

# DEFENDING THE MILITARY MISSION

AT CHOCOLATE MOUNTAIN AERIAL GUNNERY RANGE

June 2017

## Fact Sheet 3 of 6

This fact sheet summarizes the information that is presented in more detail in the Sonoran Institute report titled [Evaluating Encroachment Pressures on the Military Mission in the California Desert Region](#).

This document should be paired with Fact Sheet 1, which includes recommendations that apply broadly across the five studied military facilities in the California Desert region.

The report is available at <http://www.tiny.cc/CalDesertMilitary>



## The Military Mission and Environmental Health are Intertwined

Founded in 1942, the Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range (CMAGR) is a military facility located in southeastern California. With 357 square miles of desert landscape, the CMAGR is used for training for aerial bombing, missile firing, tactical maneuvering and air support, and other defense-related purposes. The Chocolate Mountains Aerial Gunnery Range is one of the most heavily used aerial gunnery ranges in the West, so much so that proposals are proffered to utilize the CMAGR for ground training in addition to the aviation training that it was established to support. (pg. 13)

## Key Findings and Recommendations

An analysis of CMAGR and the surrounding area identified the following concerns that may present a current or reasonably foreseeable encroachment threat. Each key finding is referenced by number in the map on page 3.

### Urban development is expected to result in no encroachment (pg. 18)

Though some rural communities occur in the vicinity of Chocolate Mountain, they are not expected to grow or contribute additional encroachment pressure to the facility.

Renewable energy is expected to result in indirect encroachment (pg. 29)

1. Renewable energy projects could occur adjacent to the CMAGR and result in direct encroachment concerns, however the configuration and size of the facility make this unlikely.
2. Cumulative development activities within Development Focus Areas (DFAs) may result in incremental fragmentation of habitat

### Recommendations:

- Continued evaluation of new renewable energy projects to prevent encroachment pressures from occurring.
- Prevent a concentration of renewable energy projects in wildlife corridors





that could contribute to the long-term isolation of the facility.

**Electrical transmission is expected to result in indirect encroachment (pg. 39)**

3. The construction of a significant number of new transmission lines in the West-Wide Energy Corridors (WWECs) could reduce habitat connectivity for flora and fauna across the landscape.
4. New projects could contribute to encroachment on military missions if they are not appropriately designed or located due to vertical hazards and/or electromagnetic interference.

**Recommendations:**

- The CMAGR and other affected facilities in the California Desert should be aware of the impact of a concentration of additional electrical transmission lines that could be placed within WWECs in the area.
- Support regional transmission planning that will focus development in areas of least impact to natural resources and biological connectivity.

**Mining is expected to result in no encroachment (pg. 49)**

5. There is very little current mining activity near the CMAGR. In the future, however, there could be new and significant operations as there are lands with significant mineral potential near the facility.

**Recommendation:**

- Advocate for expeditious action by the Bureau of Land Management to evaluate the withdrawal of appropriate public lands from new mining exploration.

**Recreation activity is expected to result in indirect encroachment (pg. 59)**

6. The Imperial Sand Dunes Open Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) area is used by millions of recreationists every year. This area will continue to be utilized and presents little concern for direct encroachment within the area.
7. The Imperial Dunes OHV area crosses over a broad swath of mapped connectivity area. Management of these recreation activities needs to be balanced to ensure that habitat connectivity for flora and fauna is maintained.

