

Report to Congressional Committees

September 2017

MILITARY TRAINING

DOD Met Annual Reporting Requirements in Its 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report

Accessible Version



Highlights of GAO-17-769, a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD relies on its training ranges within the United States and overseas to help prepare its forces for combat and complexmissions around the globe.

Section 366 of the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 required DOD to submit a comprehensive plan on its efforts to address training constraints caused by limitations on the use of militarylands, airspace, and marine areas in the United States and overseas for training. The act, as amended, further required DOD to provide annual progress reports on its efforts through 2018. The act also included a provision for GAO to submit annual evaluations of DOD's reports. This report assesses the extent to which DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report met statutory reporting requirements.

To conduct this work, GAO reviewed DOD's 2017 report and compared it with the statutory reporting requirements. GAO also interviewed cognizant DOD and military service officials regarding preparations made to complete the 2017 report.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making recommendations in this report. DOD agreed with GAO's findings without further comment.

September 2017

MILITARY TRAINING

DOD Met Annual Reporting Requirements in Its 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense's (DOD) 2017 sustainable ranges report met the annual statutory reporting requirements to describe DOD's progress in implementing its plan to sustain training ranges and any additional actions taken or planned for addressing training constraints caused by limitations on the use of military lands, marine areas, and airspace. DOD's 2017 report provides updates to the plan required by the act, specifically (1) proposals to enhance training range capabilities and address any shortfalls; (2) goals and milestones to describe DOD's progress in implementing its comprehensive training range sustainment plan; and (3) projected funding requirements for each of the military services to implement their planned actions. In the report, DOD used goals and milestones to address the statutory requirement to describe its progress in implementing its comprehensive training range sustainment plan. Using these goals as a common framework, each military service developed its own milestones and needed actions for reaching those milestones. The report also identifies evolving activities and emerging issues related to training range sustainability, and it includes actions taken to mitigate them.

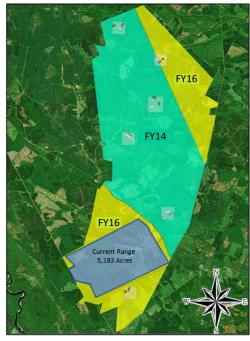
Expansion of the Townsend Bombing Range

In updates pertaining to military services' issues related to range capability, the report noted that the Marine Corps has identified the need for an aviation training range on the East Coast of the United States capable of supporting precision guided munitions training. The report states, the Marine Corps selected the expansion of Townsend Bombing Range in Georgia as the best alternative for securing this East Coast capability after a thorough assessment of area capabilities. The report notes that a record of decision to expand Townsend was signed in January 2014 and that a formal airspace proposal supporting the land expansion has been submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration. The report further stated that full operational capability is now planned for December 2019.

FY14: Funded through fiscal year 2014 military construction appropriations

FY16: Funded through fiscal year 2016 military construction account

Source: United States Marine Corps. | GAO-17-769



View GAO-17-769. For more information, contact Brian J. Lepore at (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov.

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Abbreviations

DOD Department of Defense

FY Fiscal Year

SOF Special Operations Forces

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September 6, 2017

Congressional Committees

The Department of Defense (DOD) relies on access to military lands. marine areas, and airspace to provide its forces with a realistic training environment. Its training ranges within the United States and overseas help prepare forces to face combat and complex missions around the globe. As DOD seeks to provide training on its ranges to sustain military readiness, challenges related to range capabilities and encroachment continue to grow, new challenges emerge, and dynamic conditions and events exacerbate existing challenges. According to DOD's 2017 Report to Congress on Sustainable Ranges (hereinafter referred to as DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report), range capability challenges include insufficient resources as well as outdated equipment and systems that require updates in order to complete current training requirements.² In addition, the military services continue to face encroachment challenges that include endangered species and critical habitat; incompatible development and land use adjacent to DOD training areas, to include foreign investment located in proximity to military training areas; effects related to the reallocation of electromagnetic spectrum³ as a result of the National Broadband Plan⁴; and effects related to climate change. Further,

¹ DOD defines range "encroachment" as external, as well as internal, DOD factors and influences that constrain or have the potential to inhibit the full access or operational use of the live training and test domain. Examples include, but are not limited to, endangered species and critical habitat, unexploded ordnance and munitions, radio frequency spectrum, maritime or airspace restrictions, air quality, airborne noise, urban growth, physical obstructions, and renewable energy projects.

