

June 20, 2006

Congressional Committees

Subject: *Improvement Continues in DOD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges but Additional Time Is Needed to Fully Implement Key Initiatives*

Recent operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations around the world have highlighted the need for U.S. forces to train as they intend to fight. The use of military training ranges enhances the success of the training by providing realistic, hand-on experience. However, the military services report they have increasingly lost training range capabilities due to encroachment<sup>1</sup> and other factors, such as a lack of maintenance and modernization. According to the Department of Defense (DOD), encroachment pressures generally fall within three broad categories: (1) competition for resources (e.g., access to land, water, air, and key frequencies in the communications spectrum); (2) civilian community objections to military training exercises (e.g., noise complaints); and (3) heightened focus on environmental enforcement and compliance issues. DOD officials report that encroachment has resulted in a slow but steady increase in problems affecting the realistic use of their ranges and that the gradual accumulation of these limitations will increasingly threaten training readiness. For example, urban development around many installations has made noise generated by military training a leading cause of community complaints and claims, resulting in nighttime and weekend training curfews, range closures, and aircraft flight changes.

Title III, section 366 of the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003,<sup>2</sup> required the Secretary of Defense to develop a comprehensive plan for the sustainment of training ranges using existing authorities available to the Secretaries of Defense and the military departments to address training constraints caused by limitations on the use of military lands, marine areas, and airspace available both in the United States and overseas. Section 366 also required the Secretary to submit to

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<sup>1</sup> DOD defines “encroachment” as the cumulative result of any and all outside influences that impede normal training and testing. DOD initially identified the following eight encroachment factors: endangered species and critical habitat, unexploded ordinance and munitions constituents, competition for frequency spectrum, protected marine resources, competition for airspace, air pollution, noise, and urban growth around installations. Emerging encroachment issues involve cultural resources, clean water, and wetlands.

<sup>2</sup> Pub. L. No. 107-314, Title III, Section 366 (2002).

Congress a report containing the comprehensive training range sustainment plan, the results of an assessment and evaluation of current and future training range requirements, and any recommendations that the Secretary may have for legislative or regulatory changes to address training constraints. It also directed the Secretary of Defense to develop and maintain an inventory of training ranges for each of the armed forces, which identifies all training capacities, capabilities, and constraints at each training range. DOD was to submit both the report and the training range inventory to Congress at the same time the President submitted the budget for fiscal year 2004 and to provide status reports annually for fiscal years 2005 through 2008. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) submitted its first report—*Implementation of the Department of Defense Training Range Comprehensive Plan*—and its training range inventory to Congress on February 27, 2004, and its second annual report and inventory to Congress on July 14, 2005.<sup>3</sup> OSD presented its current annual sustainable ranges report and inventory to Congress on February 17, 2006.<sup>4</sup>

Section 366 also required GAO to provide Congress with an evaluation of OSD's annual reports. In our prior reports, we found that OSD's training range reports and inventories provided to Congress did not fully address several reporting requirements.<sup>5</sup> For example, both previous OSD reports did not meet requirements because they did not include an assessment of current and future training range requirements; an evaluation of the adequacy of current resources, including virtual and constructive assets, to meet current and future training range requirements; or recommendations for legislative or regulatory changes to address training constraints—although specifically required to do so by section 366. Nevertheless, as we pointed out in our prior report, there was a noteworthy change from 2004 to 2005 reporting—OSD's 2005 report included some elements of a plan, such as general goals, actions, and milestones, needed to address the long-term sustainability of ranges, but did not identify funding requirements for implementing planned actions, although specified by section 366, and did not assign responsibility for implementation of specific tasks or provide performance metrics to measure progress—critical elements for a meaningful plan. We also found that the inventories in both reports did not fully identify specific capacities, capabilities, and training constraints for all ranges as required by section 366.

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<sup>3</sup> DOD, Office of the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, *Implementation of the Department of Defense Training Range Comprehensive Plan* (Washington, D.C.: July 2005).

