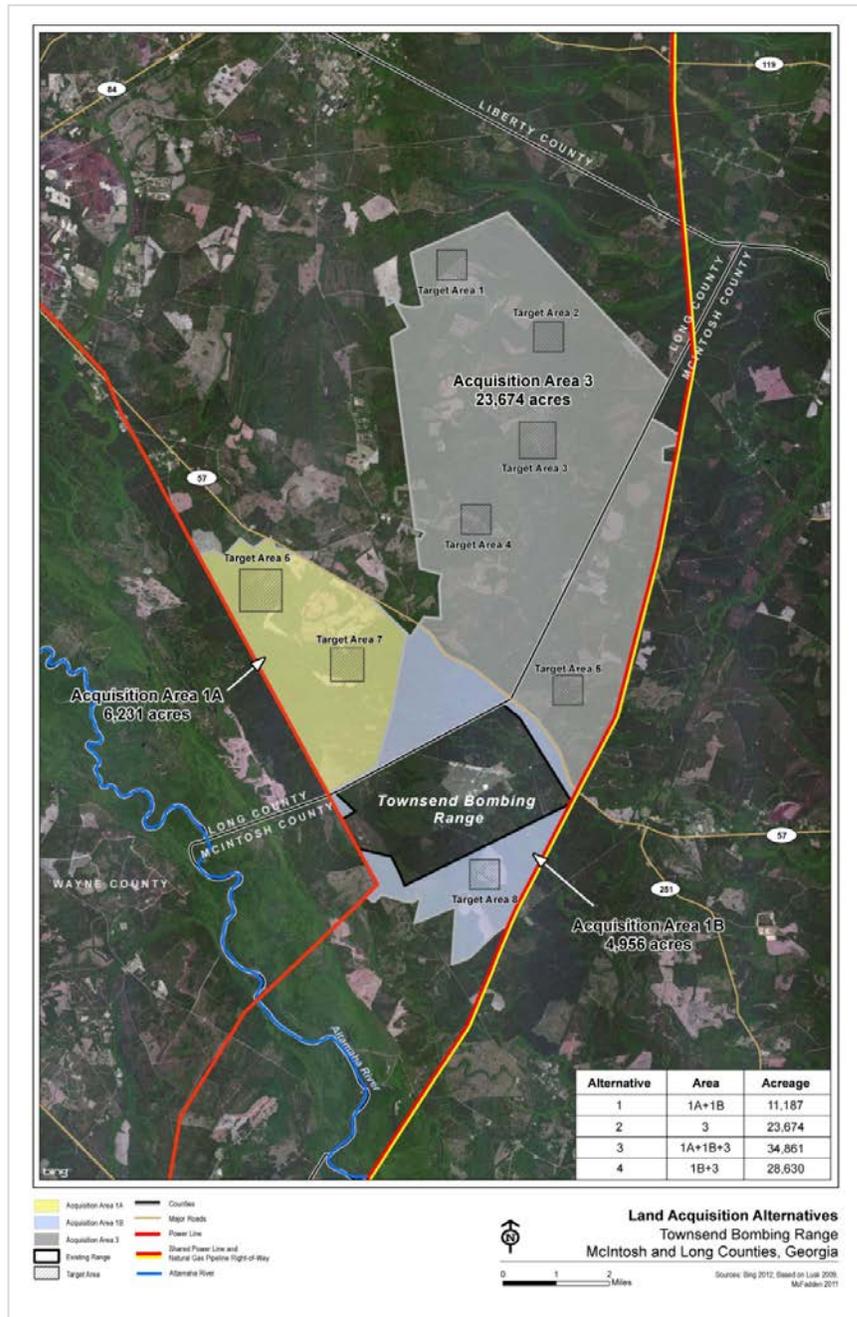
How did the Marine Corps determine the areas that were studied?

The Marine Corps used planning models that accurately plot the area in which any ordnance would land after release from an aircraft. Sufficient area is proposed in each potential alternative for acquisition to assure safe training operations based on these models. In all of the alternatives, the weapon danger zones (WDZs) are safely within the potential acquisition area. To develop land acquisition areas, the Marine Corps used modeling software, standard across the Department of Defense, for determining WDZs and analysis of land ownership surrounding Townsend Bombing Range. The Marine Corps sought to take advantage of existing, identifiable natural geographical features (e.g., waterways) and man-made landmarks (e.g., roads, power lines). Where possible, these easily recognizable landscape features were used to create natural boundary lines for the land acquisition areas.