² Department of Defense, *Report to Congress on Sustainable Ranges for Fiscal Year* 2017, (May 2017).

³ Electromagnetic spectrum is defined as the range of frequencies of electromagnetic radiation from zero to infinity. According to DOD officials, it includes visible light, microw ave, radio, and infrared wave lengths.

⁴ In 2009, Congress enacted the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which directs the Federal Communications Commission to develop a National Broadband Plan for greater transparency in spectrum allocation and utilization over the next decade. In response to the act and the President's Broadband Initiative, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration has identified several potential radio frequency bands for reallocation and auction for broadband services which, according to DOD officials, includes bands currently used by DOD.

DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report states that the implementation of the Budget Control Act of 2011 continues to affect DOD and the military services through changes in force structure and significant reductions in funding for operations and maintenance, military construction, and research and development investments, as well as acquisition programs. To work within these limits and increase the long-term sustainability of its military range resources, DOD has launched a number of efforts aimed at both preserving its training ranges and addressing the effects of its training activities on the environment and on local communities through the issuance of policy, the establishment of programs, and proactive partnering at the federal, state, and local levels.

Section 366 of the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 required DOD to submit to Congress, at the same time as the President submitted his budget for fiscal year 2004, 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. Further, section 366, as amended, requires the Secretary of Defense to submit an annual progress report to Congress through fiscal year 2018 at the same time as the President's budget. Since 2004, DOD has submitted an annual Sustainable Ranges Report to address these requirements. Additionally, the act includes a provision for us to submit annual evaluations of DOD's reports to Congress within 90 days of receiving these reports from DOD. This report assesses the extent to which DOD met the statutory reporting requirements for its 2017

⁵ In 2011, the Budget Control Act of 2011, Pub. L. No. 112-25 (2011), amending the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, Pub. L. No. 99-177 (1985), imposed discretionary spending limits for fiscal years 2012 to 2021. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-74 (2015), extended caps of direct spending through 2025. As with other agencies, DOD's appropriations may be affected by the discretionary spending limits.

⁶ Pub. L. No. 107-314, § 366 (2002). Section 366 originally required reports for fiscal years 2005 through 2008. How ever, 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, § 348 (2006), and extended through 2018 by section 311 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, Pub. L. No. 112-239, § 311 (2013).

⁷ Section 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 the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007, Pub. L. No. 109-364, § 348 (2006).

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Sustainable Ranges Report. This is our fourteenth annual review of DOD's Sustainable Ranges Report.

To determine whether DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report met the statutory reporting requirements specified in section 366 of the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 (as amended) we reviewed the report and compared it with the statutory requirements contained in section 366, as amended. Specifically, two independent analysts reviewed the 2017 report to determine whether the report included information that met the reporting requirements. We considered a requirement to be "met" if the 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report provided evidence concerning all requirements of the sub-section. We considered the requirement to be "partially met" if the report provided evidence concerning some of the requirements and "not met" if the report did not provide any evidence concerning the requirements. We also compared the 2015 and 2016 reports to determine what changes, if any. DOD had made since its most recent Sustainable Ranges Report. We also reviewed the memorandum that the Office of the Secretary of Defense sent to the military services to request data for the 2016 and 2017 Sustainable Ranges Reports to determine what differences, if any, there were in the types of information requested from each of the military services. Finally, we obtained responses from officials of the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Education and Training and from the military services on changes, if any, to the services' submissions of information on training ranges to DOD for the 2017 report, and any challenges DOD faced in preparing the report. The intent of our review was not to comprehensively evaluate the data presented in DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report, but rather to determine the extent to which the report met mandated statutory requirements and whether DOD faced challenges in preparing its report.

We conducted this performance audit from May to September 2017 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.

Background

DOD has reported 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. The act as subsequently amended required annual progress reports to be submitted at the same time as the President submitted the administration's annual budget for fiscal years 2005 through 2018. The provision that we evaluate the plans submitted pursuant to section 366 within 90 days of receiving the report from DOD has also been extended through fiscal year 2018.

