

ASSESSING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF EXPANDED MISSION ACTIVITIES FORT IRWIN, CALIFORNIA



WESTON helped Fort Irwin assess the potential environmental impacts, including endangered species and water use, arising from proposed changes to its mission.

Project Highlights

Challenge:

Analyze the potential environmental impacts of proposed land use changes, training activities, and a population increase associated with new mission functions at Fort Irwin, CA.

Solution:

- Gathered extensive information on all facets of the installation, interviewed post experts, and developed an accurate, quantitative baseline of the installation
- Assessed the alternatives, considering—among other issues—land expansion, air quality, noise, threatened and endangered species, and water supply
- Coordinated public meetings and communications

Result:

A comprehensive Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) that included possible mitigation measures, which will be used to make a final, informed decision on which alternative the Army will pursue.

The U.S. Army has proposed changes in the structure of forces stationed at Fort Irwin, California. These changes would require an increased number of soldiers and an associated increase in the number of family members, construction of new facilities, increases in installation operations, and adjustments to institutional programs to support realigned units and organizations. Also proposed was the possibility of increasing the number of training rotations at Fort Irwin from 10 per year to 12. Weston Solutions, Inc. (WESTON®) prepared the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS), required for changes of this scope.

Alternatives Developed and Assessed

- No-Action: continue operations at current levels without changes
- Increase training rotations from 10 to 11; increase installation population by 690 soldiers
- Increase training rotations from 10 to 11; increase installation population by approximately 5,000 soldiers
- Increase training rotations from 10 to 12; increase installation population by 690 soldiers (the preferred alternative and the one proposed by the Army)
- Increase training rotations from 10 to 12; increase installation population by approximately 5,000 soldiers

Alternatives Assessment

WESTON's analysis took into account the dynamic conditions of Fort Irwin and the training center, which included challenges with land expansion, air quality, noise, threatened and endangered species, and water supply.

Air Quality: Fort Irwin currently is affected by air quality issues related to ozone and particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}). The installation is in nonattainment with state ozone standards and both federal and state PM₁₀ standards, while a portion of the installation is in a federal nonattainment area for ozone and PM_{2.5}. WESTON's analysis included extensive air modeling of three project components for each alternative: construction, training rotation emissions, and infrastructure-related impacts. WESTON then reviewed the modeling results and conducted an analysis of impacts from the proposed action and alternatives.

Noise: WESTON identified the need to update Training and Maneuver Range noise contours to complete the impacts analysis. WESTON then facilitated the required update and completed the impacts analysis.

Endangered Species: Fort Irwin is currently home to a federally listed endangered plant species (Lane Mountain milkvetch) and a federally listed threatened reptile species (Desert Tortoise—Mojave Population). WESTON coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which determined a new biological opinion was not necessary and extended an existing biological opinion. WESTON then coordinated the impacts analysis process for biological resources.

Water Use: Because current pumping rates allow for a 70-year available water supply, the proposed and alternative actions could result in a long-term water shortage. WESTON's analysis of water usage trends determined that implementation of all but the no-action alternatives would result in moderate to major long-term impacts to the water supply.

Public Meetings and Public Communications

WESTON coordinated three public scoping meetings and three public hearings, and also prepared agendas, presentations, posters, and comment cards. Additionally, WESTON maintained the mailing list and distribution of public review copies of the Draft PEIS. WESTON utilized an electronic public comment tracking system to facilitate organization and filtration of public comments received.

Addressing Mission Requirements Now and in the Future

By developing this comprehensive, appropriate, contemporary, and legally defensible PEIS, WESTON has helped support Fort Irwin's mission requirements now and in the future.



Elements of a PEIS

1. Prepare and publish a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register
2. Hold public scoping meetings and hearings
3. Coordinate with local, state, and federal organizations
4. Develop Alternatives
5. Prepare the Draft (PEIS)
6. Address and analyze public comments received during scoping and public meetings and hearings
7. Prepare the PEIS and finalize the Record of Decision
8. Prepare a consolidated Administrative Record