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STATEMENT OF

MR. ROGER M. NATSUHARA

ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF NAVY
(ENERGY, INSTALLATIONS, AND ENVIRONMENT)

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS,
FORESTS, AND MINING

of the

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, and members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the continuing need for the Department of the Navy's land withdrawals in the Southwest.

A number of Department of Navy installations are located wholly or partially on public lands that have been withdrawn from the public domain for military purposes. Since the passage of the Engle Act, such military land withdrawals exceeding 5,000 acres must be authorized in statute. The military land withdrawals for Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake and the Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range expire next year and can only be renewed by an Act of Congress. China Lake supports the Navy's research, development, acquisition, testing and evaluation of cutting edge weapons systems for the warfighter. It consists of over 1.1 million acres of land of which over 90 percent are withdrawn public lands. The installation supports approximately 9000 hours of aircraft and weapons training annually and is of critical importance in maintaining national military readiness. The Department has no viable alternative location where it can perform the testing, training and operations that are conducted at China Lake.

The aerial gunnery range located in the Chocolate Mountains consists of about 459,000 acres of which approximately 227,000 acres are withdrawn public lands. The range supports Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force aircrew training in air combat maneuvering and tactics; airborne laser system operations; air-to-air gunnery and air-to-ground bombing, rocketry, and strafing. The range is the primary range for the Marine Corps' advanced aviation tactics school, serves east coast Marine aviation units by providing capability not available on the east coast, and is the primary "backyard" range for the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. Navy Special Warfare units also use this gunnery range to conduct ground combat training.

In addition to the renewal of existing military land withdrawals at China Lake and the Chocolate Mountains, the Department of Navy requests a new land withdrawal at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twenty-nine Palms, CA to meet current and future training requirements. Although ground operations are winding down in

Afghanistan, the world is still a very uncertain place, with the threat environment only growing more complex. As the Nation's premier "first responders" in conflict, the Marine Corps must remain nimble and flexible enough to engage the enemy with the appropriately sized and right mix of forces on the battlefield.

This withdrawal is required to expand the existing training environment and provide sufficient maneuver area, both land and airspace, to conduct sustained, combined arms, live-fire and maneuver field training for Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB)-sized Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTF). A MEB—the primary forcible entry contingency response force—consists of three battalion task forces and associated command, aviation, and combat logistics support elements.

MEBs must be capable of performing a variety of missions throughout the spectrum of conflict because they will encounter complex situations containing asymmetric threats, nonlinear battlefields, and unclear delineation between combatants and noncombatants. To overcome these challenges and operate effectively, MEBs must train in a realistic setting, which the current installation configuration cannot provide. Twenty-nine Palms, established in the 1950s and sized for the weapons and tactics of the time, is simply not big enough to accommodate the way the Marine Corps must train to fight today's battles.

To accomplish this, the Department intends to purchase private and state lands adjacent to the Combat Center, pursue the establishment and modification of Special Use Airspace through the Federal Aviation Administration and request a military land withdrawal of additional public lands. Because of the amount of acreage being requested, this land withdrawal also requires an Act of Congress. We recognize the public's keen interest in retaining access to Johnson Valley for recreational purposes. Our land withdrawal request—developed through public input—preserves public access to Johnson Valley, the area prized by the off-highway vehicle recreation enthusiasts due to its unique terrain features. Our withdrawal request represents a reasonable solution for preserving public access while providing space for required military training.

As required by the current law, the Department has worked with the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Federal Aviation Administration in preparation for these withdrawals over the last several years. The Administration has submitted a legislative proposal through which these land withdrawals would be enacted as part of Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act.

The need to enact legislation and authorize these withdrawals is urgent. As our Department of Defense colleagues have stated in previous testimony earlier this year, the consequences of failing to enact withdrawal legislation could, in some of these instances, cause severe impacts on DOD and the military Services if we are forced to stop training and testing. In all cases, DOD has a compelling need for the withdrawn land in order to successfully conduct its testing, training, missions and operations with the capabilities and competence that it must maintain.

Our Nation's Navy and Marine Corps operate globally, which includes having the ability to project power, effect deterrence, and provide humanitarian aid whenever and wherever needed to protect the interests of the United States. To do this, however, requires forces who train as they would fight and weapons that deliver as promised. We ask for your support in giving our men and women what they need to prevail. I look forward to working with you to sustain the war fighting readiness and quality of life for the most formidable expeditionary fighting force in the world. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I welcome your questions.