



September 12, 2012

Congressional Committees

Subject: Military Training: DOD Met Annual Reporting Requirements and Improved Its Sustainable Ranges Report

The Department of Defense (DOD) relies on access to military land, airspace, sea space, and frequency spectrum to provide its forces a realistic training environment that will ready them to face combat or complex missions around the globe. Over the decades, however, several factors collectively known as encroachment have increasingly challenged the military's access to these resources.¹ Additionally, increased operational tempo and overseas deployments, specifically in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, have strained the ability of some existing range resources and infrastructures to continue supporting training at the levels required by DOD and the military services. To respond to these challenges and increase the long-term sustainability of its military range resources, DOD has launched a number of efforts aimed both at preserving its training ranges and addressing the effects of its training activities on the environment and on local communities.

Section 366 of the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 (as amended)² required DOD to submit a comprehensive plan for using existing authorities available to the department to address training constraints caused by limitations on the use of military lands, marine areas, and airspace in the United States and overseas to Congress at the same time as the President submitted his budget for fiscal year 2004. Further, Section 366 required DOD to submit an annual progress report to Congress along with the President's budget for fiscal years 2005 through 2013. To address these requirements, DOD has submitted an annual sustainable ranges report since 2004. In addition, the act directed us to submit annual evaluations of DOD's reports to Congress within 90 days of receiving these reports from DOD.³ Our review of DOD's 2012 sustainable ranges report is our ninth annual report in response to the act. In this review, we discuss (1) the extent to which DOD's 2012 sustainable ranges report meets the statutory requirements and (2) the extent to which DOD has acted on GAO recommendations to improve its report submissions and what

¹DOD defines range "encroachment" as external influences that threaten or constrain range and operating area activities required for force training and testing. Encroachment includes, but is not limited to, endangered species and critical habitat, unexploded ordnance and munitions, electronic frequency spectrum, maritime sustainability, airspace restrictions, air quality, airborne noise, and urban growth.

²Pub. L. No. 107-314 (2002). Section 366 originally required reports for fiscal years 2005 through 2008. However, this requirement was extended through 2013 by section 348 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007, Pub. L. No. 109-364 (2006). Additionally, section 1063(c)(2) of Pub. L. No. 110-181 (2008) and section 1075(g)(2) of Pub. L. No. 111-383 (2011) made clerical amendments to section 348 of Pub. L. No. 109-364.

³Section 366 originally required GAO to submit its report to Congress within 60 days of receiving the original report from DOD, but this was extended to 90 days by section 348 of Pub. L. No. 109-364 (2006).

opportunities, if any, exist for DOD to improve future reporting. In accordance with the act, we are submitting this report to you.

To determine the extent to which DOD's 2012 sustainable ranges report meets the requirements specified by section 366, we reviewed DOD's 2012 report and compared it to the reporting requirements contained in the act. We also identified and reviewed specific elements of DOD's comprehensive range sustainment plan that demonstrate how DOD met the statutory requirements. Further, we compared the 2011 and 2012 sustainable ranges reports to identify any improvements DOD had made and the extent to which the current report addressed GAO's prior recommendations. In addition, we met with Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) and military service officials to discuss the extent to which the 2012 report met the act's requirements and addressed key recommendations made in prior GAO reports. We also discussed with these officials the extent to which opportunities may exist for improving future sustainable ranges reporting. The intent of our review was not to comprehensively evaluate the data presented in the 2012 sustainable ranges report but rather to determine the extent to which the report met the mandated requirements and whether DOD's reporting could be improved.

We conducted this performance audit between April 2012 and September 2012 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Results in Brief

In our view, DOD's 2012 sustainable ranges report meets the annual statutory reporting requirements that DOD describe its progress in implementing its sustainable ranges plan and any additional actions taken or to be taken in addressing training constraints caused by limitations on the use of military lands, marine areas, and airspace. DOD's 2012 report also provides updates to several elements of the plan that the act required DOD to include in its original submission in 2004. These elements include (1) proposals to enhance training range capabilities and address any shortfalls in resources, (2) goals and milestones for tracking planned actions and measuring progress, and (3) projected funding requirements for implementing planned actions, among others. Taken together, these elements of DOD's 2012 sustainable ranges report describe the department's progress in implementing its comprehensive plan and addressing training constraints at its ranges, thus meeting the annual reporting requirements of the act.

DOD has taken action in response to all 13 prior GAO recommendations that focused on meeting the requirements of the act and improving the report submissions and has completed implementation of all but two of those recommendations. In response to three recommendations in our 2011 report, DOD included additional information in its goals, actions, and milestones and funding requirements sections in the 2012 sustainable ranges report. In our earlier reviews of DOD's annual sustainable ranges report, we identified a total of 10 recommendations. DOD has since completed implementation of all but two of the prior recommendations, which related to readiness reporting. DOD has been addressing these two recommendations by developing and testing a range assessment module for the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS), and expects to complete its review by the end of fiscal year 2012. Through the changes DOD has implemented in its annual reporting over the past

several years, many based on GAO recommendations, DOD has continued to improve its reporting on its sustainable ranges. We are making no new recommendations in this report.

