



## MARINES REDUCE STUDY AREA, BUT NOT BY MUCH IN JOHNSON VALLEY

On June 9, the USMC announced they were relinquishing some 60,000 acres from further study for the planned Base expansion. A very small portion of the acreage relinquished is in Johnson Valley.

The lines at the southern edge of the OHV area were pulled back to align with the terrain...in other words, with the border of the OHV area as originally drawn by the BLM years ago.

This means that the line at Boone Rd. is now two miles from Hwy. 247 instead of one, and lines that abutted on some private property have shifted northward 1/2 to 2 miles (see map).

Considerations of training value, terrain, and public comments are some of the reasons for the reduction of the study area. Some occupied parcels and legally recorded acres were removed.

A total of 33,000 acres of BLM public lands were relinquished (less than 10% of the public lands first segregated for study).

The study area east of the Base was reduced from 212,000 acres to 161,000.

To the south of the Base, near the entrance about 3,000 acres, including private land, was eliminated.

The total area for the various expansion alternatives was reduced from 422,000 to 360,000 acres.

### THE MEETING IN JOHNSON VALLEY

The long postponed meeting at the Community Center was finally called for Thursday, June 18.

It was hosted by the Partnership for Johnson Valley, and chairman Harry Baker conducted the meeting.

Although notice was short, over 60 people were there, and more Johnson Valley residents were able to see the presentation than at previous focus group

meetings. Several off-road groups were represented: My Jeep Rocks, Four Wheelers 4 Christ, Friends of Giant Rock, Friends of Johnson Valley, AMA District 37 and ORBA.

Observing for area businesses were Lucerne Valley Economic Development Association members and Ace Alternators of Yucca Valley. Also on hand were members of the Homestead Valley Community Council and the National Park Service.

The meeting began with a presentation by Joe Ross, who is the manager of the Land Acquisition Program. He reviewed information about the why's and wherefore's of the Base expansion, for the benefit of those who had not been to any of the scoping meetings last winter. Changes in military strategy have caused the Department of the Navy to feel the Marines need to train larger groups together. Three battalions in live fire air-ground combat maneuvers for 48-72 hours at a time is the goal. They feel more space is necessary to train well and safely, in order to be a "force in readiness" on call at a moment's notice from the President.

Joe then outlined all the efforts the Marines had made to reach those who would be affected by the expansion. They made direct contact with 168 government agencies and representatives announcing the Notice of Intent to expand the Base. The dates of scoping meetings were mailed to some 900 officials, special interest groups and citizens. Private landowners and other stakeholders within the study area were also invited. (A mailing list has been created to ensure all interested parties are informed as the Environmental Study process continues.)

The USMC issued press releases about the scoping meetings to 65 representatives of the news media. Advertisements were placed in four local newspapers. The BLM also published announcements of their meetings and the Marine meetings.

The USMC website [www.29palms.usmc.mil/las/](http://www.29palms.usmc.mil/las/) provided press releases and other public notification, and scoping displays and handouts, and will continue to do so.

The 90-day scoping period produced a grand total of 19,244 comments. The Partnership for Johnson Valley petition to preserve Johnson Valley OHV area contained 3,332 signatures; a second petition to preserve the OHV area through de-designation of wilderness areas to the east of the Base had 8,907

signatures. Each of these signatures counted as a comment, which caused comments from OHV groups to be the largest percentage, about 71% of the total.

Environmental groups accounted for 21%. The balance was from other recreational groups, property owners, business owners, 15 mining claimants, alternative energy developers, utility companies, the film industry, and resolutions passed by the Yucca Valley and Apple Valley. (There was also a detailed comment from the County Land Use Services Dept.)

By far the largest number of comments about the project study areas were against the expansion into Johnson Valley. The 8,907 signatures on the de-designation of wilderness also weighted the numbers toward the preservation of Johnson Valley. Expansion into Johnson Valley favored by only a very few.

If your comment discussed more than one concern, the first one mentioned was the one that was counted. If you mentioned noise first, it was put into "public health and safety of surrounding communities." If you mentioned real estate values or business losses first, it was categorized as "negative impact on the economy."



*Pushing the tables together into a horseshoe shape and setting up rows of chairs next to the windows accommodated most of the surprisingly large turnout for the PFJV meeting.*

The estimated time line for the expansion now is:  
 Description of proposed action alternatives. . . 7/2009  
 Draft Environmental Impact Statement. . . . . 8/2010  
*A 90-day scoping period will follow, with more meetings and time for your comments.*  
 Final Environmental Impact Statement. . . . . 9/2011  
 Presentation to Congress. . . . . 2012  
 FAA Special Use Airspace . . . . . 2012  
 Begin Marine Expeditionary Brigade Training . . 2015

**OTHER PROPOSALS AFFECTING US**

After a short break, Harry Baker presented information on some other proposals. The groups making the proposals were invited to the meeting to explain details, but they were not in attendance.

The Wildlands Conservancy & the "Mother Road Monument" proposal. Harry displayed a map showing the areas included in this three-part proposal:

1) Preservation of the Route 66 ("Mother Road") corridor is in a proposal to create a National Monument to stop development on 2.6 billion acres lying to the north and east of the Marine Base eastern study area, extending from Route 66 to the northern limits of Joshua Tree National Park. This is to block the multi-

tude of permit requests to the BLM for solar fields and transmission corridors. Existing uses would continue, except mining.

2) Acreage from the desert near Hwy. 62 up to Big Bear to be preserved in a "Sand to Snow" Monument.

3) Johnson Valley OHV Area would be protected as a national recreation area.

Harry discussed the pitfalls that could be hidden in the final wording of any legislation, such as, would the OHV area remain Open Access or would travel be restricted to numbered trails.

He also emphasized that Sen. Dianne Feinstein has made public her support for the monument proposal, but said nothing about Sand to Snow OR Johnson Valley in her comments.

The California Wilderness Coalition has a proposal to create more wilderness from public lands, again supposedly to halt the onslaught of alternative energy permits. These places were excluded from previous wilderness areas: the Clipper, Trilobite and Sleeping Beauty ranges, and the Avawatz area and others.

**C o m p e t i t i v e  
 Renewable Energy Zones  
 (CREZ)** The latest map

draws a line for transmission towers, from the solar fields proposed to the east of the community of Johnson Valley, through the OHV area, northeast to the existing power line corridor.

Discussion on blocking the myriad of solar fields and wind farms now marked on the project maps centered on achieving protection for rural Hwy. 247, too.

At the start of the Q&A, Harry asked the representatives from AMA District 37 about their query to other off-road organizations: would they agree to having

Johnson Valley designated as a National Recreation Area with the possibility of saving up to 70%, having the same uses as it does today. AMA said very little, as the mood of the audience was obviously against this. It was felt to be disappointing that one of the OHV groups would start negotiating against itself before there were any firm proposals to negotiate. They do not speak for the entire OHV community.

Harry then asked each person in the audience for comments or questions. Before we adjourned, he said the Partnership for Johnson Valley would set up another meeting when there were more firm details to discuss on any of these proposals.

*Thanks again to PFJV for their work in our behalf.*