**Recommendation:**

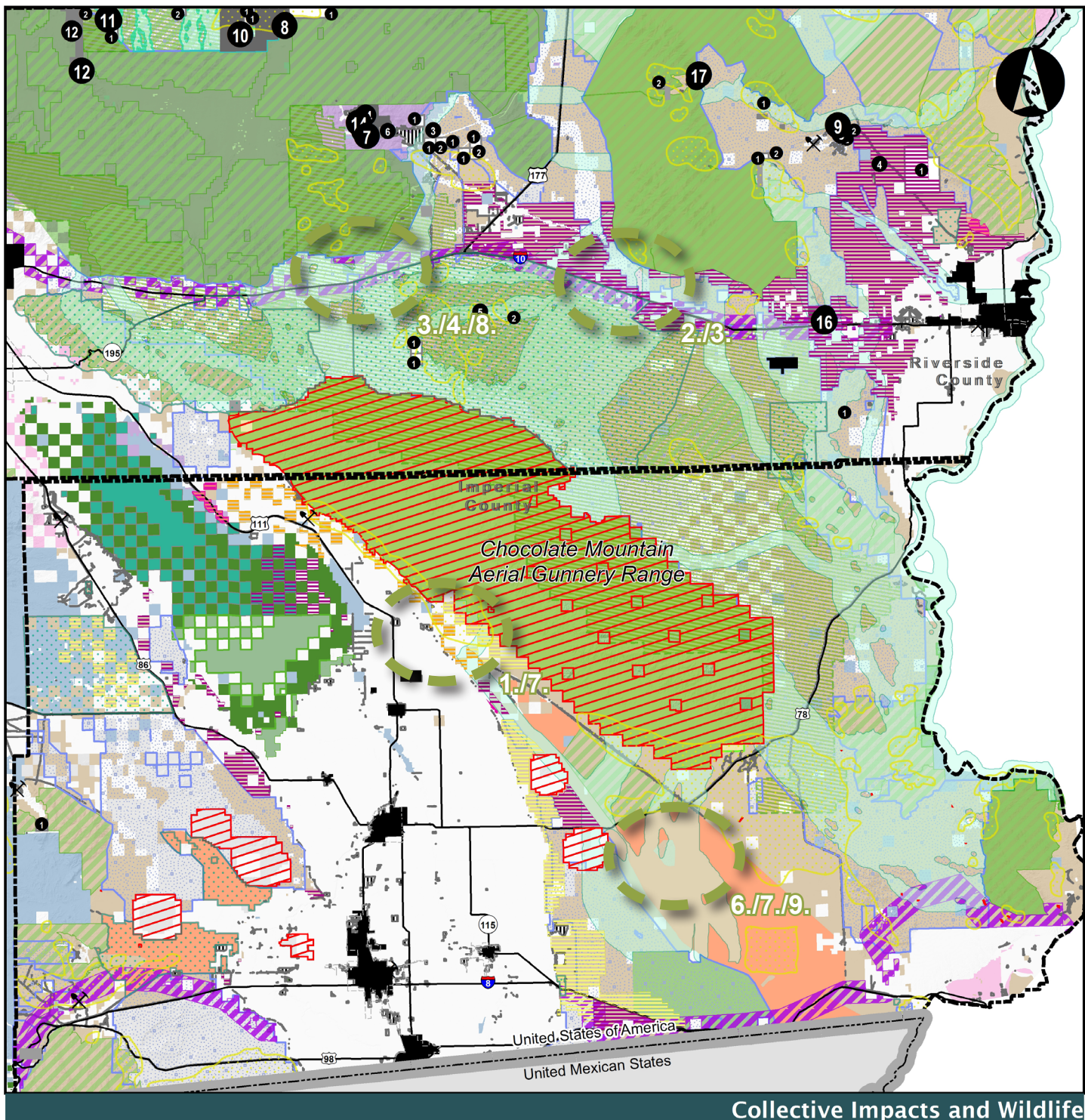
- Some corridors on the south of the facility may require additional management actions to prevent their degradation from concentrated OHV use.

**Natural resource management is expected to result in indirect encroachment (pg. 68)**

8. The military mission around the CMAGR appears to be relatively free of direct encroachment pressure. The possible exception is the presence of significant







Collective Impacts and Wildlife



1:750,000

**Legend**

- |                             |                               |                              |                              |   |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Cal Desert Counties         | Open OHV Areas                | DRECP Variance Process Lands | US Fish and Wildlife Service | 1 - 2<br>3 - 6<br>7 - 17<br>18 - 122<br>High Potential<br>Mineral Locations<br>Active Mines |
| Military Facility           | West-wide Energy Corridor     | ACEC                         | Native American Reservation  |   |
| Major Roads                 | Development                   | Wildlife Linkage             | Bureau of Reclamation        |   |
| City Limits 2010            | Focus Area (All Technologies) | Wilderness Area              | Other Federal                |   |
| Urban Areas                 | Geothermal                    | Critical Habitat             | State Private                |   |
| Impervious Built-up Land    | Solar and Geothermal          | Wildland Blocks              | City                         |   |
| Recreation management areas | Variance Process Lands        | California Lands Association | County                       |   |
|                             |                               | BLM                          |                              |   |
|                             |                               | NPS                          |                              |   |





renewable energy development potential in areas in the vicinity of the southern boundary of the facility.

9. The success of military operations at the CMAGR are impacted by cumulative indirect encroachment related to the fragmentation and loss of ecological function of lands surrounding the facility.

#### Recommendations:

- Monitor natural resource management activities and policies and keep the Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) up to date.
- Continue to participate in planning and activities that serve to protect the Mojave Desert tortoise.
- Maintain a proactive role in preserving connectivity of flora and fauna to the broader region as it may be that current local and regional management policies are insufficient to achieve this goal.
- Continue active participation in the Desert Managers Group, to forward ongoing collaboration with regional military facilities and other interested parties around natural resource issues.

To learn more about our efforts to preserve military missions through environmental stewardship, visit our website or contact:

Ian Dowdy, AICP  
Director, Sun Corridor Program  
[idowdy@sonoraninstitute.org](mailto:idowdy@sonoraninstitute.org)

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## The Mission of the Sonoran Institute

The Sonoran Institute's mission is to connect people and communities with the natural resources that nourish and sustain them. We work at the nexus of commerce, community, and conservation to help people in the North American West build the communities they want to live in while preserving the values which brought them here. We envision a West where civil dialogue and collaboration are hallmarks of decision making, where people and wildlife live in harmony, and where clean water, air, and energy are assured.

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