

Eco-Activists Seek To Hamper Marines' Training

by Sen. James M. Inhofe (NAPSA)—U.S. Marines may be heroes in Baghdad, but they're being shabbily treated by eco-activists who are pushing the EPA to shut down nearly 60 percent of the Marines' training facilities at Camp Pendleton, California.

Such environmental encroachments on military training and preparedness at military training facilities are occurring nationwide. Now, the Pentagon is seeking relief from unwarranted constraints on preparing our sons and daughters for combat.



Much misinformation surrounds this issue and it is time to set the record straight.

First, the Pentagon is not seeking sweeping exemptions from environmental laws as some have claimed. It has requested legal clarifications of environmental laws and regulations because of lawsuits by environmental groups that threaten military preparedness. It would still be required to abide by existing environmental laws.

The implication that the military can pollute at will is dead wrong. Simply put, hazardous

materials would not be allowed to migrate off a training range, under the Pentagon's proposal.

The Pentagon also seeks a clarification of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Environmental alarmists accuse the Pentagon of seeking exemptions from the ESA whenever its duty under that law to protect animals interferes with training operations. Again, this is woefully inaccurate.

The Pentagon is seeking to codify practices first implemented by the Clinton Administration, namely, allowing the military to use Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans (INRMPs) to protect endangered species instead of "critical habitat designations."

Such designations severely limit training ranges, as would happen at Camp Pendleton, while providing less species protection than INRMPs. Limiting training ranges to the less comprehensive and less thorough "critical habitat designation" under current law restricts valuable training space.

In addition to ESA, the Pentagon has asked for a definitional change in the Marine Mammal Protection Act. That change would allow the U.S. Navy to use low-frequency sonar to detect quiet diesel submarines, which

are now being employed by rogue states such as Iran and North Korea.

Yet, there is no scientific proof of harm to ocean mammals caused by the sonar. Restricting their use, as the current court injunction does, puts lives at risk.

Finally, many have wrongly cited a June 2002 General Accounting Office report as concluding environmental regulations had not damaged military readiness.

This, too, is simply false.

As the GAO report stated: "Over time, the impact of encroachment on training ranges has gradually increased. While the effect varies by service and individual installation, in general, encroachment has limited the extent to which training ranges are available or the types of training that can be conducted."

The Pentagon's legislative proposal seeks to balance training and readiness with environmental protections. When our men and women engage in combat, they deserve to have the very best training possible. We must act now to make sure they get it.

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