How much acreage was being studied?

During the public comment process for the Draft EIS, 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. Because of this correction, Acquisition Area 3 increased in size by 194 acres (23,480 to 23,674 acres). Acreage numbers and each resource analysis have been updated in the Final EIS.

The graphic (at right) shows the three acquisition areas that are studied in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and their relation to each other and to the current range. As shown in the table (bottom right), these three areas are studied in combination or as stand-alone options under the four alternatives.



The Marine Corps is studying the acquisition of up to approximately 34,861 acres. This is a reduction in the scope of the original study area by about 17,000 acres when the Marine Corps announced its intention to study up to approximately 51,580 acres for possible acquisition in August 2010.

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During the preparation of the Draft EIS, the Marine Corps split Study Area 1 into two subareas, which are Study Areas 1A and 1B. The Marine Corps then established a fourth alternative, Alternative 4, which is Areas 1B and 3 (28,630 acres). Alternative 4 is identified as the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS since it offers the best balance of operational capability and environmental impact.

The Department of the Navy (DON) published its Record of Decision (ROD) in the *Federal Register* on January 31, 2014. The ROD documents the DON's decision to proceed with the expansion and modernization through the implementation of Alternative 4, Areas 1B and 3 (28,630 acres).

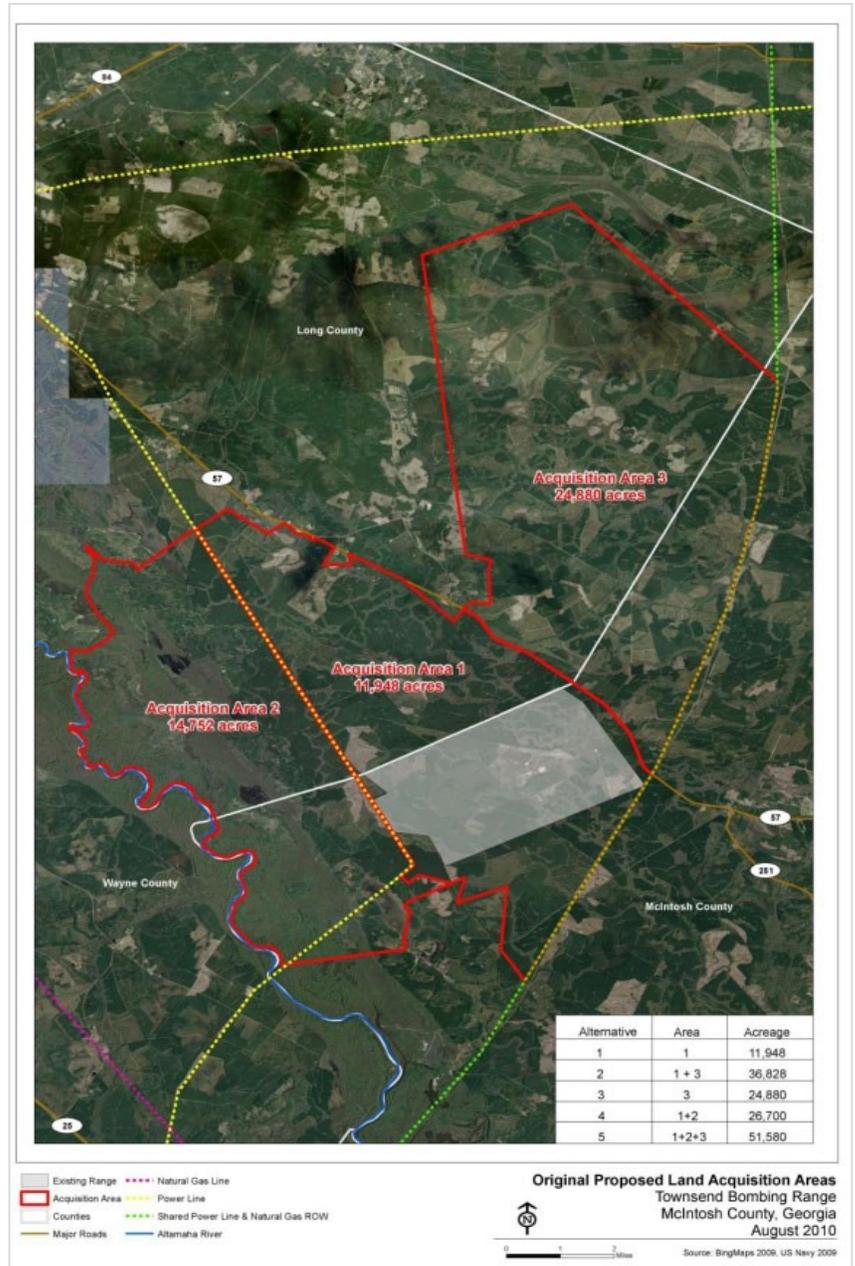
Why did the Marine Corps remove Study Area 2 from further consideration in the Environmental Impact Statement?