<sup>4</sup> DOD, Office of the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, *Report to Congress On Sustainable Ranges* (Washington, D.C.: February 2006).

<sup>5</sup> GAO, *Military Training: DOD Report on Training Ranges Does Not Fully Address Congressional Reporting Requirements*, GAO-04-608 (Washington, D.C.: June 4, 2004); and *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.: Oct. 25, 2005). See the Related GAO Products section at the end of this report for a list of our products related to the issues discussed in this report.

This letter, our third report, summarizes our observations on the extent to which OSD's 2006 sustainable ranges report and range inventory address the requirements specified by section 366, and the department's key initiatives to sustain its training ranges.

To address these objectives, we met with OSD and service officials to discuss the extent to which the 2006 report and inventory meet the mandated requirements, and to obtain information about key initiatives undertaken to address range sustainment. In addition, we reviewed OSD's 2006 report to determine if it addressed the requirements mandated by the act—a comprehensive training range sustainment plan; an assessment of current and future training range requirements; an evaluation of the adequacy of current DOD resources, including virtual and constructive assets, to meet current and future training range requirements; recommendations for legislative or regulatory changes to address training constraints; and plans to improve the readiness reporting system. We also evaluated the quality of OSD's plan presented in the 2006 report by comparing it to sound management principles for strategic planning, such as the identification of quantifiable goals, planned actions, funding requirements, milestones to measure progress, and organizations responsible for implementing the planned actions. Because OSD's 2006 report notes that it should be viewed as a supplement to the department's prior reports, we evaluated this year's report within the context of the 2004 and 2005 reports considering the degree to which all three reports met the requirements of section 366. We also reviewed OSD's 2006 range inventory to assess whether the inventory identified training capabilities, capacities, and constraints caused by limitations at each training range as specified in section 366. Due to the limited time frame for this review, we did not attempt to comprehensively evaluate the quality of the data presented in OSD's report.

We conducted our work from March through May 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

## **Summary**

While still not fully addressing all elements of the congressionally mandated reporting requirements, such as providing an assessment of training range requirements and recommendations for legislative or regulatory changes, OSD has continued to improve its annual sustainable range reporting by better describing the encroachment challenges and their effects on training, identifying tools for range management, and focusing on key initiatives needed to address encroachment.<sup>6</sup> This year's report provides a more complete picture of the impacts of encroachment on the operations of military installations and training ranges and of the challenges OSD and the

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<sup>6</sup> The 2006 report also addresses the reporting requirements of section 320 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004. (See Pub. L. No. 108-136, Title III, Section 320 (2003)). Among other items, section 320 requires DOD to report on the impacts of civilian community encroachment on military installations and operational ranges. While the reporting requirements of sections 366 and 320 complement one another, we did not assess information pertaining to section 320.

services face in addressing the sustainability of their ranges than is available in other reports and documents. It also discusses in greater detail the department's efforts to promote compatible land use around military installations and ranges by partnering with local governments and other organizations to protect these areas from development that could potentially impact military operations and training activities. For example, each of the services has acquired restrictive easements governing development or entered into cooperative agreements with state and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals to establish buffer zones around or near military installations to maintain and improve natural resources and protect against development that could affect their ability to operate and train. In addition, this year's report provides more information than prior years' reports about the multiple initiatives underway by the individual military services to sustain ranges, which over time could become key components of a long-term strategic plan that has broader applicability than these initial efforts. OSD reports that its ultimate goal is to integrate the various objectives and associated requirements of the services into one comprehensive planning process that can be maintained well into the future.

Although specifically required by section 366, OSD's 2006 inventory does not identify specific capacities, capabilities, and constraints of all the ranges. OSD officials said that it is impractical to include such a large volume of data needed to identify capacities, capabilities, and constraints where they are known as, in most instances, these data only exist at individual ranges, and the department would have to expend significant time and resources to retrieve and centralize the information. Elsewhere in the 2006 report, OSD describes the department's efforts to develop a more integrated range information enterprise for range management and sustainment, and a more integrated and standardized range scheduling system. Each military service also has developed range inventories and is in the process of developing specific information on the capacities, capabilities, and constraints of its ranges.