Background

DOD has been reporting to Congress since fiscal year 2004 on several items related to its training ranges in response to section 366 of the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003. Section 366(a) required DOD to submit a comprehensive plan to Congress at the same time that the President submitted his budget for fiscal year 2004 for using existing authorities available to the department to address training constraints caused by limitations on the use of military lands, marine areas, and airspace. The act also required annual progress reports at the same time that the President submitted his budget for fiscal years 2005 through 2013. As part of the preparation of this plan, the Secretary of Defense was to conduct an assessment of current and future training range requirements and an evaluation of the adequacy of DOD's current range resources to meet those requirements. Additionally, the 2004 plan was to include (1) proposals to enhance training range capabilities and address any shortfalls in resources identified pursuant to that assessment and evaluation, (2) goals and milestones for tracking planned actions and measuring progress, (3) projected funding requirements for implementing planned actions, and (4) designation of an office in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and in each of the military departments with lead responsibility for overseeing implementation of the plan.

Further, Section 366(a)(5) required that DOD's annual reports describe the department's progress in implementing its comprehensive plan and any actions taken or to be taken to address training constraints caused by limitations on the use of military lands, marine areas, and airspace. Moreover, section 366(b) required DOD to submit a report to Congress on its plans to improve its readiness reporting system to reflect the readiness impact of certain training constraints. Also, section 366(c) required DOD to develop and maintain a training range inventory to be submitted at the same time as the President's budget for fiscal year 2004 and annual updates for 2005 through 2013. Finally, Section 366(d), as amended, required that we evaluate the plans submitted pursuant to subsections 366(a) and (b), and submit our annual evaluations of DOD's reports to Congress within 90 days of receiving these reports from DOD.

In addition to the sustainable ranges report, DOD provides Congress the *Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative Report*, which is required separately under 10 U.S.C. § 2684a. Under the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative program, DOD works with conservation organizations and state and local governments to preserve buffer lands around military installations and ranges. The annual report describes, among other things, certain projects and other actions undertaken as part of a long-term strategy to ensure sustainability of military test and training ranges, military installations, and associated airspace. Consequently, the report on the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative program complements the sustainable ranges report in addressing some actions taken by DOD to mitigate encroachment on military installations and ranges that require, or may reasonably require, safety or operational buffer areas. Although both reports respond to statutory reporting requirements, they target different aspects of DOD's efforts to capture mission requirements, current asset capability, and current and future risks to these capabilities from encroachment.

DOD Met the Annual Reporting Requirements in Its 2012 Sustainable Ranges Report

The 2012 sustainable ranges report met the annual statutory reporting requirements that DOD describe its progress in implementing its sustainable ranges plan and any actions taken or to be taken in addressing training constraints caused by limitations on the use of military lands, marine areas, and airspace. In its report, DOD provided updates to several elements of the plan required by the act to be included in DOD's original submission in 2004. These elements include (1) proposals to enhance training range capabilities and address any shortfalls in resources, (2) goals and milestones for tracking planned actions and measuring progress, and (3) projected funding requirements for implementing planned actions, among others.⁴

DOD Reported Proposals to Enhance Range Capabilities and Address Resource Shortfalls

In our review of DOD's 2012 sustainable ranges report, we found that DOD again reported, as it did in 2011, on its proposals to enhance training range capabilities and address any shortfalls in resources. DOD bases those proposals on its assessment of current and future training range requirements and an evaluation of the adequacy of current DOD resources to meet those requirements. DOD chose to meet the statutory requirements, for example, by updating both the individual range assessments as well as the special interest sections developed by each service. In its 2012 report, DOD augmented the current and future training requirements chapter with a discussion of three emerging challenges to training and the resources necessary to address that training, which DOD states will shape the future of DOD training and ranges. The three challenges are: limitations on frequency spectrum, the growth in unmanned aerial systems operations, and cyber warfare. For example, the report stated that the growing prevalence of wireless technology and the demand for additional frequency conflicts with DOD's requirement to train personnel for increasingly complex missions using higher-performance weapons. DOD cited increasing competition for frequency spectrum that will require the department to employ technological innovation and improved scheduling to more efficiently use the spectrum allocated to it. Also, each service provided an overview of its training range and operating area requirements, identified current and future range requirements, and briefly discussed the mission areas—or types of training events—that commanders use to accomplish their missions and training objectives. For example, the Air Force introduced a new plan for an Airspace Advisory Committee that will solicit input from aviation stakeholders, including industry and the military services, regarding future airspace initiatives the Air Force is conducting or considering.