The graphic at the right depicts the original five alternatives and the original three study areas as they were presented during the Public Scoping Period: Study Areas 1, 2, and 3. Four land acquisition alternatives, which are depicted on the previous page, in addition to the No Action Alternative, were carried-forward for further analysis and studied in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

During additional analysis of the original five alternatives, Study Area 2 (which is 14,752 acres to the southeast of the current boundary of Townsend Bombing Range between the Altamaha River and the power line) was removed from further study in the EIS for the following reasons:

- Study Area 2 fails to meet the minimum training requirement.¹
- Study Area 2 is frequently flooded by the Altamaha River and inaccessible for range maintenance and clearance.

The removal of Study Area 2 eliminated the original Alternative 4 (26,700 acres) and Alternative 5 (51,580 acres) from further study in the EIS. The Marine Corps reduced its study area for potential land acquisition from approximately 51,580 acres to up to 34,861 acres.



¹ Minimum Threshold Training Requirement: (A) Must provide for a minimum of two (2), 15-degree cones for final attack heading (one tactical), with release of weapons at airspeeds from 360-540 knots and from altitudes up to 24,000 feet. (B) The range must also allow for the delivery of Guided Bomb Units (GBU) 31, 32, and 38; Joint Direct Attack Munitions; and Laser GBU 10, 12, and 16.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – *January 2014*

Does the proposed modernization of Townsend Bombing Range involve the establishment or modification of Special Use Airspace?

The Environmental Impact Statement studied a slight modification to a portion of the Special Use Airspace (SUA)—Restricted Area R-3007—that is currently associated with Townsend Bombing Range. SUA is airspace that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), who regulates the national airspace, has set aside for military or other unusual flight activity. Under the Preferred Alternative, Restricted Area R-3007 airspace will be modified by extending the current 100-foot floor to ground level only over the land to be acquired (Acquisition Areas 1B and 3) to match the existing restricted airspace over the current range. The purpose of this additional airspace is to exclude non-participating aircraft from intruding into hazardous operations, as required by FAA regulations. The proposed modernization does not require the establishment of other Special Use Airspace. The FAA will determine through rulemaking whether to make any requested SUA modification.

What is the project schedule?

Completed Project Milestones:

- Notice of Intent to Undertake an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was released August 6, 2010
- Public Scoping Meetings – August 24 and 26, 2010
- Public Scoping Comment Period – August 6 to September 7, 2010 and October 10 to November 8, 2010
- Draft EIS– Published in Federal Register on July 13, 2012
- Public Comment Period for Draft EIS – July 13 to August 27, 2012; extended until September 27, 2012.
- Public Meetings for Draft EIS – August 7 and August 9, 2012
- Final EIS – Published in Federal Register on March 22, 2013
- Record of Decision (ROD) – Published in Federal Register on January 31, 2014.

Upcoming Anticipated Project Milestones:

- FAA undertakes processes to consider establishment and modification of existing restricted airspace. 2014-2015
- Congress appropriates funds to pay for land acquisition and for range equipment and preparation. Fair market value will be offered for land or property interests identified for acquisition. 2014-2016
- The Marine Corps begins the real estate acquisition process on lands for range expansion. 2014-2017
- The Marine Corps undertakes range preparations for the installation of new targets, target scoring equipment, tower construction, and roadway construction/improvement. 2015-2018
- TBR to reach initial PGM operational capability. 2017

What is the current stage of the project and when is its anticipated completion?