In our prior reviews of DOD's Sustainable Ranges Reports, we found that DOD did not address certain required elements when it initially submitted its comprehensive plan in 2004.8 Further, we noted that it took DOD some time to develop a plan consistent with the basic requirements of section 366. Over time, we found that as DOD reported annually on its progress in implementing its comprehensive plan, it continued to improve its Sustainable Ranges Reports, and it has reported on the actions it has taken in response to prior GAO recommendations. Specifically, in 2013 we reported that DOD had implemented all 13 of the recommendations we had made since 2004 for expanding and improving DOD's reporting on sustainable ranges.9 Further, DOD has progressed from using four common goals and milestones to using 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 now are associated with identified time frames. 10

DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report Met the Annual Reporting Requirements

DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report met the annual statutory reporting requirements to describe DOD's progress in implementing its

⁸ See Related GAO Products page at the end of this report.

⁹ GAO, *Military Training: DOD Met Annual Reporting Requirements and Continued to Improve Its Sustainable Ranges Report, GAO-13-648* (Washington, D.C.: July 9, 2013).

¹⁰ GAO, *Military Training: DOD Met Annual Reporting Requirements for Its 2014 Sustainable Ranges Report*, GAO-14-517 (Washington, D.C.: May 9, 2014).

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sustainable ranges plan and any actions taken or to be taken in addressing constraints caused by limitations on the use of military lands, marine areas, and airspace. In its 2017 report, DOD provided updates to the plan that were required by the act. These updates included: (1) proposals to enhance training range capabilities and address any shortfalls in current resources; (2) goals and milestones for tracking planned actions and measuring progress in the implementation of its training range sustainment plan; and (3) projected funding requirements for implementing its planned actions.

DOD Reported Proposals to Enhance Range Capabilities and Address Shortfalls

In our review of DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report, we found that, as required by statute, DOD reported on its proposals to enhance training range capabilities and address any shortfalls in resources. DOD developed these proposals by evaluating current and future training range requirements and the ability of current DOD resources to meet these requirements. In its 2017 report, DOD revalidated its 2015 individual range capability and encroachment assessments and the current and future military service training range requirements. 11 To do so, DOD updated the report sections pertaining to each military service's issues related to range capability, encroachment, and special interests to the military service. For instance, regarding the Marine Corps, the report noted, among other things, that the Marine Corps has identified the need for an aviation training range on the East Coast of the United States capable of supporting precision-guided munitions training. The report states that the Marine Corps selected the expansion of Townsend Bombing Range in Georgia as the best alternative for securing this East Coast capability after a thorough assessment of area capabilities. The report notes that a record of decision to expand Townsend was signed in January 2014, and that a formal airspace proposal supporting the land expansion has been submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration. The report further stated that full operational capability is now planned for December 2019.

¹¹ Beginning with its 2013 Sustainable Ranges Report, DOD began conducting full range capability and encroachment assessments every 3 years rather than annually, and to validate those assessments in the years between evaluations. DOD's analysis of range capability and encroachment data over the preceding 10 years had found that there were not significant changes in the data from year to year, and the military services had confirmed this finding. DOD completed its full range capability and encroachment assessment in 2015, so the next planned full range capability and encroachment assessment is to be included in DOD's 2018 Sustainable Ranges Report.

Figure 1. Expansion of the Townsend Bombing Range

Current range

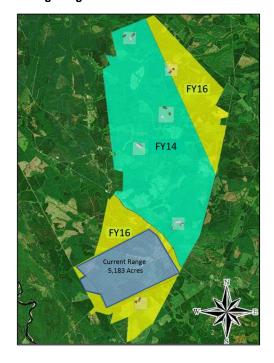
- 5,183 acres
- Airspace 2,500 square miles
- Marine Corps owned; Georgia Air National Guard operated

Expanded range

- · 35,243 acres total
- 2,500 square miles of airspace
- · Marine Corps owned and operated
- Transfer on October 1, 2017
- Record of decision Jan 2014
- · Phase I (FY14): About 19,825 acres
- Phase II (FY16): About 10,235 acres
- Total: About 30,060 acres

