Economic Development Planning, Summary 27

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Title: Strategies to Protect Arizona’s $9 Billion Military Economy: Western Maricopa County Military Land Use Nexus

Year: 2013

Source: The Sonoran Institute and the Arizona Wilderness Coalition
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Length: 15 pages.

Website: sonoranheritage.org

Summary: The economic impact of Arizona’s military installations totals about $9 billion a year. The long-term health of these facilities rests on the operational effectiveness of the Barry M. Goldwater Range, and the ease with which pilots can fly to the range to carry out their training missions. Pilots fly along Military Training Routes to the range, making these corridors a lifeline for Luke Air Force Base and the eight other installations that train over western Maricopa County and over the Goldwater Range. Unfortunately, these routes are increasingly threatened by development in western Maricopa County and other human interference, forcing pilots to fly around problem areas.

Protecting these Military Training Routes should be a top priority for Maricopa County and Arizona, which should ensure that the corridors remain open and viable. Congressional passage of a proposed Sonoran Desert Heritage bill could conserve federal lands over which the pilots fly, helping to protect the Military Training Routes from incompatible uses on the ground. Conservation designations could
ensure the lands under the routes remained in federal hands. Congress could permanently protect 80 percent of Bureau of Land Management lands in Maricopa County that are under the Military Training Routes. Additionally, the designations would preserve wildlife connectivity, reducing the likelihood that the Goldwater Range would become a “refuge of last resort” for endangered or threatened species.

Sectors: Military, defense

Geographic impact: Arizona

Key actors: Luke Air Force Base; Barry M. Goldwater Range; Bureau of Land Management; Maricopa County; U.S. Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz., and other Arizona Congressional members; Sonoran Institute; Arizona Wilderness Coalition; Wilderness Society; U.S. Department of Defense; Base Realignment and Closure Commission; DMB Associates, John F. Long Properties, and other parts of business community; Arizona Legislature; Arizona governor; Fighter Country Partnership; Glendale, Buckeye, Litchfield Park, and other West Valley communities.

Major challenges: Military installations across the country, including those in Arizona, are subject to periodic review for possible closure by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Among the factors that the commission weighs heavily in this process is whether encroaching development on the boundaries of an installation is impairing its ability to carry out its missions effectively. Other civilian-related issues include complaints about aircraft noise and safety concerns. In a fast-growing state like Arizona, new development is always a potential threat to installations like Luke Air Force Base.

In the next round of base closings, Arizona will likely have to deal with another important issue besides urban encroachment. That would be “mission encroachment,” or outside factors that threaten the economic efficiency and the operational effectiveness of installations, including their access to training ranges because of increased restrictions and obstructions.

From this perspective, the threats to Luke and the Goldwater Range include development encroachment within Military Training Routes and the possible challenges created by restricted wildlife connectivity, whereby the Goldwater Range becomes a “refuge of last resort” for threatened and endangered species.

Progress to date: The Arizona Sonoran Heritage Act was assigned to a House committee in April, 2013. In recent years, Arizona has passed significant legislation to protect such military installations as Luke Air Force Base in Glendale, Davis Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, and the Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma from urban encroachment. In fact, Arizona has been the most aggressive state in the country in protecting installations. But it may not be enough. In late April, 2013, U.S. Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz., introduced the “Arizona Sonoran Desert Heritage Act of 2013,” (H.R. 1799) whose stated aim includes safeguarding Luke Air Force Base and
the Barry M. Goldwater Range by preserving critical tracts west of Phoenix. These tracts serve as wildlife and recreation areas that would be protected through a mixture of wilderness, national conservation areas and special management area designations. The area covers about 954,600 acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. So far, no Republican House member has joined in to co-sponsor the bill.

**Major implications:** Protecting the air corridors of Barry M. Goldwater Range is essential to the range’s vitality and, by extension, the health of Luke Air Force Base in Glendale and other military installations in the state. The Goldwater Range serves Luke, the Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma, the Western Army Aviation Training Site in Marana, Davis-Monthan Air Force and the 162nd Fighter Wing in Tucson. The range is also used by other parts of the military.