### **Opportunities Remain to Further Improve Compliance with Section 366 Reporting Requirements**

Even with the improvement in this year's report, opportunities remain for OSD to more fully address the requirements specified in section 366 in the following areas.

- **Comprehensive planning efforts.** With respect to the requirement that OSD develop a comprehensive plan for the sustainment of training ranges and provide annual status reports, the 2006 sustainable ranges report provides an update of the actions taken in response to goals and milestones OSD reported last year. However, as with last year's report, the 2006 update does not identify funding requirements for implementing planned actions—although specifically required to do so by section 366. OSD officials said that funding for sustainable range efforts continues to be spread among many different appropriations and program elements and is managed differently among the services, making this task extremely challenging. In an effort to address the funding issue, DOD formed a

working group in 2004 that meets periodically to develop and refine a framework for funding sustainable range activities. However, due to the complexity of the issue, OSD officials would not speculate on how long it would take to develop a satisfactory solution for this effort. The updated plan also does not assign responsibility for implementation of actions or provide specific performance metrics to measure progress in addressing sustainment issues, although both are critical elements of a meaningful strategic plan. The Marine Corps reported that, while progress had been made in defining range requirements, goals and milestones have been more difficult to realistically plan because of the uncertain funding levels associated with requirements emerging from ongoing operations. As in prior reports, OSD officials maintain that the sustainment of ranges is a long-term process, and that a comprehensive plan should be expected to take several years to develop fully and become more defined as additional sustainment challenges are identified and addressed. We agree with DOD's assertion that ensuring the sustainment of its training ranges requires a long-term commitment that will take several years to execute.

- **Training range requirements.** As in prior reports, OSD's 2006 report does not include an assessment of current and future training range requirements or an evaluation of the adequacy of current resources, including virtual and constructive assets, to meet current and future training range requirements—although specifically required by section 366. While each of the services has completed or initiated assessments of its training range requirements and adequacy of resources, not all of these assessments are complete. In addition, senior OSD range officials believe that it is impractical to provide detailed results of such assessments in an OSD-level report due to the large volume of data it would require, but they are considering including summary statements that highlight the key results of the services' requirements assessments in the next sustainable ranges report.
- **Legislative and regulatory changes.** Like prior reports, OSD's 2006 report does not include recommendations for legislative or regulatory changes to address training constraints—although section 366 requires inclusion of any such recommendations DOD may have. OSD officials believe that this annual reporting requirement is not the most appropriate method to propose legislative and regulatory changes to Congress, and they plan to continue using the department's more traditional methods to make such proposals. For example, DOD submitted proposed legislation separately to Congress on April 3, 2006, in its annual proposed national defense authorization bill for fiscal year 2007, in which DOD recommended legislative changes intended to clarify sections of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980; the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act; and the Clear Air Act. In addition, OSD officials said that it is difficult to synchronize the process of obtaining the approval required from both DOD and the Office of Management and Budget for any legislative or regulatory proposal, while also issuing an OSD-level report, such as the annual sustainable ranges report.

