

# Supporting our Warfighters

Marine Corps Installation Command's efforts to reduce encroachment  
by Erica Rohr

**M**arine Corps installations and ranges are key national defense assets that offer a unique combination of ocean, coastal, riverine, inland, and airspace training areas. Corps installations and units have continuously faced pressures on the resources needed to conduct the training, testing, and operations necessary to sustain mission readiness. These include challenges linked to incompatible uses on the land, seaspace, and airspace required to sustain mission readiness and protect natural resources and habitats. Encroachment may cause restricted, unrealistic, or inadequate training that fails to prepare our Marines and Sailors for their missions. Severe encroachment may result in the relocation of missions and the loss of training and operating capabilities.

## The Marine Corps' Approach to Mission Sustainment

Marine Corps Installations Command's (MCICOM's) Mission Sustainment Program was established to support the long-term sustainment and functional integration of robust training environments and deployment platforms for the Operating Forces. The Mission Sustainment Program promotes compatible land uses to prevent the loss of training days and workarounds that reduce training realism and effectiveness. Continuous

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*LCpl Kirstyn Peterson, a transmissions system operator with Combat Logistics Company 36 (CLC-36), provides security with an M4 carbine during a Marine Corps Battle Skills Test at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan. CLC-36 conducted the training in order to maintain proficiency in skills that Marines learn during recruit and Marine Combat Training. The test included refresher training on immediate action drills, land navigation, and crew-served weapons. (Photo by Cpl Andrew Jones.)*

communications and strategic partnerships with our communities is essential to forestalling further encroachment on our installations, especially those training resources located off-base and offshore. Engagement with external and internal stakeholders helps the Marine Corps identify solutions that sustain mission requirements, maintain quality of life for Marines and their families, and fulfill our communities' objectives.

Encroachment has significant and lasting effects on mission sustainment. Previously isolated bases and stations now experience development right up to the limits of their boundaries. Low-level flight routes are becoming congested

with wind towers, transmission lines, and other infrastructure. Urban growth near Marine Corps installations continues to rise, which amplifies public interest and concern regarding base activities. The first to address these inquiries are the base and station commanders with their community plans and liaison officers (CPLOs). Commanders and CPLOs spend a significant amount of time engaging with their local communities. They are the de facto face of the Marine Corps to those who come in contact with the installations. Their presence and constant public engagement are essential to maintaining and expanding training areas vital for op-





**The Marine Corps purchased a restricted use of easement to buffer the Townsend Bombing Range.** (Photo by LCpl Christian Moreno.)

erational readiness as well as being the good neighbor that every community desires.

## Mission Sustainment Program Activities

To support commanders and CPLOs, the Mission Sustainment Program undertook a programmatic assessment of the encroachment threats to Marine Corps ranges and installations through the execution of encroachment control plans. These documents provide an overview of the demographic context of the installations and MCICOM regions and the pressures and constraints they face as aligned against the recognized encroachment factors. The plans also provide recommended management actions, including encroachment partnership opportunities, information about energy-development siting, and communications and outreach strategies for the commander and CPLO to execute.

*Encroachment Partnerships.* A key tool for combating encroachment is encroachment partnering, also known as the DOD's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program. Through cost-sharing partnerships, the Marine Corps works with state and local governments along with private conservation organizations to obtain easements or other interests in

land from willing sellers who preserve critical areas near our installations. Encroachment partnering enhances military readiness by helping installations to reduce, avoid, and mitigate restrictions on training and operations by promoting compatible development and protecting important natural habitats and species. To date, the Marine Corps' encroachment partnering projects have protected over 91,000 acres of land at 9 installations.

Recently, the Marine Corps completed a decade-long effort with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Nature Conservancy to preserve almost 55,000 acres of land along the Altamaha River corridor in Georgia. This area protects the ingress and egress necessary to conduct training at the recently expanded Townsend Bombing Range with minimal impact to the community and helps conserve the gopher tortoise habitat, a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Pendleton, CA, is also working with local land trusts to protect critical wildlife habitats and ensure the long-term viability of installation wildlife populations. In partnership with the Trust for Public Land, MCB Camp Pendleton conserved 35.5 acres of a much-needed coastal sage scrub habi-

tat for the federally threatened coastal California gnatcatcher habitat that is adjoined to the base's southwestern border in Oceanside. This is the Marine Corps' first project supporting a federally listed species, and it will facilitate the direct removal of training restrictions for a habitat located on base.