Another chapter of the 2012 sustainable ranges report focuses on the adequacy of existing range resources to meet training requirements. This chapter includes DOD's annual assessment process for evaluating the adequacy of each service's resources to meet current and future training range requirements, including military lands, marine areas, and airspace available in the United States and overseas.⁵ In the 2012 report, DOD continued to assess its

⁴Section 366 (a)(4)(C) required the submission of any recommendations for legislative or regulatory changes to address training constraints in the 2004 comprehensive plan. While DOD has never submitted such recommendations with its sustainable ranges report, the department explained in its 2007 report that it had an alternate mechanism in place for transmitting legislative proposals to Congress. See GAO, *Improvement Continues in DOD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges, but Opportunities Exist to Improve Its Range Assessments and Comprehensive Plan*, [GAO-08-10R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 11, 2007).

⁵In the 2012 report, each service identified the number of ranges in its inventory as well as its rationale for excluding certain ranges from its capability and encroachment assessments. For example, the Army did not include many small individual training ranges that are managed through local Army National Guard state agreements and policies.

ranges against a common set of 13 capability attributes and 12 encroachment factors that constrain training ranges to evaluate their ability to support assigned training missions.⁶ Each military service included its observations of these capability attributes and encroachment factors that are assessed against its own service-specific mission areas while providing a consistent approach across DOD. The military services assign a rating to each capability and encroachment item—indicated as red, yellow, or green—to convey the severity of the impacts of the constraints on the ranges’ ability to support their assigned mission training requirements.⁷ In our 2011 report, we reported that DOD has continued to make improvements each year to its range assessments, including how the information is presented in its report, and we found that DOD also provided this information in its 2012 sustainable ranges report.⁸ For example, the section on historical information, results, and future projections provided a qualitative assessment of each range by presenting overall rating scores from prior years as well as comments on whether the capabilities or encroachment pressures have been improving or degrading over the years and the outlook for the future.

Further, following the assessment details for each range, the military services provided observations that included explanations of how any capability and encroachment shortfalls rated severe or moderate risk were affecting training at a specific range. The services also described any planned or ongoing actions to remedy the shortfalls. For example, the Army identified training areas at Fort Carson and the Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site, Colorado, that have not been surveyed for cultural resources, which limits the service’s ability to conduct large scale maneuver exercises until those lands have been surveyed. The Army assessed the encroachment factor as red, meaning a severe risk, and commented that the installation is completing surveys and working with the state of Colorado on the historic preservation consultation process. Finally, each military service provided additional information and perspectives on any areas of special interest that impact or may impact its training capabilities and encroachment situation. In the 2012 sustainable ranges report, for example, the Marine Corps discussed some of its major encroachment concerns at Camp Pendleton, California, to illustrate the many different challenges that can threaten the service’s capabilities at its range complexes. Key challenges identified by the Marine Corps included endangered species and habitat preservation, wetlands, cultural resources at known archeological sites, and urban development by the surrounding communities as they proposed initiatives for new water, energy, and transportation infrastructure. We have previously reported that highlighting the services’ most pressing range sustainability issues helps DOD officials prioritize the department’s actions to address range issues in the most efficient and effective manner.⁹

⁶Examples of capability attributes include landspace, airspace, and seaspace; encroachment factors include threatened and endangered species, noise restrictions, and cultural resources.

⁷For the capability attributes, the military services assess the ability of a range to support required training tasks for a given mission area. Red means the range is not mission capable; yellow indicates partially mission capable; and green is fully mission capable. For the encroachment factors, the military services assess the impact from each of these factors on the capabilities of their ranges and range complexes to support assigned training missions. Red means the encroachment factor has a severe effect or high risk to the range’s ability to support its assigned mission training; yellow indicates a moderate impact or medium risk; and green is minimal impact or low risk.

⁸GAO, *Military Training: DOD’s Report on the Sustainability of Training Ranges Meets Annual Reporting Requirements but Could Be Improved*, [GAO-12-13R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 19, 2011).

⁹GAO, *Military Training: DOD Continues to Improve Its Report on the Sustainability of Training Ranges*, [GAO-10-977R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 14, 2010) and *DOD’s Report on the Sustainability of Training Ranges Addresses Most of the Congressional Reporting Requirements and Continues to Improve with Each Annual Update*, [GAO-10-103R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 27, 2009).