The Department of the Navy (DON) published its Record of Decision (ROD) for the Proposed Expansion and Modernization of Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) in McIntosh and Long Counties, Georgia, in the *Federal Register* on January 31, 2014. The ROD documents the DON's decision to approve the Proposed Action through Alternative 4, the Preferred Alternative, as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). The DON reached this decision after careful consideration of the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, the analysis and conclusions presented in the Final EIS, and comments received from federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, tribal nations, and members of the public. The full version of the DON's ROD can be found on the project Web site: www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com.

Land acquisition requires Congressional approval and funding through the Military Construction program and any Special Use Airspace would have to be established or modified by the Federal Aviation Administration. Any lands or property interests acquired as a result of this project will be purchased at fair market value.

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TOWNSEND BOMBING RANGE MODERNIZATION

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Which of the four alternatives does the Marine Corps prefer?

The resource analysis and conclusions published in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) remain fundamentally unchanged from the Draft EIS because it was determined that there was no significant change in the magnitude of resource impacts based on the reviews associated with addressing public comments. In the Draft EIS, the Marine Corps evaluated the environmental impacts associated with four action alternatives as well as the No Action Alternative. After publication of a Draft EIS, organizations and individuals (federal, state, local, and tribal governments, resource, regulatory, and planning agencies as well as non-governmental stakeholders with an interest in the proposed modernization effort) were able to review and comment on the analysis, including the selection of a preferred alternative. These comments were considered in preparation of the Final EIS. The Marine Corps identified Alternative 4 as the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS, as it offers the best balance of operational capability and environmental impact. The Department of the Navy (DON) published its Record of Decision (ROD) for the Proposed Expansion and Modernization of Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) in McIntosh and Long Counties, Georgia, in the *Federal Register*, on January 31, 2014. The ROD documents the DON's decision to approve the Proposed Action through Alternative 4, as described in the Final EIS. The full version of the DON's ROD can be found on the project Web site: www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com. The four alternatives are outlined in the table below. Alternative 4 is highlighted in blue.

		ALTERNATIVE				
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u> <i>Preferred Alternative</i>	<u>No Action</u>
Acquisition Area		1A + 1B	3	1A+1B+3	1B+3	N/A
Acreage		11,187	23,674	34,861	28,630	N/A
Infrastructure	Target Areas	6, 7, 8	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8	N/A
	Facilities	<i>All Facilities</i>	<i>Observation Tower</i>	<i>Observation Tower</i>	<i>Observation Tower</i>	N/A
Training & Readiness Percentage Met		72%	85%	85%	85%	47%

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TOWNSEND BOMBING RANGE MODERNIZATION



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – January 2014

COMMITMENT TO THE PUBLIC

The Marine Corps, with its partner the Georgia Air National Guard, has prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with full public participation. The public has had multiple opportunities to comment during the preparation of the EIS.

What opportunities does the public have to express its views on the project, the alternatives, and the environmental impact analyses?

A key component of the EIS process is providing opportunities for public review and comment. The public has had several opportunities to comment during the process, consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality guidelines and Department of the Navy (DON) policy and Marine Corps policy. The first of these opportunities occurred during the 30-day Public Scoping Period in Fall 2010, 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. Comments submitted during the scoping periods helped to shape the issues and alternatives studied throughout the development of the Draft EIS.

The Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft EIS was published on July 13, 2012, which officially initiated a 45-day Public Comment Period, providing the second public comment opportunity from July 13 to August 27, 2012. This period was extended to September 27, 2012. Two public meetings were also held during the Public Comment Period. The first meeting occurred on August 7, 2012 in McIntosh County, Georgia. The second public meeting took place on August 9, 2012 in Long County, Georgia. The Marine Corps received additional input and comments from federal, state, local, and tribal governments, resource, regulatory, and planning agencies and non-governmental stakeholders with an interest in the proposed modernization effort. Following the Public Comment Period, the Marine Corps reviewed the public comments submitted on the Draft EIS and addressed these comments in the Final EIS.

On March 22, 2013, the NOA for the Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register*. The Final EIS remains fundamentally unchanged from the Draft EIS. The adjustments made for the Final EIS improved the clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness of the analysis presented in the Draft EIS. No changes were made to conclusions in the analysis concerning the nature or magnitude of impacts on any resources. The Final EIS was distributed to federal, state and local agencies, elected officials, and other interested parties, and made available to the public on the project Web site, as well as in various libraries (please see the project Web site for more information on the public locations where the Final EIS may be located). The public was afforded an opportunity to submit comments on the Final EIS during a 30-day waiting period from March 22 to April 22, 2013.