FY14: Funded through fiscal year 2014 military construction appropriations

FY16: Funded through fiscal year 2016 military construction account



Source: United States Marine Corps. | GAO-17-769

In its 2017 report, DOD also reported on seven evolving activities and emerging issues, all of which were reported in its 2016 report. These seven activities and issues were as follows: (1) new sustainable range initiative-related influences and actions; ¹² (2) budget reductions impacting range capability; (3) foreign investment and national security; (4) threatened and endangered and candidate species; (5) demand for electromagnetic spectrum; (6) continued growth in domestic use of unmanned aircraft systems; and (7) offshore energy. DOD's 2017 report outlined some actions being taken to mitigate the challenges these issues may present for DOD test and training ranges. For example, in response to new sustainable range initiative-related influences, DOD responded to a recommendation in Senate Armed Services Committee Report 114-49 to include a review of the general capabilities, critical issues, and future capabilities necessary to support Special Operations Forces (SOF) range

¹² This category refers to DOD's continued efforts to evolve its approach to managing encroachment-related issues on its military training ranges. This evolution has required DOD to respond to emerging issues such as coordinating on national monument and marine sanctuary designations as well as the need to review special operating forces training needs.

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requirements. The 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report is the first to incorporate SOF-specific range issues.¹³

Foreign investment and its effects on national security continue to be an evolving issue faced by DOD. In an April 2016 report, we evaluated the extent to which DOD made progress in its efforts to assess the national security risks and effects of foreign encroachment.¹⁴ In that review, we found that DOD had made limited progress in addressing foreign encroachment on federally managed land since we had last reported on the subject in December 2014. 15 We also found that DOD has begun to take some steps toward assessing the national security risks and effects of foreign encroachment, but had not yet fully implemented the recommendations from our December 2014 report, which were as follows: (1) that DOD should develop and implement guidance for conducting a risk assessment on foreign encroachment and (2) that DOD should collaborate with other federal agencies to obtain additional information on transactions near ranges. DOD concurred with both recommendations. According to the 2017 report, DOD is pursuing opportunities to obtain information related to foreign investment and transactions in proximity to DOD mission-essential locations from agencies with land management authority as well as conducting a risk assessment related to those locations. In addition, DOD reported that it is considering seeking legislative relief to enhance data-collection and datasharing practices regarding foreign investment in the proximity of DOD mission-essential locations as an avenue to mitigate national securityrelated encroachment, and it has engaged the various federal land managers to expound on potential issues related to DOD concerns.

¹³ S. Rep. No. 114-49, at 318 (2015).

¹⁴ GAO, Defense Infrastructure: DOD Has Made Limited Progress in Assessing Foreign Encroachment Risks on Federally Managed Land, GAO-16-381R (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 13, 2016).

¹⁵ GAO, Defense Infrastructure: Risk Assessment Needed to Identify If Foreign Encroachment Threatens Test and Training Ranges, GAO-15-149 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 16, 2014).

DOD Used Goals and Milestones to Describe Its Progress in Implementing Its Comprehensive Training Range Sustainment Plan

In its 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report, DOD used goals and milestones to address the statutory requirement to describe its progress in implementing its comprehensive training range sustainment plan. DOD has seven goals, as follows, in support of this plan: (1) mitigate encroachment pressures on training activities from competing operating space; (2) mitigate electromagnetic spectrum competition; (3) meet military airspace challenges; (4) manage increasing military demand for range space; (5) address affects resulting from new energy infrastructure and renewable energy; (6) anticipate climate change effects; 16 and (7) sustain excellence in environmental stewardship.