DOD Used Goals and Milestones to Report Progress in Implementing Its Comprehensive Plan

In its 2012 sustainable ranges report, DOD chose to continue using the goals, actions, and milestones section of the sustainable ranges report to help address the statutory requirement to describe its progress in implementing the comprehensive plan. DOD has developed goals that it determined were measurable, attainable, and more in line with the seven focus areas established by the Sustainable Ranges Overarching Integrated Product Team to guide the department's sustainability activities.¹⁰ These seven goals are to: mitigate encroachment pressures on training activities from competing operating space (land, air, sea, space, and cyber) uses; mitigate frequency spectrum competition; meet military airspace challenges; manage increasing military demand for range space; address impacts from new energy infrastructure and renewable energy impacts; anticipate climate change impacts; and sustain excellence in environmental stewardship.¹¹ Each military service has developed its own milestones and actions to be taken to achieve those milestones, using these goals as a common framework. In the 2012 sustainable ranges report, each service provided updates to their milestones and actions, which we explain later in this report. DOD further stated that these goals and milestones will be reviewed and updated annually to ensure that DOD continues to effectively address potential future training requirements and constraints. As we have previously reported, by including goals along with service-specific actions and milestones, DOD has provided measurable data for identifying and tracking progress in mitigating encroachment. This measurable data will enable DOD and congressional decision makers to more accurately assess the department's progress toward the goal of DOD-wide training range sustainment.¹²

DOD's Projected Funding Requirements Help Track Progress in Implementing Planned Actions

In the 2012 sustainable ranges report, DOD also chose to help meet the statutory requirement to track its progress in implementing the comprehensive plan by identifying the funding requirements needed to accomplish its identified goals. DOD has established four funding categories to be used by the services when projecting their range sustainment efforts: modernization and investment, operation and maintenance, environmental, and encroachment.¹³ The funding requirements section also included definitions and specific examples for each category as well as an estimate of the services' range sustainability funding levels for the current fiscal year and the 4 subsequent fiscal years. The modernization and investment category, for example, is described as funding for research, development, acquisition, and capital investments in ranges and range infrastructure. Examples of funding

¹⁰The Sustainable Ranges Overarching Integrated Product Team operates on two levels. The team coordinates and helps develop range sustainment strategies. The Working Integrated Product Team is the staff-level working body that supports the Overarching Integrated Product Team by coordinating and communicating ongoing sustainment activities.

¹¹In the 2006 sustainable ranges report, DOD first identified the broad goals and milestones it had established for tracking planned actions and measuring progress in four critical range sustainment areas—modernization and investment, operations and maintenance, environmental, and encroachment—to guide range sustainability activities through fiscal year 2011. However, in fiscal year 2009, the department determined that many of the goals and milestones had been overcome by other events or outlived their relevance, and it identified the seven new goals in the 2010 sustainable ranges report.

¹²[GAO-10-977R](#).

¹³These categories were aligned with DOD's four original critical range sustainment areas as described above. They did not change when DOD increased the number of focus areas from four to seven in 2010.

for this category included construction of new multipurpose training ranges at Army installations and upgrades to small arms ranges. According to DOD, defining each of the funding categories helps ensure consistent data reporting across the services.

Additionally, the 2012 report, as with prior reports, addressed the challenges of reporting on the funding requirements associated with implementing its range sustainability initiatives. Specifically, DOD has stated that the military services differ in the processes and programs they use to manage their range programs, based upon their command structures, missions, and financial processes. Further, DOD described the difficulty of projecting funding for range sustainment efforts because funding sources are spread across and embedded within various appropriations—such as operation and maintenance, military personnel, procurement, or military construction. Also, the funding is spread between several program elements, which can include manpower, training, real property, or utilities. Even though DOD laid out the challenges it faces in reporting on range sustainability funding in a consolidated manner at the department level, it acknowledged that the four funding categories provide a framework for the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the military services to track, report, and project the need for future range sustainability funding. In its 2012 report, the department also stated that the ability to compare the status of resources against the results of range capabilities and encroachment assessments helped the department address its progress on resolving range sustainability issues, as required by the act. As we have consistently reported in our reviews of DOD’s sustainable ranges reports, projecting funding requirements of range sustainment efforts helps provide the best information to congressional decision makers on budget trade-offs to address training shortfalls caused by limitations on range resources.¹⁴

DOD Has Addressed GAO’s Past Recommendations and Improved Its Annual Report on Sustainable Ranges

DOD has implemented 11 of GAO’s 13 recommendations since 2004 for expanding and improving its reporting on sustainable ranges, and DOD officials stated that they are still in the process of implementing the last two recommendations. In our prior reviews of DOD’s sustainable ranges reports, we noted that DOD had not addressed certain required elements when it initially submitted its comprehensive plan in 2004. Over time, however, we have concluded that DOD has increasingly improved its report submissions. We continue to believe that DOD’s ongoing refinements are valuable for both the visibility of DOD’s progress toward its goals and to assist decision makers in determining the department’s future fiscal needs for sustaining its training ranges.

DOD Has Completed Implementation of Most of GAO’s Recommendations from Prior Reports

DOD implemented the 3 recommendations in our 2011 report and has completed implementation of 8 of the 10 recommendations in our reports from 2004 through 2010. The department is still in the process of implementing the remaining two recommendations.

Status of GAO’s 2011 Recommendations

In our 2011 review, we made three new recommendations to DOD that its 2012 sustainable ranges report include additional information in the goals, actions, and milestones and the funding requirements sections, and DOD has implemented all three of the recommendations in

¹⁴[GAO-10-103R](#).

its report.¹⁵ The intent of our recommendations was to improve the visibility of DOD’s progress in achieving its stated sustainability goals and milestones and to assist congressional decision makers in determining future range sustainment fiscal needs. Figure 1 summarizes our 2011 recommendations and the status of DOD’s implementation of those recommendations.