- **Readiness reporting improvements.** Like prior reports, OSD's 2006 report does not describe the department's plans to improve its readiness reporting system, despite a specific mandate in section 366 that it do so no later than June 30, 2003. Although the mandate specifically identified the Global Status of Resources and Training System as the vehicle for reporting readiness, DOD plans to incorporate this type of information in its expanded Defense Readiness Reporting System. The expanded system is intended to enlarge DOD's readiness reporting process from simple resource-based reporting to the use of near real-time readiness information and tools to determine the capability of an organization to execute tasks and missions. The system is scheduled to be fully operational by the end of fiscal year 2007. Depending on the status of the system, senior OSD range officials stated that they plan to report on the system in OSD's next sustainable ranges report.
- **Training range inventories.** As in prior inventories, OSD's 2006 inventory does not identify specific capacities, capabilities, and constraints of all the ranges—although specifically required by section 366. Instead, the 2006 inventory lists available operational training ranges and provides data on the size and type of ranges (e.g., air to ground, land maneuver, and urbanized terrain). OSD officials said that it is impractical to include the large volume of data needed to identify capacities, capabilities, and constraints where they are known in its inventory, and as a result these types of data were omitted. Plus, because in most instances these data only exist at individual ranges, the department would have to expend significant time and resources to retrieve and centralize the information. Elsewhere in the 2006 report, OSD describes the department's efforts to develop a more integrated range information enterprise for range management and sustainment, and a more integrated and standardized range scheduling system. For example, in 2005, the department conducted an initial baseline survey of the range information systems within DOD and examined 16 different systems, which covered a wide range of functional areas to include scheduling, munitions tracking, safety, and range management. During 2006, OSD plans to update this effort to include systems not yet analyzed, as well as any enhancement of systems already examined. However, due to the differences in range missions, scheduling requirements, and processes, OSD reports that significant challenges exist in completing a more integrated information enterprise, and OSD officials would not speculate on when this effort would be complete.

In OSD's 2006 sustainable ranges report, the Marine Corps commented that we have taken an expansive definition of the mandate to provide a range inventory when we recommended in our prior reports the development of an enterprise-level information system that would facilitate cross-service or joint planning of ranges. The Marine Corps also reported that such an OSD system would be expensive and infrequently used. In technical comments on a draft of this report, DOD noted that the Marine Corps has acknowledged the potential value of the services having access to each other's range inventories and scheduling systems. DOD further commented that the Marine Corps has invested, like the other services, considerable time, effort, and money to build a range management system that suits the requirements of its primary

users and that Marine Corps and Army range users already have access to each other's scheduling systems and a considerable amount of range information through the Web-based range facility management support system. DOD also commented that the Marine Corps has suggested that a system of such Web-based links to each service's range inventories and schedules, when they are made available, is an achievable and satisfactory way to arrive at a DOD-wide enterprise level system. We believe that this suggestion warrants further consideration and may achieve many of the benefits we envisioned in our prior recommendation for an inventory that could be readily accessible to users across the department. At the same time, in addition to our prior recommendation, DOD reports—including OSD's current sustainable ranges report—and Defense officials have also called for a range information management system that would allow range offices and users to share information within and across the services, and that such a Web-based system could also include data on best practices, policies, points of contact, funding, and range conditions and capabilities.

### **Under OSD Leadership, the Services Have Started a Broad Range of Initiatives to Address Training Range Sustainment**

The 2006 report provides information about a broad range of service initiatives, developed under OSD leadership, that are underway to address training range sustainment but which will require some time to complete. In 2003, OSD issued a directive outlining the overarching policy for the department's sustainment program.<sup>7</sup> The directive requires DOD components to identify encroachment concerns, environmental considerations, financial obligations, and safety factors that may influence current or future training range activities and uses. It also requires that inventories of training ranges be completed, updated every 5 years, and maintained in a geographical information system that is readily accessible by installation and range decision makers. It further requires multitiered coordination and outreach programs at the national, regional, and local levels to promote sustainment of ranges. According to OSD, the sustainment of its training and testing capability, while also engaging in environmental stewardship and mitigating encroachment concerns, is a long-term process. Ultimately, its goal is to integrate the various services' objectives and associated funding requirements into one comprehensive planning process that can be maintained well into the future.