The DON published its Record of Decision (ROD) for the Proposed Expansion and Modernization of Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) in McIntosh and Long Counties, Georgia, in the *Federal Register*, on January 31, 2014. The ROD documents the DON's decision to approve the Proposed Action through Alternative 4, identified as the Preferred Alternative and described in the Final EIS. The DON reached this decision after careful consideration of the purpose and need for the Proposed Action, the analysis and conclusions presented in the Final EIS, and comments received from federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, tribal nations, and members of the public. The full version of the DON's ROD can be found on the project Web site: www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com.

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TOWNSEND BOMBING RANGE MODERNIZATION

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Where can I find more information about the project?

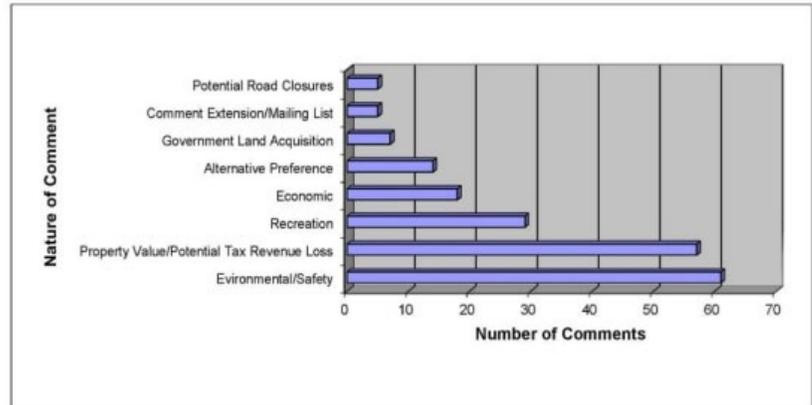
You can find more information about the project, including graphics that depict the study areas and alternatives, at: www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com.

Was there a problem receiving the public comments during the Scoping Period?

The project team identified an issue with the Post Office Box that was established to receive public comments. This issue caused some of the comments to be undeliverable or returned to the sender. To address the delivery issue, the public comment period was reopened from October 10 through November 8, 2010. During the scoping periods, the Marine Corps received 110 comments in total. These comments were used to finalize the range of reasonable alternatives and issues studied in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

What was the outcome of the Public Scoping Period?

The Marine Corps received strong community participation in its Public Scoping Periods conducted August 6 through September 7, 2010 and again from October 10 through November 8, 2010. Scoping is the process by which the Marine Corps solicited input from the public and interested agencies on the nature and extent of issues and impacts that were addressed in the Townsend Bombing Range Modernization Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Marine Corps received 110 comments from the local community and



other interested stakeholders during the two scoping periods. These comments were used to finalize the range of reasonable alternatives and inform the issues that were studied in the EIS. A number of issues received comment by the public during the Scoping Period, including (in no particular order): the economic well-being of the surrounding communities; interests of the Marine Corps encroachment prevention partners in preserving conservation values in the area; biological and water resources protection; transportation issues; hunting, fishing, and other recreation activities; noise and other quality of life impacts. The Scoping Summary Report is included as Appendix A in the Final EIS. The graph above depicts these comments by the number received.

What was the outcome of the Public Comment Period?

During the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) comment period, the Marine Corps received 100 public comments, of which 24 were provided at the public meetings, 13 were emailed, 42 were entered on the project Web site, and 21 were submitted through the mail. The most commonly noted comments submitted on the Draft EIS referenced socioeconomic issues (loss of tax revenue, potential effects to property taxes/values), public safety issues, cultural resources, noise, natural resources, road closures, real estate, forest management, impacts to hunting/recreation, and water quality/water control concerns.

On March 22, 2013, a Notice of Availability for the Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register*. The Final EIS remains fundamentally unchanged from the Draft EIS because the analysis in response to public comments did not identify any

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increases in the magnitude of impacts to environmental resources and, therefore, did not change the conclusions reached in the EIS. The adjustments made for the Final EIS improved the clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness of the analysis presented. A Public Comment Summary Report, available as Appendix B to the Final EIS, describes the Draft EIS review process and summarizes the comments received. Please refer to Sections 1.6 through Section 1.8 of the Final EIS for more information.