Figure 1: List of GAO 2011 Recommendations and the Status of DOD’s Implementation of Those Recommendations

GAO recommendation	Status of recommendation
In the goals, actions, and milestones section, include a brief narrative that describes the progress made since the prior year’s report for each action and milestone.	●
In the funding requirements section, provide an explanation for excluding the funds required to execute buffer projects under the Compatible Use Buffer program from the Army funding projections for the encroachment category.	●
In the funding requirements section, for each funding category, provide an explanation for significant fluctuations in funding projections.	●

● Addressed
 ◐ Partially addressed
 ○ Not addressed
 Source: GAO and DOD.

During our 2011 review, DOD concurred with our first recommendation, which was to include in its 2012 sustainable ranges report a brief narrative that describes the progress made since the prior year’s report for each action and milestone in the goals, actions, and milestones section. In our 2011 report, we had found that there was insufficient information to effectively track and measure the overall progress of each action and the related milestones that each military service had developed to help achieve DOD’s common goals. The report included information only about the respective milestone’s description and the estimated completion date. Specifically, in our comparison of the 2010 and 2011 reports, we found that DOD officials revised some milestone completion dates, deleted some actions and milestones in the 2011 report that were in the 2010 report, and included some new actions and milestones. In our review of DOD’s 2012 sustainable ranges report, we found that DOD had expanded the tables that show the current status of the milestones for each of the seven common goals. Each table now includes two additional columns, one that identifies the status of each milestone and another to provide additional service comments on progress made on many of the milestones since the 2011 report. For example, in the 2012 report, the Marine Corps established three new actions accompanied by multiple milestones to address the common DOD goal to address impacts from new energy infrastructure and renewable energy impacts. The status and comments columns identified these items as new actions and milestones. Similarly, in the 2011 report, the Navy had established a milestone to define and codify organizational roles and responsibilities to streamline Navy assessments of renewable energy proposals by the end of fiscal year 2011. This milestone also supported DOD’s renewable energy goal. In the 2012 sustainable ranges report, the Navy indicated that the status of this milestone was complete and specified the year of completion in its additional service comments. Because these actions and milestones were identified as new or completed, we were better able to identify the changes in the goals, actions, and milestones section between the 2011 and 2012 reports. Thus, we found that the additional two columns provide more specific information that helps inform the readers when a new action or milestone is added to the report—and when an action or milestone has been completed, revised, updated, or deleted—and enables DOD to better explain the progress that each service has made in meeting its planned actions and milestones.

¹⁵ GAO-12-13R.

Further, we recommended in our 2011 report that DOD provide an explanation for why the Army's funding projections for the encroachment category excluded the funds required to execute buffer projects under the Compatible Use Buffer program.¹⁶ DOD partially concurred with our recommendation and later implemented the recommendation in its 2012 sustainable ranges report. In our review of the 2011 sustainable ranges report, we found that neither the Army nor the Air Force provided any funding projections for the encroachment category. While the Air Force provided its reason for being unable to provide projected funds for this category, the Army did not include an explanation for why funds used in support of the Army Compatible Use Buffer program are not captured in the 2011 report. In its written comments to our 2011 report, DOD stated that the Army's Compatible Use Buffer initiative is not a program of record with its own dedicated funding stream; however, the Army noted that it was working to estimate the funding associated with Army Compatible Use Buffer administration and support and include that information in DOD's 2012 report. Subsequently, in our current review, we found that the Army was able to provide projected funding for the encroachment category of \$6.4 million per year for fiscal years 2012 through 2016. The Army reported this funding projection as an increase from the 2011 report and attributed the funding projections in part to being able to estimate manpower funding associated with centralized Army Compatible Use Buffer program administration and management. Additionally, the Army programmed funds for this program into its budget process rather than relying on end-of-year funding from other programs, as it had done previously. However, according to Army officials, the Army is uncertain about the availability of the funds projected for spending in future years because of risk factors such as changes in force structure and potential budget reductions.

