Bridging the Gap: Desert Scimitar as a Model for Military Use of Public Lands

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Purpose and Need for Desert Scimitar Exercise

• Annual 1st Marine Division live-fire exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) – 29 Palms, California.
• Existing military installations lack geographic scope needed to test the command and control, and logistical capabilities of the Division.
• Desert Scimitar 01 sought ways to test and train the Division’s command and control element under conditions more representative of the distances and terrain they would encounter in battle.
Objectives of Desert Scimitar 01

- Test the Division’s and subordinate units’ abilities to rapidly embark and deploy their forces in response to an execution order.
- Exercise command, control, and communication over moving forces separated by large distances, across terrain which closely simulates the terrain of the actual Area of Operations (AOR).
- Test the ability of new communications systems and the Marines who use them.
- Test the ability of the Division and subordinate and supporting units to conduct a river crossing, to include all of the tactical control measures and coordination required to move a division’s worth of equipment and personnel.
- Test the ability of the Division and subordinate and supporting units to provide logistical support to a division’s worth of equipment and personnel across extended distances.
- Force Marines (planners and operators) to operate in unfamiliar terrain.
Inter-Agency Coordination: Fall 2000 –Spring 2001

• 1st Marine Division Planners
• US Bureau of Land Management (NEPA Lead Agency)
• US Bureau of Reclamation
• US Army Yuma Proving Ground
• Anteon Corporation

DS-01 Exercise Planned for 1-12 May 01
Exercise Area Reconnaissance

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1st Marine Division Desert Scimitar Exercise
BLM Policy: Military Use of Public Lands

BLM Instruction Memorandum - Military Activities On and Over the Public Lands

This Instruction Memorandum (IM) provides policy guidance to the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) field offices. These offices receive numerous requests to use the public lands for both State National Guard (SNCO) and Federal military purposes. Such uses range from small unit training, with negligible short-term impacts, to uses with long-term impacts on the resource and current users of the public lands. This IM provides a compilation and restatement in a single document of statutory, regulatory and policy that affects the authorization of military activities which may impact public lands.

Attachment 1 provides supporting information on the application of the policy guidance.
Environmental Survey and Assessment

- Existing Environmental Clearances
- Environmental Assessment
- Biological Assessment
- Cultural Resources Inventory
- Agency Consultation
- Public Participation
- Contingency Plans
- Permits and MOAs
DS-01 Proposed Action

- Long-range tactical C3 exercise between YPG and MAGACC 29-Palms
- 1,500 Marines, 500 wheeled vehicles
- Scripted enemy engagement scenarios conducted over radios
- Travel on existing roads, daylight training
- Use developed properties and pre-disturbed sites
- Food, water, and supplies imported
- Waste disposal provided
### Potential Environmental Impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental Element</th>
<th>Proposed Action</th>
<th>Potential Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Air Quality</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Threatened Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLM ACECs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Resources</td>
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<td>Farmlands</td>
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<td>Invasive, Non-native Species</td>
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<tr>
<td>T&amp;E Animal Species</td>
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<tr>
<td>T&amp;E Plant Species</td>
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<td>Wastes (hazardous/solid)</td>
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<td>Water Quality (surface and ground)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual Resource Mgmt.</td>
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</table>

**Threatened Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population)**

**Desert Tortoise Critical Habitat**
Strategy: Avoid Significant Impact

- No “live-fire” or simulated fire
- No pyrotechnics, smoke, or obscurants
- No “aggressor forces”
- No physical engagements
- No “off-road” maneuvers or “free play”
- No tracked combat vehicles
- No nighttime exercises
Approvals and Permits

- Section 404 (CWA), Nationwide 12 Permits: USACE
- Section 7 Consultation (ESA): USFWS
- Section 106 Consultation (NHPA): SHPO
- Water Quality Certification or Waiver (Section 401): California RWQCB
- Section 1603 Streambed Alteration Agreement: California DFG
- Section 2081 (CEQA) Incidental Take Permit: California DFG
- Encroachment Permits: Cal Trans
- Encroachment Permits: Arizona DOT
- Right of Use Permit: US BOR
- Bridge Permit: USCG
Approvals and Permits (cont.)

- Letter of Intent to Use (Blythe Landfill): Riverside County
- Letter of Intent to Use (Desert Center Airport): Riverside County
- Park Facility Activity (Palo Verde Campground): Imperial County Parks and Recreation
- Environmental Agreement for Training Units: US Army YPG
- Use Permit: Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
- Use Permit: Colorado River Indian Tribes
- Cooperative Agreement: USMC and BLM, USMC and BOR
- Property Use Permit: 5 Private Properties
DS-01 Exercise Implementation

- Pre-Staging Activities
- Staging at Assembly Areas
- Movement to Contact
- Seize Near- Shore Objectives and Shaping
- River Crossing
- Staging for Retrograde/End of Exercise
- Post-Exercise Activities
Press and Public Relations

**North County Times**

Marine division plans major desert crossing

**The Press-Enterprise**

Marine convoy has biologists worried

TREK: A 175-mile desert exercise involving 3,000 Marines will penetrate wildlife areas.

**SignOnSanDiego.com**

Troops well trained in protecting tortoises
Environmental Monitoring and Compliance

- Pre-exercise clearance surveys
- Full-time desert tortoise monitoring
- Inter-agency emergency response coordination
- Post-exercise surveys, review, reporting, and close-out
Desert Scimitar 02 and 03 Planning

- Expanded Exercise Area
- Additional Routes, Additional Assembly Areas
- 2,200 Marines
- 600 Vehicles
- Additional Aircraft
- MCAGCC to Yuma (reversed direction)

DS-02 Exercise Planned for 15 April to 10 May 02

DS-03 Planned for Spring 03 - Cancelled Sep 02
DS 03 Planned Routes
DS 03 Planned Assembly Areas

Legend
- Assembly Area
- DS03 Route
- Major Road
- State Boundary
- County Boundary
- Military Reservation

Figure 1
Assembly Areas, California and Arizona

Desert Scimitar 03 Exercise
Yuma, AZ to Twentynine Palms, CA

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1st Marine Division Desert Scimitar Exercise
Future Opportunities

• Finalize Programmatic Agreements for DS Exercise Area
• Develop Joint Use Areas
• Create Similar Corridors Between Other DOD Installations
• Ensure Stakeholder / Public Buy-In
Conclusions

• Desert Scimitar is a useful model for future military exercises on public and private lands.
• DS-01 and 02 succeeded because of inter-agency cooperation and local community support.
• The DS exercise area should be preserved through programmatic agreements between DOD and land management agencies.

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