MILITARY FLIGHTS OVER THE DESERT

Over the years, the southern California deserts have been recognized for their significant natural and cultural resources. Many opportunities exist for the public to enjoy these resources. As early as 1933, federal and state governments established protected lands, national and state parks, recreation areas, preserves, and wilderness areas. They are managed by various federal and state agencies. Land management agencies are mandated, by laws and regulations to preserve these resources and to provide for the public's enjoyment of them.

The United States military has used the region since the 1930's for a host of test and training activities involving aircraft and associated aerospace vehicles. The commanders from the various military services that use the airspace in the region are charged by law and regulation to conduct training operations in support of the national defense of this country.

"Land management agencies safeguard our nation's heritage through the protection of our natural resources and preservation of our country's special places for the enjoyment of this and future generations. The U.S. military protects our heritage through a strong national defense to ensure that this and future generations have the freedom to continue to preserve and enjoy these special places. Constructive engagement between these government entities honors their missions." - John Reynolds, Regional Director, Pacific West Region, National Park Service

"By working as a team we can preserve both the natural diversity of military training areas and our opportunity to train the way we plan to fight now and in the future." - General Joseph W. Ralston, USAF, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

In combat situations, military aircraft avoid detection by enemy radar systems by flying as fast and as close to the ground as possible. Pilots must routinely train for, and test for, this type of flying.

The California desert may seem limitless, but, a single low level training mission by a military fighter can require a route 500 miles long to provide adequate training in navigation, timing, and aircraft systems operations.

In the Southwest between Los Angeles and San Diego, and extending more than 250 miles to the east are seven military installations with a flying mission. Each installation has men and women who are required to maintain their skills and test their equipment on a continuing basis. The spectacular scenic mountains and valleys of the desert are the same rugged mountains and valleys the military need to practice their war-fighting mission. In other words, the geography that makes southern California attractive for recreational use is the same geography the military needs for training and testing. Low level flying normally occurs during daylight hours. So, military flights may operate in the area during your stay in the desert.

The California Desert Protection Act, passed by Congress in 1994, requires the integration of diverse missions through the protection of resources while ensuring the military's ability to conduct operations. Congress passed the Act to *"...preserve unrivaled scenic, geologic, and wildlife values associated with these unique natural landscapes." Congress also recognized that "...continued use of the lands and airspace in the California desert region is essential for military purposes..."*

Congress further directed that *"nothing…shall restrict or preclude low-level overflights of military aircraft over such units, including military overflights that can be seen or heard…"*

Federal and state agencies work together in interagency forums to network aspects of our diverse missions. The Desert Managers Group (DMG) is an interagency group that includes senior managers of various land management agencies and representatives from the major military installations in the area. The DMG has formed a focus committee, the Overflight Interagency Work Group, to collaborate on future overflight issues. Primary objectives of this group include the following:

- Educate agency personnel and the general public about overflight issues
- Develop effective working relationships among participating agencies
- Coordinate and resolve issues
- Support problem solving through education and process identification

A cooperative effort between the U.S. Navy and Joshua Tree National Park has already drastically reduced impacts to the park and its visitors without degrading the quality of the pilots' training. The interagency work group will continue to seek opportunities to resolve overflight issues.

DESERT MANAGERS GROUP AREA OF INTEREST

Desert Managers Group Participants

US Department of the Interior

National Park Service:
- Death Valley National Park
- Joshua Tree National Park
- Lake Mead National Recreation Area
- Mojave National Preserve

Bureau of Land Management:
- Barstow Field Office
- Desert District Office, Riverside
- El Centro Field Office
- Needles Field Office
- Palm Springs Field Office
- Ridgecrest Field Office

US Geological Survey:
- National Mapping Division, Menlo Park
- Water Resources, San Diego
- Western Ecological Research Center, Sacramento

Fish and Wildlife Service:
- Carlsbad Field Office
- Ventura Field Office

US Department of Defense

Chocolate Mountains Aerial Gunnery Range
Edwards Air Force Base
Marine Corps Task Force Training Command, 29 Palms
Marine Corps Logistics Base, Barstow
Marine Corps Air Station, Yuma
Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake
National Training Center, Fort Irwin

State of California

Department of Fish and Game
Department of Transportation
State Parks, Colorado Desert Sector
State Parks, Mojave Desert Sector

For more information visit: www.dmg.gov