Our 2011 report also recommended that DOD provide an explanation in its 2012 report for significant fluctuations in funding projections, including fluctuations reported between fiscal years that are included in the current report as well as those that would otherwise be apparent only by comparing the prior report to the current one. DOD partially concurred with the recommendation and implemented it in its 2012 sustainable ranges report. In its written response to our 2011 report, DOD stated that the intent of the financial reporting section of its report is to provide broad insight into future program requirements and not to serve as a financial statement for accounting purposes. However, the department noted that it would attempt to discuss significant fluctuations in the proposed funding profiles in its 2012 report. In our current review, we found that DOD had expanded the funding requirements section to include a summary of significant funding fluctuations observed across the reporting years and between the 2011 and 2012 sustainable ranges reports. In the 2012 sustainable ranges report, each military service presented a summary of the extent of changes in all four funding categories—even those that remained relatively stable across the reporting years and since the previous DOD report—and provided more detailed explanations of any significant changes in funding. For example, the Air Force discussed the large fluctuations in its reported funding projections for both the modernization and investment and the operation and maintenance categories when compared to the previous report. As part of its summary, the Air Force provided revised funding projections for these two funding categories, addressing the error that we identified in our 2011 review.¹⁷ By including this additional funding information, DOD

¹⁶The Army Compatible Use Buffer program is used by the Army to enter into cooperative agreements with partners to create buffer zones around at-risk testing or training ranges while simultaneously protecting natural resources.

¹⁷In our 2011 review, we compared DOD's 2010 and 2011 reports and found a 56 percent decrease in the Air Force's projections for fiscal year 2012 funding in the modernization and investment category and a 51 percent decrease in the operation and maintenance category. Following discussions with Air Force officials concerning the reasons for these decreases, the Air Force provided us revised funding amounts. According to Air Force officials, the service had inadvertently omitted funds for one of its program elements. See GAO-12-13R.

has provided readers of the report with more clarity on the changes in funding projections between the current and previous years' reports, thereby improving the usefulness of the report.

Status of GAO's Recommendations from 2004 through 2010

From 2004 through 2010, we completed seven reviews of DOD's annual sustainable ranges reports, identified areas for potential improvement, and made a total of 10 recommendations aimed at improving DOD's report submissions. DOD has completed implementation of 8 of the 10 recommendations. DOD officials stated that they are continuing to work on implementing 2 remaining recommendations from our 2004 report, which relate to readiness reporting. DOD has been addressing the two recommendations by developing and testing a range assessment module for DRRS, and expects to complete its review by the end of fiscal year 2012. Figure 2 summarizes our recommendations from 2004 through 2010, and the status of DOD's implementation of those recommendations.

Figure 2: GAO Recommendations from 2004-2010 Reviews and the Status of DOD's Implementation of Those Recommendations

GAO recommendation	Status of recommendation
GAO-09-128R: Improvement Continues in DOD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges, but Opportunities Exist to Improve Its Range Assessments and Comprehensive Plan (Dec. 15, 2008)	
Include each service's rationale for excluding the specific training ranges not included in its assessment of the adequacy of current resources to meet requirements in future sustainable ranges reports.	●
Include the Marine Corps' individual combat training elements as the mission areas in the range capability and encroachment assessment in future sustainable ranges reports.	●
Include an update on the actions taken by the Air Force to address DOD's modernization and investment goals for range sustainment in future sustainable ranges reports.	●
Include a detailed description of all funding data included in each funding category, for each of the military services in future sustainable ranges reports.	●
GAO-08-10R: Improvement Continues in DOD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges, but Opportunities Exist to Improve Its Range Assessments and Comprehensive Plan (Oct. 11, 2007)	
Develop clear criteria and standard methods for assessing current and future training range requirements and capabilities.	●
Include funding information on the services' range sustainment efforts in future reports.	●
GAO-04-608: Military Training: DOD Report on Training Ranges Does Not Fully Address Congressional Reporting Requirements (June 4, 2004)	
Develop an integrated training range database that identifies available training resources, specific capacities and capabilities, and training constraints caused by limitations on the use of training ranges, which could be continuously updated and shared among the services at all command levels, regardless of service ownership. ^a	◐
Develop a comprehensive plan, which includes quantifiable goals and milestones for tracking planned actions and measuring progress, and projected funding requirements to more fully address identified training constraints.	●
Assess current and future training range requirements and evaluate the adequacy of current resources to meet these requirements.	●
Develop a readiness reporting system to reflect the impact on readiness caused by training constraints due to limitations on the use of training ranges. ^a	◐

- Addressed
- ◐ Partially addressed
- Not addressed

Source: GAO and DOD.

^aDOD has taken action to address GAO's recommendation but implementation is still in progress.

In 2004, we reviewed DOD's first sustainable ranges report and made four recommendations to assist the department in developing its comprehensive training range plan and to address

other congressional reporting requirements. DOD has implemented two of those recommendations, and officials stated that they are in the process of implementing the remaining two.