Individually, the military services have initiated a planning and management process as an integral part of the department's sustainable ranges program. For example, the Army issued a detailed sustainable range program plan in July 2003<sup>8</sup> and recently started developing a tool for standardized local range plans, which will identify current and future ranges and training land assets, and integrate training

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<sup>7</sup> DOD Directive 3200.15, *Sustainment of Ranges and Operating Areas* (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 10, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Army Publication, *Army Sustainable Range Program Plan* (Washington, D.C.: July 14, 2003).

requirements and constraints. The Army expects to test this management tool during fiscal year 2006 and field it in final form in fiscal year 2007. The Navy has also started to develop management plans for its training range complexes that, among other things, include a description of each of the training areas, an investment strategy, analyses of encroachment and sustainment challenges and capability shortfalls, identification of existing environmental planning requirements, and a blueprint for obtaining community involvement.<sup>9</sup> The Navy expects to have management plans completed for 15 of its 17 range complexes by October 2006, and does not plan to prepare such plans for the remaining 2 complexes because these complexes are not involved in any ongoing training operations. The Marine Corps has started to develop local range complex management plans for their training ranges that will, at a minimum, describe the condition of the ranges, organizational relationships, and encroachment and sustainment challenges; assess range capabilities against requirements; outline community outreach programs; and identify investment requirements for sustainment and modernization. Marine Corps officials said that they funded six plans that are being developed and expect the remaining two plans to be completed in the 2008-2009 time frame. Furthermore, according to Air Force officials, local range offices have plans to manage their ranges and Air Force headquarters is creating a management system, scheduled to be operational in 2007, to update and provide for more standardized plans across its ranges.

In addition, each military service has developed range inventories and is in the process of developing specific information on the capacities, capabilities, and constraints of their ranges. For example, Army officials told us that they have an inventory that identifies capacities and capabilities of their ranges and are in the process of developing a model to quantify the impacts of encroachment on the Army's training mission. They are testing the encroachment model now and expect it to be operational in fiscal year 2007. The Navy has also initiated an effort to identify the capabilities and constraints of its training complexes as part of its local planning effort. The Marine Corps' current Web-based inventory, called the range and training area management system, provides both general and detailed information about each of its ranges, identifies range capabilities and capability shortfalls, tracks encroachment impacts on training and readiness, and allows commanders from any service to schedule their training events remotely. Senior Marine Corps officials said that, while the system is fully operational, they continue to update its data and capabilities as funding becomes available and new management needs and requirements are identified. Furthermore, each Air Force range has its own Web page for its potential users and Air Force headquarters is developing an information system that will provide range managers worldwide with a single point of access to range management documentation, procedures, and data collection. Among other items, the system will contain information on daily operations, planning

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<sup>9</sup> The Navy has approximately 300 individual ranges and operating areas—not including small arms ranges—that consist of a combination of land, sea space, or airspace. Operating areas are sections of the ocean that are not owned by the Navy in the way that land ranges are traditionally owned but where routine training and testing take place. For decades, the Navy has grouped most of its ranges and operating areas into 17 geographical complexes—identified in OSD's 2006 report—for operational use and has applied this geographical concept to its sustainable range management.



requirements, training procedures, range usage by aircraft and weapon, and target status. While the initial release of the system was scheduled for spring 2006, with greater expanded functionality scheduled for fall 2006, these milestones have slipped 11 months recently due to the need to fund other Air Force priorities.

In addition to the planning efforts and steps taken to inventory their training ranges discussed above, the military services have started a broad range of initiatives to combat encroachment, as discussed below. While some of these initiatives have been implemented, most are still being developed and will take several more years to test and evaluate before they are fully implemented.

**Army Sustainable Range Program:** In July 2003, the Army issued a plan to describe its sustainable range program and serve as implementing guidelines for DOD guidance pertaining to the sustainment of training ranges.<sup>10</sup> The Army also issued a regulation in August 2005 that outlines its sustainable range program and approach for improving how it designs, manages, and uses ranges to ensure long-term sustainability.<sup>11</sup> The regulation also defines responsibilities, prescribes policies for Army-controlled training ranges and lands, describes the Army's public outreach efforts, and provides tools for identifying and assessing current and future encroachment challenges. Within the program, Army has initiated several key efforts to address issues associated with the sustainment of its training ranges, to include the following.