Much of the land use within the Marine Corps' North Carolina operational footprint is comprised of working farmlands and forests. To preserve such compatible uses, the Marine Corps developed a partnership with the state to access the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation (ADFP) Program for encroachment partnering projects. The ADFP Program will enable installations in North Carolina to leverage the ADFP Program trust fund and U.S. Department of Agriculture grants as matching funds toward the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. Marine Corps Installations East is also using ADFP Program to establish 25-year minimum term easements on privately owned working lands, another first for the DOD. New uses of the encroachment partnering authority provide the Mission Sustainment Program with increasingly flexible tools to react to and support the evolving *Marine Corps Operating Concept*, (Washington, DC: HQMC, September 2016).

*Compatible Energy Development.* In response to the growing prevalence of renewable energy near installations, ranges, and airspace, the DOD established the DOD Siting Clearinghouse to work with industry to overcome risks to national security while promoting compatible domestic energy development. The Mission Sustainment Program coordinates through the Siting Clearinghouse's mission compatibility evaluation process to conduct timely, transparent, and science-based analyses of the potential impact to military operations and to identify mitigation strategies. A vital aspect of the evaluations is receiving input from the tenant commands and Operating Forces on the potential impacts of the proposed projects on the Marine Corps' current and future training and operations, which MCICOM facilitates and coordinates. The Mission



Sustainment Program is continuously engaging with Federal agencies, developers, landowners, and state, Indian tribal, or local governments to educate them on Marine Corps requirements and to find solutions to encroachment concerns identified through the MCE process.

In response to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM's) National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program for 2019–2024, MCICOM is diligently working with the DOD Siting Clearinghouse to assess potential impacts to operations and chart a path forward for future planning and engagement efforts. The Marine Corps' mission compatibility assessments inform BOEM of factors to consider in the early stages of its planning for possible future offshore energy development. For example, representatives from Marine Corps Installations West coordinated with Navy and Air Force stakeholders in the southwest region to engage with BOEM, the state of California, and multiple energy developers to find a potentially compatible site for an offshore wind farm outside a DOD test or training range, warning area, or operating area. Similar efforts in the past led to BOEM withdrawing interest in a wind energy development area within a key Marine Corps offshore live fire training area north of Oahu, HI. While the Marine Corps remains a committed partner in supporting compatible domestic energy development, the Mission Sustainment Program strives to first and foremost support the warfighter's ability to safely train and operate.

*Community Outreach and Engagement.* Two-way communication between the Marine Corps installation commanders and their CPLOs and our communities is critical to building enduring relationships and successful compatible land-use planning. In a 2014 *Gazette* article, MajGen Juan G. Ayala, USMC(Ret), emphasized that the role of being good neighbors cannot be overstated; however, a commander's and CPLO's most important task is to remain diligent in ensuring that installation training areas are not encroached upon and that surrounding communi-



**Areas must be protected, but the surrounding community must also support the Marine Corps' training mission. (Photo by PFC Aaron Harshaw.)**

ties understand and support the Marines and their mission.<sup>1</sup> Commanders and their CPLOs are on-the-ground advocates against encroachment and the Marine Corps' primary interface with the public—from addressing noise complaints to assuring government leaders and environmental advocates that Marines are some of the best stewards

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**... Marines are some of the best stewards of natural and cultural resources ...**

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of natural and cultural resources in the world. They educate civic and business leaders of the bases' economic impact on the communities, and advocate on the behalf of Marines and their families on issues such as education and housing. Commanders and CPLOs often serve as thought leaders by speaking at events such as school-board meetings, state commander councils, and other community forums. As the face of the Marine Corps, their access, influence, and status in their communities strengthen alliances, inform influential

elected representatives, and showcase the Marine Corps story.

### Way Forward

Our ability to minimize encroachment is based largely on the trust and partnerships we establish with our diverse stakeholders at all levels of influence. The Marine Corps Mission Sustainment Program will continue to support our installation commanders in proactively partnering and engaging with our internal and external communities to preclude mission degradation from encroachment and enabling our installations to serve as key force projection platforms.

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### Note

1. MajGen Juan G. Ayala, "MCICOM: Providing Sustainable Force Projection Platforms to the Warfighter," *Marine Corps Gazette*, (Quantico, VA: October 2014).



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