- One remaining GAO recommendation whose implementation is still in progress is for the Office of the Secretary of Defense to develop an integrated training range database that would serve as the baseline for the mandated comprehensive training range plan. We had stated that this database should identify available training resources, specific capacities and capabilities, and training constraints caused by encroachment and other factors, which could be continuously updated and shared among the services at all command levels, regardless of service ownership. Although DOD did not concur with our recommendation to develop a stand-alone training range database, DOD is developing a range module to be included in DRRS. The module will provide an integrated database that identifies available training resources and constraints, which would meet the intent of our recommendation.¹⁸
- The second remaining recommendation is for DOD to develop a readiness reporting system to reflect the impact on readiness caused by training constraints due to limitations on the use of training ranges. Section 366(b) required DOD to report to Congress its plans to improve its readiness reporting system—the Global Status of Resources and Training System—to reflect the extent that limitations on the use of training ranges impacted readiness. DOD did not agree with our recommendation and stated that it was inappropriate to modify this system to address encroachment. However, DOD stated that the department planned to incorporate the impact of range encroachment on readiness into DRRS, which was under development at that time. Providing Congress with information on DOD’s progress toward improving readiness reporting—whether through DRRS or another system—to reflect the impact of range-related training constraints on readiness would meet the intent of our recommendation.¹⁹

Both of these recommendations are tied to the development of DRRS, and, in our review of the 2012 sustainable ranges report, we found that DOD continues to make progress in improving this system by incorporating training range assessment data. As we reported in 2011, DOD is using a phased approach to enhance DRRS by establishing a range assessment module to address range resource and readiness issues.

- The first phase of development used the methodology for manually collecting and reporting range assessment data for the annual sustainable ranges reports as a baseline for developing the online capability of a range assessment module. This phase was completed in May 2009.
- The second phase for developing the range assessment module in DRRS was to link the range assessments with the operational readiness reporting processes of DOD and the military services. This phase was expected to ultimately provide the capability for

¹⁸In 2002, DOD Directive 7730.65, *Department of Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS)* (June 3, 2002), established the DRRS to measure and report on the readiness of military forces and the supporting infrastructure to meet missions and goals assigned by the Secretary of Defense.

¹⁹GAO, *Military Training: DOD Report on Training Ranges Does Not Fully Address Congressional Reporting Requirements*, [GAO-04-608](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 4, 2004).

users of a range to examine the extent to which encroachment factors affect that range's ability to support various operational capabilities. According to DOD, this phase was completed in June 2010; however, DOD reported that funding shortfalls required the department to defer additional testing and development of the range assessment module to a third phase.

- The third phase, which was funded in fiscal year 2011, will fully incorporate the range assessment module into DRRS. In its 2012 sustainable ranges report, DOD stated that the target date for completing the phase III system functionality was June 2012. According to DOD officials, the technical capability of the range assessment module is fully functional; however, DOD and the military services are still reviewing the functionality of the module to ensure that it is interoperable within the various data systems and to identify any business process changes that might be needed. The officials told us that this review of the range assessment module is expected to be completed by the end of fiscal year 2012.

In its 2012 report, DOD stated that, once fully implemented, the range assessment module could serve as an important decision support tool for both the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the military services. In addition, this module will provide end-users with a more strategic assessment of individual range capabilities by identifying available training resources and constraints.

DOD Has Continued to Improve Its Report on Sustainable Ranges

In our prior reviews, we have concluded that DOD has increasingly improved its sustainable ranges report submissions over time, and, as discussed above, the department has continued to improve its reporting with its 2012 report. We found in our initial reviews that DOD had not addressed certain required elements of its comprehensive plan in its initial report in 2004. Further, we noted that it took DOD some time to develop a plan consistent with the basic requirements of section 366. As DOD has reported annually on its progress in implementing its comprehensive plan, it has continued to improve its sustainable ranges reports and has reported on the actions it has taken in response to various GAO recommendations. Specific examples include the special interest sections for each service; the goals, actions, and milestones section; the funding requirements section; and the individual range assessments.

- One key improvement in DOD's annual reporting is each service's development of a special interest section that briefly highlights critical issues facing the services regarding range capabilities and encroachment factors. We have reported that, by highlighting its most pressing range sustainability issues, DOD officials can begin to prioritize the department's actions to address range issues in the most efficient and effective manner.
- We have also noted the improvements DOD has made in how it measures its progress in implementing its comprehensive plan and tracks its planned actions to address training constraints caused by limitations on the use of its ranges. For example, over time the department shifted from four common goals and milestones to seven shared goals for which the services have developed their own actions and milestones that are tailored to their missions. We have reported that these new goals and milestones are more quantifiable and are now associated with identified time frames. Although the status of these milestones represents a point in time and some changes may have occurred as DOD's report worked its way through the review process, these

improvements continue to provide a clearer picture of the progress DOD has been making toward achieving these common range sustainment goals.

- Another key improvement we have acknowledged is DOD's reporting on its projected funding requirements. We have reported that, given the challenges DOD has identified in projecting funding across various appropriations and program elements, the department has improved its reporting by shifting from annual funding projections to longer-range estimates for the four funding categories. DOD's annual reports now provide descriptive information on these funding categories, project future range sustainment fiscal needs, and identify significant changes to the funding categories for each service. As we have reported, by projecting its funding requirements for range sustainment, DOD can provide the best information to congressional decision makers on budget trade-offs to address training shortfalls caused by limitations on range resources.
- Finally, we have noted that DOD has improved the information in the military services' range assessments in its annual reports. For example, DOD now includes narratives with range-specific detail in the report body. Our review found that the information provided in the report body provides the reader with a more direct link between a range's assessment and the factors that contribute to a range's overall capability and encroachment score. Additionally, each service now provides its reasons for not evaluating certain ranges as part of its process for assessing the capabilities and constraints of the ranges in its inventory.