- To improve public support and the Army's understanding of public concerns related to live fire training, Army developed a public outreach and involvement campaign. The campaign provides installations with a strategy to communicate with the public regarding live fire training and encroachment challenges, and consists of a training package to assist installations in communicating with and educating the public. As a part of its overall outreach program, the Army also hosted range tours at Fort Carson, Colorado; Schofield Barracks, Hawaii; and Fort Hood, Texas, in 2005, to provide the public with an opportunity to visit an installation and see firsthand the types of training conducted and how encroachment issues affect training. Army officials expect more tours will be conducted in the future.
- Because noise remains one of its leading encroachment challenges, the Army developed several different tools to more accurately forecast the effects of weapon noise on humans and animals. One such tool calculates and displays blast noise exposure contours resulting from large weapons and explosive charges. Another tool calculates and displays noise level contours at small arms ranges. Also, as of April 2006, the Army reports it has completed 60 operational noise management plans for its installations that describe the noise environment,

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<sup>10</sup> Army Publication, *Army Sustainable Range Program Plan* (Washington, D.C.: July 14, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Army Regulation 350-19, *The Army Sustainable Range Program* (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 30, 2005).

specify education and public outreach, outline complaint management, and identify noise abatement procedures. Twenty plans are under development and another 14 plans are scheduled for 2007.

- To obtain the information necessary to address threatened and endangered species, the Army initiated a research program designed to quantify the effects of training on high-priority species found on military lands. This program focuses on quantifying the relationship among such military-unique activities as artillery noise, vehicular training, and smoke with species viability. According to the Army, these efforts have reduced training restrictions. For example, restrictions at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Fort Stewart, Georgia, to protect the red-cockaded woodpecker have been relaxed due to the results of this program. In addition, the Army has initiated research and management efforts for the gray bat at eight installations. The project is scheduled to be completed by December 2006 and a senior Army range official believes it could result in reduced training restrictions starting in 2007.
- To quantify the effects of encroachment on training, the Army is developing an encroachment condition model. Using geographic data, the model will capture the effects of the encroachment factors on training, such as limitations on digging; bivouacs; maneuvers; and the use of live fire, smoke, and pyrotechnics. These results will be integrated with another existing planning tool that determines training-throughput capacities and requirements for installations. The Army completed the prototype of the model at Fort Riley, Kansas, in September 2005, and plans to continue the data collection phase of the project through 2006. If successful, the Army plans to field the model at all of its ranges by the end of 2007.

**Navy Training Range Sustainment Program:** The Navy began developing its range sustainment program in 2001 to assess and help manage its ranges, ensure adequate range access for effective training of sailors, and provide for consistency across range complexes, minimizing individual range-by-range responses to issues that affect ranges as a whole. As part of the program, the Navy has made organizational changes, initiated specific range management and environmental planning initiatives, and focused on knowledge advancement about marine mammals and related issues that are relevant to encroachment of ranges. In addition, the Navy continues to collect density data to make assessments of potential impacts to marine species from training; implement operational range clearance of unexploded ordnance and target debris to minimize the potential for future contamination; conduct environmental planning to help ensure operations and maintenance of ranges are conducted in a manner that is protective of human health and the environment; and issue range sustainability and environmental program assessments that document the environmental conditions at each Navy range. The Navy also drafted a range capability document to quantify its training requirements. This document describes the required capabilities for each range at the three levels of training complexity—basic, intermediate, and advanced. The Navy headquarters range office, in conjunction with the Navy environmental readiness office, is

developing a servicewide range sustainment policy that will assign specific range sustainment responsibilities to each level of the range support command structure and integrate sustainment strategies from the various test and training communities. The policy is scheduled to be issued by September 2006. The Navy also plans to establish a Navy-wide encroachment database by the end of July 2006 that identifies and quantifies encroachment challenges. It is also developing encroachment partnering projects to acquire minimal interests in lands adjacent to or near Navy ranges where local planning and zoning initiatives are insufficient to preserve off-base habitat in order to relieve current or avoid future restrictions on training. For example, the Navy has partnered with the State of California and The Nature Conservancy to acquire easements near La Posta Mountain Warfare Training Range, California, to prevent development that would be incompatible with its training activities.

