

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
Remarks of Kern County First District Supervisor Mick Gleason, USN Ret.
In support of HR 4458 (McCarthy):
Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake Security Enhancement Act
April 29, 2014

Good afternoon, committee members. I am Supervisor Mick Gleason from Kern County, California. Kern County is home to the Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, in the First Supervisorial District which I represent.

I am also the retired commander of NAWS China Lake, so I bring that perspective to this issue. As someone who has worked very hard to carry out the critical national defense missions of the base, I want very much to see those missions continue to help protect our national security.

HR 4458 is vital to the mission at NAWS China Lake, because it would permanently withdraw public land that is currently used by China Lake, but administered by the BLM, for the Navy by September 30, 2015. The area to be withdrawn contains the Cuddeback Range and BLM lands in the southwest corner of China Lake's South Range.

NAWS China Lake and its test ranges may appear to be vast, but the number of missions carried out at the base are crowding that space. Many current and future mission requirements can be met if the land underlying the R2505 and R2524 airspace, also known as the Cuddeback Range, is withdrawn for military use.

As former commander of the base, I can tell you that acquiring the Cuddeback Range has been a high priority at China Lake for a number of years. The Naval Weapons Division has a rapid response role going back all 68 years of its existence at China Lake. Supporting this traditional role while meeting emerging mission requirements and maintaining safety and security requires not only space to conduct these new missions but added buffer zones to protect against impacts to the base's neighbors and to protect the highly secure nature of this work.

However, the last major range expansion at China Lake was in the late 1950s. While the base's mission has grown exponentially since then, its land holdings have remained unchanged.

The base needs its fence line to match its airspace, because developing unmanned systems, miniature munitions, and irregular warfare efforts will require additional combined air and land ranges. Without these range resources to provide decision-quality engineering data to improve new warfare systems, our nation's warfighters will face an increased risk in the field.

BRAC decisions have concentrated our military's RDAT&E capabilities and have further increased China Lake's national role as the single source of many future weapons and warfare systems. NAWS China Lake's remoteness, its controlled military restricted airspace, and its position as the Navy's only recognized Weapons and Armaments RDAT&E Center of Excellence are unmatched. China Lake is where critical new research and development missions must be carried out.

But the Navy needs to exercise full control of the adjoining federal lands designated by HR 4458 to do the job. Bringing them under the Navy's permanent control will greatly enhance China Lake's ability to safely and securely test unmanned air and land systems, to develop the munitions that will arm those weapons, and to evolve ground and air tactics that will win future battles.

The lands to be withdrawn under HR 4458 would exclude existing wilderness areas, and the Navy would continue to fulfill the environmental requirements for these lands that apply to other areas within its boundaries. These 26,000 acres can be withdrawn for the Navy's use while still preserving million of acres in their wilderness state.

I therefore respectfully request that the Committee approve HR 4458.