

4.2 AIRSPACE

The potential impacts to airspace use resulting from the alternatives are discussed below. Cumulative impacts and mitigation measures, if appropriate, are also presented in this section.

4.2.1 Alternative 1

The McGregor Range mission activities under Alternative 1 would not affect airspace use or airport activities in the ROI. Under this alternative, current military use of the airspace would remain essentially unchanged except for initiatives now being evaluated that may expand the level of operations in the McGregor Range training areas. These include (see Section 2.1.1) the development of a helicopter training complex, the launching of 4 to 6 ATACMS per year into McGregor Range, and the development of a new USAF air-to-ground tactical target complex to be located on Otero Mesa. USAF air-to-ground sorties on McGregor Range in R-5103 (B or "low") was 1,151 sorties in FY 95 and projected to decline to 833 in FY 00 without the USAF tactical target complex. When the tactical target complex is constructed, USAF sorties are projected to increase by 100 to 933 in FY 00 (USAF, 1998). Although these initiatives may cause a shift and an increase of activity within McGregor Range, they do not contain the potential to change airspace operating requirements. There are no impacts to air operations.

4.2.2 Alternative 2

McGregor Range activity under Alternative 2 would have no impact upon airport operations or airspace use and management. This alternative provides for the return of the Sacramento Mountains foothills portion of McGregor Range to the public domain, which would change the northeastern ground boundary of the McGregor Range withdrawal. This alternative does not propose any change to the configuration of McGregor Range Restricted Area airspace. Except for changes to existing missile firing scenarios and dismounted training activities that now use the Sacramento Mountains foothills, McGregor Range would support the existing and proposed mission activities described in Alternative 1.

4.2.3 Alternative 3

Alternative 3 would not affect airspace use or airport activities in the ROI. Under this alternative there are no proposed changes to the configuration of McGregor Range Restricted Area airspace. With respect to airspace use, helicopter aerial gunnery at Cane Cholla and fixed-wing air-to-ground operations at the existing Class C Bombing Range would continue. Missile activities would be re-oriented and reduced as necessary, relative to the reduced property boundaries. The return of Otero Mesa and other areas of the existing McGregor Range to the public domain would preclude development of the USAF tactical target complex on Otero Mesa, reducing the level of activity within the Restricted Area. Military operations that are constrained by reduced land areas within McGregor Range would still be contained within the existing Restricted Area airspace.

4.2.4 Alternative 4

Alternative 4 would not have an effect upon airport operations or airspace management within the ROI. Under this alternative, all portions of McGregor Range north of New Mexico Highway 506 and the Otero Mesa would be returned to the public domain. Relative to airspace use, the constraints to missile and aircraft activity described in Alternative 3 would apply to Alternative 4. Additionally, further constraints to other live-fire missile activities would be required. The Class C Bombing Range used for air-to-ground gunnery and bombing training would lie outside of McGregor Range boundaries and that activity would have to be discontinued. As in all previous alternatives, there would be no change to the configuration of the existing McGregor Range Restricted Area airspace.

4.2.5 Alternative 5 – No Action

Alternative 5, the No Action Alternative, provides that the Restricted Airspace above McGregor Range could continue to be used for some military aircraft training. If the Restricted Area is maintained in its current configuration the No Action Alternative would not affect airspace use or airport activities in the ROI.

It is possible that with discontinuance of all air-to-ground, and ground-to-air activities, the Restricted Area airspace, in consultation between the DoD and the FAA, could be reconfigured to change the vertical boundaries, lateral boundaries, and/or operating procedures. It is also possible that the Restricted Area could be changed to a MOA. MOAs are established to separate nonhazardous military flight training from other air traffic flying under IFR and to identify for pilots flying under VFR where such military flight training is being conducted. VFR aircraft are not restricted from flying through a MOA. However, all civil and military pilots flying VFR in a MOA are required by federal regulation to maintain visual separation from each other. Any of these airspace actions would follow congressional action on the *McGregor Range LEIS* and would be evaluated under a separate NEPA process.

4.2.6 Alternative 6

Under Alternative 6, the designation of the wilderness area or NCA would not likely affect airspace management. However, this alternative requires congressional action for implementation. Because the precise nature and extent of the congressional action cannot be determined at this time, detailed airspace analysis of this alternative is deferred until the proposal is specified for this type of nonmilitary withdrawal by the DOI.

4.2.7 Cumulative Impacts

Projected military activities that have the potential to contribute to cumulative airspace use impacts in the McGregor Range airspace ROI are activities at HAFB and WSMR. The cumulative impact of the proposed HAFB action is a positive impact created by a reduction in flight operations in McGregor Range restricted airspace. Activities at HAFB that could impact cumulative airspace use in the ROI are the 100 sorties projected for the USAF tactical target complex. The net cumulative effect is an increase of 100 sorties from FY 97.

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Based upon the information contained in the WSMR EIS, proposed WSMR activities should have no significant cumulative airspace impacts relative to McGregor Range. With respect to potential airspace related cumulative impacts of WSMR activities, the WSMR EIS (U.S. Army, 1998n) identifies ongoing and projected test programs and other missions anticipated at WSMR. The WSMR EIS provides that, relative to the projects and new programs proposed over the next 10 years at WSMR, changes in the scope of operations resulting from each component cannot be predicted or are not defined and will require separate environmental documentation. However, the broad analysis of potential cumulative impacts conducted in the WSMR EIS did not include airspace as one of the four areas identified as areas of specific cumulative impacts.

4.2.8 Mitigation

Because no significant impacts to airspace management would occur as a result of any McGregor Range alternative or cumulative airspace actions, no mitigative measures are necessary.

4.2.9 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

No irreversible and irretrievable commitment of airspace resources would occur.