The proposed Arizona Sonoran Desert Heritage Act could result in the permanent protection of 80 percent of Maricopa County federal lands under Military Training Routes, more than 650 square miles of additional protective designations, nearly doubling the amount that is protected today. This would help ensure the long-term use of Goldwater Range for training missions. Luke’s role also would be strengthened, especially in light of it recently landing a new mission to train pilots to fly the new F-35 fighter jet.

**Opportunities for alignment:** Arizona Congressional delegation working with other members of Congress, U.S. Department of Defense, and state and local leaders to protect the Goldwater range and the state’s military installations. Off-road vehicle enthusiasts have expressed fears that the bill will prevent them from using lands. In an earlier version of the bill, concerns were raised that mineral exploration and development were precluded.

**Background:** The military’s operations in Arizona have an estimated $9 billion impact. In recent years, there has been a renewed appreciation for the economic impact of these eight installations with the periodic closure of installations around the country, including Williams Air Force Base in Mesa. Arizona has been at the forefront of states in passing legislation to protect such installations as Luke Air Force Base from homes and businesses springing up nearby.

While there has been a great deal of attention paid to urban encroachment in Arizona, much less is known about the threats to Military Training Routes between Luke and the Goldwater Range. One of the attractions of Luke is that its proximity to the Goldwater Range makes it easy to get there quickly and with less use of fuel, also putting less stress on aircraft.

Interviews with key personnel at Luke suggest growing concerns about the unfettered use of Military Training Routes because of significant pockets of small communities and other areas where noise or safety complaints have been registered. This has resulted in pilots flying around the problem areas. If these areas
were to expand and/or multiply as western Maricopa County grows, it would narrow the effective size of the training routes and cause additional diversions. If unabated, the growth could reduce functional mission capacity to critical levels.

**Endangered and threatened species and land use management**

Military land managers have shown the ability to adapt and evolve over the years in dealing with the revenue-gathering programs of the 1970s and 1980s that encouraged camping and grazing, to the emergence of an ecosystem management philosophy in the 1990s. For land managers, the focus now is on biodiversity and the conservation of natural landscapes. Each installation must take under consideration the needs of any endangered or threatened species while balancing the training needs of the military.

Camp Pendleton, located between San Diego and Los Angeles, is widely recognized for the great lengths that it has gone to restore habitat so as to nurture and grow populations of threatened and endangered species – in order to continue to use parts of the land for training.

Arizona’s military installations and the Goldwater Range, in particular, should look to head off major problems triggered by the need to manage endangered or threatened species. Four species are of concern on the Goldwater Range: the Sonoran pronghorn antelope, Lesser long-nosed bat, Peirson’s milkvetch, and the Rat-tailed horned lizard. The Sonoran desert tortoise could be added to that list by 2014.

If a protected species were to be left with no other natural habitat except for a military facility, a military installation could become a “refuge of last resort.” The most logical way to prevent that from happening is to ensure adequate wildlife connectivity between the military installation and other viable habitat. In the case of the Goldwater Range, lands within the Sonoran Desert National Monument and within the Gila Bend Mountains north of Interstate 8 are similar to lands within the range.

**Conclusions**

Borrowing a page from Camp Pendleton, Arizona must think “out of the box” to lower the risk of potential problems resulting from threatened and endangered species regulations, continued urban development and potential changes in public perception of military installations. Of great concern is protecting the Military Training Routes to the Goldwater Range and ensuring the habitat connectivity that help ensure a future for Goldwater.

Without these connections, it’s more likely that Goldwater Range will face mission encroachment due to environmental regulations. The result will be a Goldwater Range that operates less efficiently and effectively.
Conclusion 1: The designation of federal lands under Military Training Routes such as the Sonoran Desert heritage plan can enhance the long-term viability of a military installation while protecting other important natural, ecological, social, and recreational values – effectively a low-cost conservation easement.

Conclusion 2: Conservation easements within private lands can prevent the development of incompatible uses and resulting mission encroachment.

Conclusion 3: Appropriate land trades as authorized by Proposition 119 between lands owned and managed by the Arizona State Land Department and lands under federal ownership within Military Training Routes or in the vicinity of military installations can reduce the risks of mission encroachment.