**Marine Corps Mission Capable Ranges Program:** The Marine Corps initiated its mission capable ranges program in 2003 for operations, maintenance, and modernization of its ranges and training areas. Within the program, it has specified six tasks: (1) preserve and enhance live fire combined arms training, (2) recapture littoral training capabilities, (3) leverage technology to provide feedback for better training, (4) guard against encroachment, (5) facilitate cross-service utilization, and (6) support the joint national training capability. In addition, the Marine Corps is developing a document that validates the requirements for its ranges and training areas over the next 10-year period. The document identifies shortfalls in range capabilities that will form the basis for the Marine Corps' investment strategies for range operations, maintenance, and modernization. Senior Marine Corps officials expect the document to be issued by the end of fiscal year 2006. The Marine Corps has also developed several management tools, such as its training range encroachment information system and range environmental vulnerability assessment program, to evaluate and report to decision makers on encroachment and its impacts and to assist in the development of strategies to engage federal, state, and local agencies in solving encroachment issues. The encroachment information system was initiated at Camp Pendleton in 2003, and Marine Corps officials plan to implement the system at all of their ranges by the end of 2006. The Marine Corps also implemented its range environmental vulnerability assessment program in fiscal year 2004 and plans to initiate assessments of all operational ranges by 2008. Also growing in importance, according to the Marine Corps officials, are partnerships with states, local governments, and conservation-minded nongovernmental organizations to acquire undeveloped land from willing sellers to prevent its development in a manner inconsistent with military readiness requirements.

**Air Force Sustainable Range Program:** Under its sustainable range program, the Air Force has instituted a four-point strategy to address encroachment issues: (1) identify and quantify the resources needed to perform the Air Force training mission and the readiness impairments resulting from encroachment, including the impacts on joint use of training facilities managed by other DOD components; (2) institute routine dialogue with other federal agencies to develop regulatory and administrative improvements that address encroachment issues; (3) communicate with states,

tribes, local governments, and other interested organizations regarding how unintended consequences of resource management programs can impair military readiness; and (4) explore the possible need for statutory changes. In addition, the Air Force has initiated the development of several management tools to help address sustainment issues, including the following.

- The Air Force is developing an approach for assessing and managing the capability of the installation's natural infrastructure to support current and future military missions—called Natural Infrastructure Capability and Resource Management. Within this approach, the Air Force incorporates urban encroachment, infrastructure limits, and other operating constraints into an assessment process to quantify the adequacy of land, air, and water infrastructure to support mission needs on a range or installation. The Air Force has completed more than 30 assessments over the last 2 years and plans to assess all of its installations and ranges by the end of 2007.
- The Air Force has developed an operational range environmental database for the collection and storage of specific environmental information useful in making decisions related to the sustainment of ranges. The first module consists of general range attributes such as location, range type, size, and usage. The second module is focused on range specifics such as air media, range residue, hazardous waste, contaminant release, landfills, natural and cultural resources, and clean water.

### **Concluding Observations**

Each of the military services has initiated important individual initiatives that over time could provide a more cohesive approach to addressing training range limitations and needs. We believe that OSD has an important role to play in fostering coordination, collaboration, and expansion of the best ideas and actions of the individual services and shaping these efforts into a cohesive plan for its training ranges. At the same time, as we previously reported, we continue to believe there are opportunities for DOD to develop a report that addresses more fully the reporting requirements specified in section 366, and we have made recommendations to the Secretary of Defense in our prior reports that highlight these opportunities. Because our previous recommendations remain open, we are not recommending any new executive actions in this report. However, we agree with DOD's assertion that ensuring the sustainment of its training ranges requires a long-term commitment that will take several years to execute. As a result, the incremental changes reflected in OSD's reporting from year to year may not necessitate the requirement to report annually on the department's process to address the sustainment of training ranges. Until DOD is further along in this long-term process, our observations on OSD's compliance with the specified reporting requirements may continue to change little from year to year, providing little or no new information to Congress for carrying out its oversight responsibilities. Also, ending the reporting requirement in fiscal year 2008 as now envisioned by section 366 could result in Congress not receiving information on the final disposition of several of the long-term initiatives. A more

comprehensive review of the status and management of the ongoing efforts to sustain training ranges at an appropriate date in the future may be more beneficial to Congress than our annual reporting specified in section 366.

