

Target: Military Proposals Without Proper Review

Target: Military Proposals Without Proper Review

The

Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site (PCMS) supports a diverse ecosystem with large numbers of big and small game, fisheries, non-game wildlife, forest, rangeland, mineral resources, as well as containing significant archeological and paleontological resources. Rock the Earth

is opposing the Army's proposed expansion of the PCMS as the plan lacks the necessary environmental evaluation to go forward, fails to review other reasonable alternatives to expansion, and fails to take all measures necessary to protect the important environmental, archeological and paleontological resources found in this area.

Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site Expansion

The Army is

proposing to expand the Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site ("PCMS"), taking of thousands of acres of land by eminent domain and the establishing the largest maneuver and military bombing range in the country.

Issue:

Whether the United States Army's Draft Environmental Impact Statement ("DEIS") for the expansion and operation of the PCMS adequately reviews potential environmental impacts and complies with applicable federal laws and regulations.

Background:

The Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site (PCMS) is a training area administered by Fort Carson that encompasses 235,896 acres located about 150 miles southeast of Fort Carson. The military acquired PCMS in the mid-80s to provide the Army with a place to conduct mechanized brigade training exercises. Approximately half of the PCMS area was acquired through the use of eminent domain. As the second largest Department of Defense training site in the nation (to California's Fort Irwin), PCMS has hosted up to two major military exercises a year, in which roughly 5,000 troops, 300 heavy tracked vehicles and 400

wheeled vehicles take to the expansive wilderness in month-long, intensive war maneuver exercises. The training area borders miles of the Purgatoire River and includes significant portions of at least six of its tributaries. PCMS supports a diverse ecosystem with large numbers of big and small game, fisheries, non-game wildlife, forest, rangeland and mineral resources. PCMS is also known to contain significant archeological and paleontological resources, including giant fossilized dinosaur tracks in an area known as Picket Wire Canyon.

This past fall (2006) the Army released the draft "Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site Transformation Environmental Impact Statement" for public comment, the first step toward an expansion that would result in the taking of thousands of acres of land by eminent domain and the establishment of the largest maneuver and military bombing range in the country. The draft EIS seeks authorization for an unspecified increase in use, including joint service operations and multi-national training, and construction of new support facilities costing \$26 million, including a live hand grenade range, an ammunition holding area, and a protective equipment testing facility.

RtE Position:

Even though the Army has received permission from the Pentagon to proceed with land acquisition, the DEIS fails to disclose or evaluate the environmental impacts of expansion in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA"). In addition, the draft EIS violates NEPA failing to consider a range of reasonable alternatives, failing to gather or disclose environmental baseline information, and failing to describe the activities that will occur if the project is approved in sufficient detail to allow the public a meaningful opportunity to comment. In light of these failures, the draft EIS is unable to fulfill its function of reasonably informing the public and agency officials of the project's potential impacts on air quality, water resources, wildlife, endangered species, vegetation, and rural communities surrounding the base. Federal environmental protections cannot be circumvented under the false cloak of 'National Security.'

Update:

On September 8, a federal judge blocked the Army's plans to greatly increase its use of the existing PCMS. Ruling that the Army did not fully comply with federal environmental assessment law before it issued its 2007 decision for expanded use of the site, Senior U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch set aside the Army's decision authorizing new facilities and year-round training at the 238,000-acre site northeast of Trinidad, Colorado

Links:

Federal District Court Decision of September 8, 2009

Rock the Earth
February 14, 2007 Comment Letter to DEIS

Pinon Canyon Expansion Opposition
Coalition

Purgatoire, Apishapa & Comanche
Grassland Trust

Not 1 More Acre!