Using these goals as a common framework, each military service developed its own milestones and needed actions for reaching those milestones. In DOD's 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report, each service provided updates to its milestones and actions based on annual assessment data. The report included the following examples:

- The Army has ongoing actions to mitigate electromagnetic spectrum competition on ranges. For example, the Army reported that installation of fiber optic cabling has been completed at approximately 20 installations to support wireless networks and targeting control systems in order to mitigate electromagnetic spectrum interference on ranges.
- The Navy has ongoing interactions with Bureau of Ocean Energy Management state renewable energy task forces to support assessments of proposed wind energy developments to minimize effects on Navy and DOD offshore readiness.
- The Marine Corps has ongoing actions to engage in regulatory and legislative processes at the local, state, and national levels on issues that may affect range sustainability or readiness. The Marine Corps is

¹⁶ We have reported our findings related to certain limits on the use of some training ranges and limitations on accessibility of the ranges due to climate change effects. For more information see GAO, *Climate Change Adaptation: DOD Can Improve Infrastructure Planning and Processes to Better Account for Potential Impacts*, GAO-14-446 (Washington, D.C.: May 30, 2014).

- also exploring partnerships to meet natural resource regulatory responsibilities.
- The Air Force is engaged in ongoing development of the Center Scheduling Enterprise flight scheduling system for use at Air Force Ranges. In addition, the Air Force is developing an interface between its flight scheduling system and the Army/Marine Corps Range Facility Management Support System, to facilitate scheduling across military services.

DOD Reported Its Projected Funding Requirements for Implementing Planned Actions

In the 2017 Sustainable Ranges Report, DOD met the statutory requirement to track its progress in implementing the comprehensive plan by identifying the funding requirements needed to accomplish its goals. DOD delineated the following four funding categories to be used by the services to project their range sustainment efforts: (1) modernization and investment; (2) operations and maintenance; (3) environmental; and (4) encroachment. The funding requirements section of the 2017 report includes descriptions and specific examples for each funding category, as well as actual funding levels for fiscal year 2016 and requested funding levels for fiscal years 2017 through 2021. For example, the encroachment category is described as funding dedicated to actions optimizing accessibility to ranges by minimizing restrictions that do or could limit range activities, including outreach and buffer projects. Specific examples of encroachment funding include Army Compatible Use Buffer program administration and support and encroachment planning efforts. The report also provides an explanation of any fluctuations occurring over the 5-year funding period covered in the report. For example, the Air Force's requested funding for the modernization and investment category fluctuated from \$48.3 million in fiscal year 2017 to \$236.8 million in fiscal year 2020 to \$185.6 million in fiscal year 2021. The Air Force attributes this planned fluctuation to a decision to infuse funding in range infrastructure to research, develop, procure, and sustain advanced threat emitters, range communications/networks, and datalink systems, among other things.

Agency Comments

We are not making recommendations in this report. In oral comments on a draft of this report, DOD agreed with our findings and did not have any further comments.

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

If you or your staff have any questions concerning 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. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix.

Brian J. Lepore

Director

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Appendix: 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, Maria Storts (Assistant Director), Kerstin Hudon, Liza Bartlett, Michael Silver, Alexandra Gonzalez, and John Wren made key contributions to this report.

Related GAO Products

Military Training: DOD Met Annual Reporting Requirements in Its 2016 Sustainable Ranges Report. GAO-16-627 Washington, D.C.: June 15, 2016.

Defense Infrastructure: DOD Has Made Limited Progress in Assessing Foreign Encroachment Risks on Federally Managed Land. GAO-16-381R. Washington, D.C.: April 13, 2016.

Military Training: DOD's Annual Sustainable Ranges Report Addressed Statutory Reporting Requirements. GAO-15-537. Washington, D.C.: June 17, 2015.

Defense Infrastructure: Risk Assessment Needed to Identify If Foreign Encroachment Threatens Test and Training Ranges. GAO-15-149. Washington, D.C.: December 16, 2014.

Climate Change Adaptation: DOD Can Improve Infrastructure Planning and Processes to Better Account for Potential Impacts. GAO-14-446. Washington D.C.: May 30, 2014.

Military Training: DOD Met Annual Reporting Requirements for Its 2014 Sustainable Ranges Report. GAO-14-517. Washington, D.C.: May 9, 2014.

Military Training: DOD Met Annual Reporting Requirements and Continued to Improve Its Sustainable Ranges Report. GAO-13-648. Washington, D.C.: July 9, 2013.

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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.

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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.

Related GAO Products

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.

(102089)

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James-Christian Blockwood, Managing Director, spel@gao.gov, (202) 512-4707 U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7814, Washington, DC 20548