Agency Comments

We are not making recommendations in this report. We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In response, DOD stated that it agreed in general with the report and had no specific comments. A copy of DOD's letter is in enclosure I.

We are sending copies of this report to appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Secretaries of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; the Commandant of the Marine Corps; and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. In addition, this report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in enclosure II.



Brian J. Lepore
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Enclosures - 2

List of Committees

The Honorable Carl Levin
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The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
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United States Senate

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The Honorable Adam Smith
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House of Representatives

The Honorable C. W. Bill Young
Chairman
The Honorable Norman D. Dicks
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Comments from the Department of Defense



READINESS AND FORCE
MANAGEMENT

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AUG 22 2012

Mr. Brian J. Lepore
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Lepore:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) Draft Report, GAO-12-879R, "MILITARY TRAINING: DoD Met Annual Reporting Requirements and Improved Its Sustainable Ranges Report," dated July 24, 2012 (GAO Code 351725).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft. The DoD appreciates the opportunity to work with the GAO to continually improve reporting on the ability of our training ranges to meet the needs of the warfighter. The Department agrees in general with the report and has no specific comments.

Sincerely,

Laura J. Juncos
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Readiness

Enclosure II

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Brian J. Lepore, (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, GAO staff who made key contributions to this report include Harold Reich, Assistant Director; Karyn Angulo; Ashley Houston; Charles Perdue; Richard Powelson; Michael Silver; Amie Steele; John Van Schaik; and Michael Willems.

Related GAO Products

Military Training: DOD's Report on the Sustainability of Training Ranges Meets Annual Reporting Requirements but Could Be Improved. [GAO-12-13R](#). Washington, D.C.: October 19, 2011.

Military Training: DOD Continues to Improve Its Report on the Sustainability of Training Ranges. [GAO-10-977R](#). Washington, D.C.: September 14, 2010.

Military Training: DOD's Report on the Sustainability of Training Ranges Addresses Most of the Congressional Reporting Requirements and Continues to Improve with Each Annual Update. [GAO-10-103R](#). Washington, D.C.: October 27, 2009.

Improvement Continues in DOD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges, but Opportunities Exist to Improve Its Range Assessments and Comprehensive Plan. [GAO-09-128R](#). Washington, D.C.: December 15, 2008.

Military Training: Compliance with Environmental Laws Affects Some Training Activities, but DOD Has Not Made a Sound Business Case for Additional Environmental Exemptions. [GAO-08-407](#). Washington, D.C.: March 7, 2008.

Improvement Continues in DOD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges, but Opportunities Exist to Improve Its Range Assessments and Comprehensive Plan. [GAO-08-10R](#). Washington, D.C.: October 11, 2007.

Improvement Continues in DOD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges but Additional Time Is Needed to Fully Implement Key Initiatives. [GAO-06-725R](#). Washington, D.C.: June 20, 2006.

Military Training: Funding Requests for Joint Urban Operations Training and Facilities Should Be Based on Sound Strategy and Requirements. [GAO-06-193](#). Washington, D.C.: December 8, 2005.

Some Improvements Have Been Made in DOD's Annual Training Range Reporting but It Still Fails to Fully Address Congressional Requirements. [GAO-06-29R](#). Washington, D.C.: October 25, 2005.

Military Training: Actions Needed to Enhance DOD's Program to Transform Joint Training. [GAO-05-548](#). Washington, D.C.: June 21, 2005.

Military Training: Better Planning and Funding Priority Needed to Improve Conditions of Military Training Ranges. [GAO-05-534](#). Washington, D.C.: June 10, 2005.

Military Training: DOD Report on Training Ranges Does Not Fully Address Congressional Reporting Requirements. [GAO-04-608](#). Washington, D.C.: June 4, 2004.

Military Training: Implementation Strategy Needed to Increase Interagency Management for Endangered Species Affecting Training Ranges. [GAO-03-976](#). Washington, D.C.: September 29, 2003.

Military Training: DOD Approach to Managing Encroachment on Training Ranges Still Evolving. [GAO-03-621T](#). Washington, D.C.: April 2, 2003.

Military Training: DOD Lacks a Comprehensive Plan to Manage Encroachment on Training Ranges. [GAO-02-614](#). Washington, D.C.: June 11, 2002.

Military Training: DOD Needs a Comprehensive Plan to Manage Encroachment on Training Ranges. [GAO-02-727T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 16, 2002.

Military Training: Limitations Exist Overseas but Are Not Reflected in Readiness Reporting. [GAO-02-525](#). Washington, D.C.: April 30, 2002.

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