



For Immediate Release

July 6, 2015
Sonoran Institute
11010 N. Tatum Blvd., Suite D-101
Phoenix, AZ 85028

Contact: Ian Dowdy
623-680-5913
idowdy@sonoraninstitute.org

General Media Inquiries: Seth Cothrun
(520) 290-0828 x 1110
scothrun@sonoraninstitute.org

Encroachments “creeping up” on AZ military operations

Sonoran Institute releases tools to help communities balance growth, defense

PHOENIX (July 6, 2015) -- Arizona communities are being encouraged to use a new framework for balancing development in remote areas in an effort to retain the state's \$9 billion-a-year military economy while preserving open space on federal lands.

The framework, developed by the Sonoran Institute with input from military, community and conservation leaders, is being released July 6 as part of a new study “Mutual Benefit; Preserving Arizona’s Military Mission and the Value of Publicly Owned Lands.” The Institute will lead a congressional policy briefing on the report and framework July 7 in Washington D.C.

“Though we have long recognized the special relationship between the open landscapes in Arizona and the military training operations that occur here, we have only recently begun to take steps to protect both of these valuable assets from gradual degradation, “ said Ian Dowdy, a Sonoran Institute program director and lead author of the report.

The Institute is recommending states and local communities, especially in the West, anticipate additional demands on lands that used to be remote in order to ensure that new uses are not constraining military operations. Planners expect added demands for such uses as solar and wind energy sites, mining, outdoor recreation and conventional land development.

At the same time, changes in global warfare mean the military needs larger areas to train in. In a 2014 report to Congress, the secretary of defense noted “The reality that a 21st century battle space is measured in vast distances covered rapidly by highly capable forces increases the demand for extensive training areas and airspace that exceed the limitations of a single installation.”

In Arizona, that heightens concerns that the open lands the military counts on for flight paths could be compromised by incompatible land uses. If bases close or missions relocate as a result, it jeopardizes military readiness and the military's \$9 billion a year contribution to the Arizona economy, Dowdy and military supporters said.

"This report demonstrates the need for constant vigilance around preserving Arizona's storied military legacy," says Fred Pease, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force. "This is another positive example of Arizona's national leadership in developing proactive proposals to address potential encroachment of military operating space."

There's no one single threat to Arizona bases in 2015; the issue is that "encroachments can creep up," the study found. What communities need to watch out for is many separate demands that can add up to "death by a thousand cuts" for a military facility, Dowdy says. The Institute created a framework for community leaders to continually assess and measure possible impacts so they can get ahead of any problems and mitigate them.

For years, the military has counted on flying over miles of open space, across Arizona and much of the West. Pilots polished combat flight skills in noisy maneuvers that bothered few people. Marines, soldiers and pilots counted on training in these vast natural landscapes much like those where they might be deployed, particularly in desert areas.

While military bases make up only 4 percent of Arizona's landmass, they utilize the airspace in corridors that cover almost 52 percent of the state's area. And most of that area is managed by federal and state land agencies that don't always consider military encroachment issues, the report said.

The Department of Defense has been promoting open areas around bases – from golf courses to farms and low-density housing development – that wouldn't conflict with military operations. Compatibility of activities around private lands and suburban housing most often get worked out between local officials and military planners.

"This same scrutiny and proactive measures have not occurred, however, with respect to lands owned by the federal government in the public lands system," the Sonoran Institute report noted.

On government land managed for multiple uses, agencies such as the Arizona State Land Department, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Forest Service increasingly must come up with complex solutions. Often, these solutions have not taken military interests into full account because planners may assume defense needs are met within the military's own bases, ranges, and other facilities.

The Sonoran Institute report highlights three case studies of direct, indirect or perceived encroachment: at Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson, Fort Huachuca in Sierra Vista and the Barry M. Goldwater Bombing Range southwest of Phoenix. In each case, the military and nearby communities have been taking action to protect installations.

At Davis-Monthan, where Tucson's growth has resulted in housing developments to directly encroach on an airfield built in the 1920s, military and local officials have been jointly planning land uses since 2001 to balance growth and military needs.

The Goldwater Range used by the Air Force and Marines faced the potential of becoming an isolated refuge for wildlife if development threatened endangered animals in surrounding areas. Military planners realized the range needed to be managed as part of a larger ecosystem and worked with multiple land agencies to ensure enough wildlife corridors to preserve the range for military use.

At Fort Huachuca, the military, the city of Sierra Vista and Cochise County have successfully worked together for decades to conserve water, yet faced lingering perceptions that the Fort drew down local water supplies. By creating buffers around the Fort and conserving even more water, local and military officials won recognition in 2014 that the Fort was not having any detrimental effect on the nearby San Pedro River.

While each of these case studies showed communities that took action to protect military installations, too often such efforts are reactive to threats that could have been foreseen and addressed to reduce impact to the military operations, the Institute found.

The Sonoran Institute recommends Arizona and communities concerned about maintaining their military bases use the planning framework developed by the Institute to anticipate potential impacts further in advance and then work with federal, state and local land planners to make sure the military uses are protected.

"This careful look at encroachment issues across Arizona is particularly useful for local communities as we make decisions around growth and development in our county. The tools that that are unveiled in this report will help us ensure that valuable installations like Davis-Monthan and other southern Arizona military installations remain open long into the future," says Pima County Supervisor Ramon Valadez.

Encroachment has been an issue for military facilities in other states as well. The Marine Corps' Camp Pendleton north of San Diego and the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms near Joshua Tree National Park have experienced substantial growth in surrounding areas that used to be open. At Fort Bragg in North Carolina, conservationists and the Department of Defense worked together to preserve acreage for wildlife and military training uses.

The Sonoran Institute is a nonprofit organization that inspires and enables community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of western North America. Join us throughout 2015 in celebrating a landmark 25 Years Strong, Shaping the Future of the West. For more information, visit www.sonoraninstitute.org.

Resources:

Contact:

Ian Dowdy, program director, Sonoran Institute, Phoenix. Mobile (623) 680-5913 or idowdy@sonoraninstitute.org

Downloadable report:

http://www.sonoraninstitute.org/component/docman/doc_download/1579-mutual-benefit-preservingarizonas-military-mission-and-the-value-of-publicly-owned-lands.html

Visuals:

To set up video or still photo shoots illustrating this story or on-site interviews with Sonoran experts, contact:

Phoenix: Wanda Mills-Bocachica, (602) 393-4310 x 310

Tucson: John Shepard, (520) 907-6521

Advisors who helped shape the Sonoran Institute report:

Military advocate: John Regni, Lt. Gen., USAF, retired, TheJFRGroup@cox.net, (623) 935-6433

Military advocate: Fred Pease, USAF Senior Executive Service, retired, fkpz64@gmail.com, (520) 373-1239

Conservationist: Mike Quigley, Arizona State Director, The Wilderness Society, mike_quigley@twc.org, (520) 334-8741

Local community: Ramon Valadez, Pima County Supervisor, dist2@pima.gov, (520) 740-8126