How would the proposed modernization of Townsend Bombing Range restrict the mobility of residents in Long and McIntosh Counties along Highway 57? Would Highway 57 be closed?

The Marine Corps recognizes the importance of Highway 57 as a thoroughfare for local residents and travelers in Long and McIntosh Counties. The Marine Corps has no plans to propose to close or relocate Highway 57 under any of the alternatives for modernization under study. Any land acquisition and the training operations conducted in any new training range area would continue to allow for the public's safe use of Highway 57.

Following the Public Comment Period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), additional information was added to the Final EIS to clarify that no portion of State Highway 57 would be closed under any of the action alternatives. The current practice of temporarily closing Blue's Reach Road (also known as Old Barrington Road and Old Cox Road) during certain training activities would continue under any of the action alternatives. Under Alternatives 1, 3, and 4, range officials may close the portion of Blue's Reach Road that enters the new range boundary when access to the range would conflict with training operations. The road would otherwise remain open. You may refer to Section 3.2.4.3 and Sections 3.11.4.2 to 3.11.4.4 of the Final EIS for additional information.

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STEWARDSHIP

The Environmental Impact Statement evaluated a range of reasonable alternatives and the potential impacts of each alternative. This analysis will inform a decision that will continue the Marine Corps' tradition of being a good neighbor and steward of natural resources and cultural resources.

What resources were analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement?

The analysis and conclusions published in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are fundamentally unchanged from the Draft EIS. The adjustments made for the Final EIS improved the clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness of the analysis presented. The EIS analyzed 14 resource areas to evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed expansion and modernization of Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) on the human environment, which includes the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people with that environment. The resources are: land use; socioeconomics; recreation; wetlands; water resources; airspace; noise; biological resources; cultural resources; air quality; transportation; topography, geology and soils; utilities and infrastructure; and hazardous materials and waste. Please refer to Section 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences, of the Final EIS for further information.

Did the resource analysis reveal any potentially significant impacts?

Of the fourteen resource areas that are analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), socioeconomics was determined to be the one with a potentially significant impact. A summary of the socioeconomic impact analysis that was published in the Final EIS is summarized below. Please refer to EIS Section 3.2, Socioeconomics, for further information and analysis.

ALTERNATIVE	<u>1</u> (11,187 acres)	<u>2</u> (23,674 acres)	<u>3</u> (34,861 acres)	<u>4</u> <i>Selected</i> (28,630 acres)
<u>Long County</u> (258,240 acres)				
Acres Acquired	8,204	18,137	26,341	20,110
Annual Tax Loss	\$53,572	\$118,435	\$172,007	\$131,318
Percent Total Taxes	1.39%	3.08%	4.48%	3.42%
<u>McIntosh County</u> (367,680 acres)				
Acres Acquired	2,983	5,537	8,520	8,520
Annual Tax Loss	\$12,708	\$22,761	\$35,469	\$35,469
Percent Total Taxes	0.22%	0.39%	0.60%	0.60%

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TOWNSEND BOMBING RANGE MODERNIZATION



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What would be done about any potential impacts?

The Final EIS evaluated the potential environmental impacts that could occur under each alternative, as well as under the No Action Alternative. The Final EIS analyzed potential impacts to 14 resources areas: land use; socioeconomics; recreation; wetlands; water resources; airspace; noise; biological resources; cultural resources; air quality; transportation; topography, geology and soils; utilities and infrastructure; and hazardous materials and waste. Of the 14 resource areas that were analyzed in the EIS, socioeconomics was determined to be the one potential significant impact.

The DON has acknowledged the potential loss of tax revenues to local governments resulting from the Proposed Action and recognizes tax loss as a significant impact to both Long and McIntosh Counties. The DON remains committed to working with neighbors and stakeholders. Additional information is included in the full version of the ROD, which can be found on the project Web site: www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com.

Would the project restrict public access to recreation areas near Townsend Bombing Range particularly the Altamaha River and the Townsend Wildlife Management Area?

The project would not restrict access to the Altamaha River and the Townsend Wildlife Management Area. Study Area 2 encompassed land up to the bank of the Altamaha River and the Townsend Wildlife Management Area. Study Area 2 was eliminated from consideration for acquisition in this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

How would the proposed modernization affect hunting?

