



TOWNSEND BOMBING RANGE MODERNIZATION

PROJECT UPDATE — March 2013



Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

This Project Update Notice offers a means to provide easily accessible, wide-spread distribution of new project information. This information augments the regular update of project documents that can be found on the Townsend Bombing Range Environmental Impact Statement website. Please visit the website (www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com) to view these project documents for an overview and key background information on the project.

PROJECT UPDATE

Publication of the Final EIS:

On March 15, 2013, the Marine Corps published the Notice of Availability for the Final EIS in the *Federal Register*. 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, agencies and the public can comment on the Final EIS. All written comments must be postmarked or received by April 13, 2013, to ensure they become part of the official project record. Written comments may be submitted via the project website or mailed to the Townsend EIS Project Manager address in the tan box (see below). Copies of the Final EIS can be viewed or downloaded from the project Web site at www.townsendbombingrangeeis.com, or at the following locations:

- Ida Hilton Public Library, 1105 North Way, Darien, Georgia 31305
- Long County Public Library, 28 South Main Street, Ludowici, Georgia 31316
- Hog Hammock Public Library, 1023 Hillery Lane, Sapelo Island, Georgia 31327

Completion of the Draft EIS Public Comment Period:

On July 13, 2012, the United States Marine Corps (Marine Corps) published in the *Federal Register* its Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Townsend Bombing Range (TBR) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS). The Draft EIS provided a detailed analysis of the environmental impacts associated with the alternatives for the modernization and expansion of TBR, located in McIntosh and Long counties, Georgia, to better meet Marine Corps aviation training requirements. The NOA of the Draft EIS officially identified a Public Comment Period from July 13 to August 27, 2012, which was later extended to September 27, 2012. During the public comment period, federal, state, and local agencies, citizens, and other interested parties were able to review and comment on the Draft EIS. During this period, the Marine Corps held two public meetings – one in McIntosh County on August 7, 2012 and one in Long County on August 9, 2012. The Marine Corps received 100 comments on the Draft EIS that were analyzed and addressed in preparation of the Final EIS.

Final EIS Responds to Comments on Draft 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. The adjustments that were made for the Final EIS improved the clarity, accuracy, and thoroughness of the analysis presented. 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 to 23,674 acres. Acreage numbers and each resource analysis were updated in the Final EIS. Acquisition Area 3 is a part of the Preferred Alternative, Alternative 4 (1B and 3).

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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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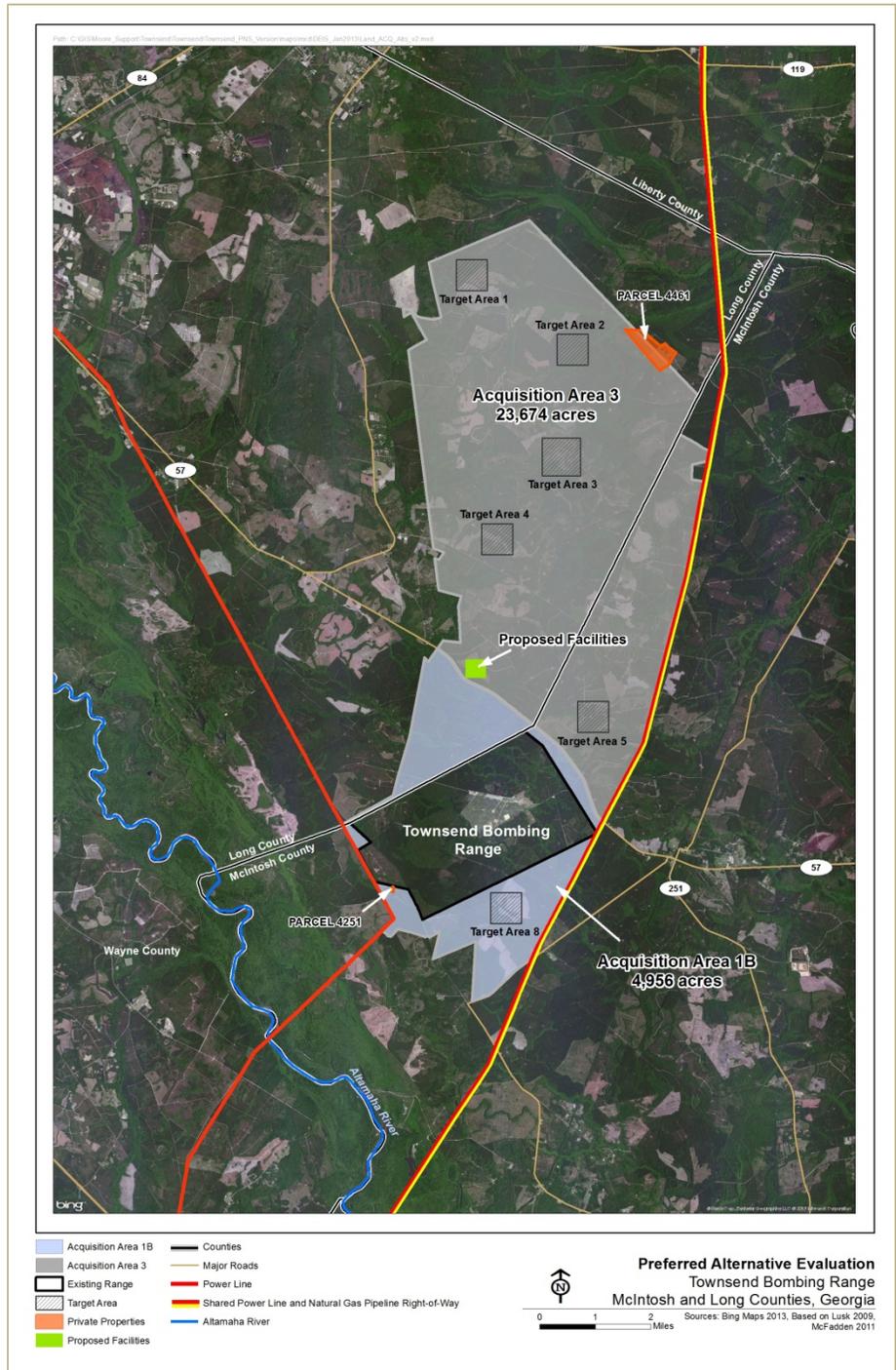
TRAINING REQUIREMENT AND PROPOSED ACTION:

Modernizing TBR to accommodate inert PGM training will significantly enhance east coast aviation unit training efficiency. Presently, TBR can accommodate only 47% of the required F/A-18 Hornet individual fixed-wing air crew training syllabus. The Proposed Action would allow air crews to meet up to 85% of their proficiency requirements at TBR.

The Final EIS identifies Alternative 4 as the Preferred Alternative, because it is the optimal choice considering both training and environmental factors. It includes acquisition of Areas 1B and 3 (28,630 acres) as well as a 3,007-acre timber easement held by McIntosh County. Any land or property interests purchased would be purchased at fair market value. Under the Preferred Alternative, the Marine Corps would also seek to modify Restricted Area R-3007A airspace by adding to the current Restricted Area the airspace from 100 feet above ground level down to the surface of the ground where it would be above the proposed acquisition Areas 1B and 3. The Preferred Alternative also includes the construction of six new target areas and other associated training infrastructure that would support the improvement of air-to-ground training capabilities.

NEXT STEPS:

Following this 30-day waiting period, a Record of Decision on the project will be published by the Department of the Navy (Summer 2013). If the Record of Decision selects land acquisition for modernization of TBR, Congress will review and approve funds for the purchase of lands. Any lands or property interests acquired would be purchased at fair market value.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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