### **Agency Comments and Our Evaluation**

In comments on a draft of this report, the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Readiness stated that DOD has made significant process in assessing the encroachment challenges facing the nation's military training and testing ranges and mitigating this threat, and that its annual report reflected the importance DOD accords this subject. The Deputy Under Secretary of Defense also stated that DOD agreed with us on the need for an effective and coordinated response to address this issue and that our report did a good job highlighting many of the initiatives undertaken to sustain training ranges, which are the foundation for any comprehensive solution. The department also committed to continuing efforts to effectively oversee and report on its collective range sustainment activities, and to do so using measurable goals and milestones.

The Deputy Under Secretary of Defense's comments are reprinted in their entirety in enclosure I. DOD also provided technical clarifications, which we incorporated as appropriate.

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We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees and members; the Secretary of Defense; and the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The report is also available at no charge on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. The GAO staff members who made key contributions to this report are listed in enclosure II.

If you or your staff have any questions on the matters discussed in this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5581 or [holmanb@gao.gov](mailto:holmanb@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barry W. Holman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Barry" and last name "Holman" clearly legible.

Barry W. Holman, Director  
Defense Capabilities and Management

*List of Congressional Committees*

The Honorable John Warner  
Chairman  
The Honorable Carl Levin  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Ted Stevens  
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The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye  
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The Honorable C. W. Bill Young  
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**Comments from the Department of Defense**PERSONNEL AND  
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Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Holman:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the Government Accountability Office Draft Report GAO-06-725R, "MILITARY TRAINING: Improvement Continues in DOD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges but Additional Time Is Needed to Fully Implement Key Initiatives," dated May 10, 2006 (GAO code 350834).

The Department thanks the GAO for its efforts over the past several years in assessing the encroachment challenges facing our nation's military training and testing ranges and our actions to mitigate this threat. The Department agrees with the GAO on the need for an effective and coordinated response. We feel we have made significant progress in this regard, as the GAO Report states, and believe our February 2006 submission to Congress reflects the importance we place on this initiative.

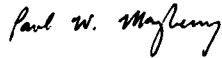
The Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Services are working closely together to refine and execute a comprehensive range sustainment response that will counter encroachment and protect this nation's investment in our irreplaceable land, sea, air and spectrum resources. We are committed to improving our ability to track, coordinate and manage overall range sustainment planning and programming. The GAO report does a good job highlighting many of the initiatives undertaken by the Services to sustain their training; these efforts are the foundation of any comprehensive solution. The Department will continue its efforts to effectively oversee and report on our collective range sustainment activities, and to do so using measurable goals and milestones.

The Department continues to work to better define and project forward our training requirements in order to identify and protect needed resources. As we increasingly partner with states and localities in protecting vital military assets, we have learned that being able to clearly state our long-range requirements is vital to charting a successful course ahead. Such long-range planning is admittedly a challenge, given the dynamic nature of national security objectives and training needs; we will describe our progress in our future reports. Similarly, our ability to track training range sustainment as part of future readiness reporting is essential; we will ensure this is more fully addressed in future reports as well.



Several technical comments on the report have been provided separately for GAO consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress and the GAO to maintain a ready and sustainable military testing and training infrastructure.

Sincerely,



Paul W. Mayberry  
Deputy Under Secretary of Defense  
(Readiness)



## **GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments**

### **GAO Contact**

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### **Acknowledgments**

In addition to the person named above, Renee S. Brown, Mark A. Little, and Andy G. Marek also made major contributions to this report.

## Related GAO Products

*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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