The EIS evaluated the potential impacts to recreation under each of the proposed alternatives. Under each of the action alternatives, any lands acquired to safely accommodate the delivery of precision-guided munitions would continue to support limited public access for hunting and fishing. Hunting and fishing access is currently restricted to private-sector lease agreements. However, the action alternatives would create opportunities for increased public access to previously inaccessible privately administered recreation lands through the Townsend Bombing Range hunting program. An overall increase in publicly accessible lands associated with the action alternatives would offset some of that lost in the private sector. All target areas associated with the Proposed Action, however, would be designated as exclusive military use and closed to public access.

Would modernizing Townsend Bombing Range change the number of operations or timing of use of the Range?

Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) would continue to operate under its existing hours of operation under any modernization plan selected. The projected annual F/A-18 flight operations at TBR for each alternative are listed below. Expanded precision-guided munitions training would not significantly increase the number of operations. TBR's normal business hours are Monday and Friday 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM and Tuesday through Thursday 8:00 AM – 10:00 PM. Any times outside of normal business hours would be coordinated with the Federal Aviation Administration by Notice to Airmen with at least a 24-hour notice.

Projected Annual Total Number of Sorties Conducted by Action Alternative	
TBR (Existing)	2,538
Alternative 1	3,583
Alternative 2	4,243
Alternative 3	4,243
Alternative 4 (Selected)	4,243

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Would the proposed modernization create additional noise at Townsend Bombing Range?

As a part of the analysis for the EIS, the Marine Corps studied the potential noise impacts. The analysis revealed the expanded precision-guided munitions training would not significantly increase the noise on Townsend Bombing Range (TBR). A key factor that influences the noise level that is experienced on the ground is the altitude at which flight operations are conducted. The use of PGM at TBR would move more sorties above 10,000 feet. Currently 41.7% of the total sorties conducted at TBR today are conducted above 10,000 feet. Under the Preferred Alternative, which is Alternative 4, 56.9% of the total sorties would be conducted above 10,000 feet. This increase in the percent of training that is conducted at higher altitudes would reduce the noise exposure experienced on the ground from flight operations. The 94 strafing sorties that are currently conducted at TBR and are the primary source of noise on TBR would remain the same throughout each action alternative. Thus, the maximum noise level from strafing flight operations due to the Proposed Action would not exceed 55 dBA (A-weighted decibels).

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TOWNSEND BOMBING RANGE MODERNIZATION

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FUTURE AVIATION RESOURCES

The proposal to modernize and expand Townsend Bombing Range is a weapon-driven, rather than airframe driven, requirement.

How is this project related to the Marine Corps Joint Strike Fighter basing decision?

The proposed modernization of Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) is a separate action from the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) East Coast basing decision that was announced through a Record of Decision in December 2010. Both projects are subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality guidelines and Department of the Navy policy that require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the solicitation of public input through public meetings and comment periods. These two projects are subject to the same EIS process but they are separate actions with separate EIS and ROD documents. Most importantly these two projects address separate aviation requirements for the Marine Corps. The modernization at TBR is to support the training needs of the current aircraft, the F/A-18, flown by the Marine Aircraft Group 31 based at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort whereas the JSF basing decision answered the question as to which Marine Corps air stations should receive these new aircraft.

If the Joint Strike Fighter is scheduled to replace the F/A-18, why is Townsend Bombing Range under consideration for modernization to support F/A-18 aircrew training?

The requirement that initiated the proposal to modernize Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) is a weapon-driven (rather than airframe- driven) requirement. The aircrews currently assigned to the F/A-18s at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort have a need to train with precision-guided munitions (PGM). In order to prepare for combat, particularly given the nature of the current conflicts, aircrew need to train with and be proficient in, among other things, the delivery of PGM and use of airborne weapons against a range of target types, including supporting military operations on urban terrain. Training with PGM will continue to be emphasized to achieve readiness for future national security and military missions. The lack of a Marine Corps air-to-ground training range on the East Coast has created inefficiencies in the use of the Marine Corps aviation training ranges as a whole.

The process to evaluate possible methods to address the deficiency for the East Coast aviation began in 2003 when the requirement was identified. If the Record of Decision calls for the acquisition of land and modernization of TBR, the land acquisition process and range equipment instrumentation process would begin in fiscal year 2014. The F/A-18 assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 31 is scheduled to remain in service until the 2020s.

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