



Basin and Range Watch



Conservation
Lands
Foundation



FRIENDS of
NEVADA
WILDERNESS



SIERRA
CLUB



Save the Desert National Wildlife Refuge! Oppose Military Takeover of our Public Wildlands

The 116th Congress will decide the future of Desert National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada, the largest wildlife refuge in the contiguous United States. The U.S. Air Force has proposed to expand military use and control over more than two-thirds of the refuge, to the detriment of wildlife, habitat, public access and tribal use of this unique and vital landscape. The military's preferred management scenario would dispense with the current co-management agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and allow the Air Force to take over nearly 1.1 million acres of refuge lands for war training activities. This is unacceptable.

Congress must not surrender any more of Desert National Wildlife Refuge for military use, especially with millions of acres in Nevada already devoted to live ammunition bombing and other ground-disturbing combat exercises. Our coalition strongly opposes the expansion of the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) and increased Air Force control over Desert National Wildlife Refuge, in favor of the following principles.

Congress must repair the current collaborative approach to managing the Desert National Wildlife Refuge that balances wildlife conservation, cultural resource protection and military use of these public lands. The Fish and Wildlife Service is charged with managing the National Wildlife Refuge System for fish, wildlife and plants, and a host of environmental, social, recreational and cultural values for current and future generations. Established in 1936, and encompassing nearly 1.6 million acres, the Desert National Wildlife Refuge conserves a broad diversity of flora and fauna, including 320 bird, 53 mammal, 35 reptile, and four amphibian species. As the best remaining example of undisturbed Mojave Desert ecosystem in the West, the refuge is essential habitat for the iconic desert bighorn sheep and the threatened desert tortoise. It also protects ancient petroglyphs and indigenous artifacts. The Service must retain primary jurisdiction over the entirety of Desert National Wildlife Refuge in order to uphold Congressional mandates to conserve refuge resources for the benefit of the American public.

Congress must preserve public access and tribal use of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge by rejecting the Air Force's proposal to close additional public lands for war training. The military has already excluded the public from 826,000 acres of Desert National Wildlife Refuge as part of the 2.9-million-acre NTTR. The Air Force's proposal would expand the NTTR onto an additional 260,000 refuge acres, preventing hunting, wildlife watching, hiking and other public and tribal use of the most ecologically significant, culturally important and accessible refuge lands. No additional refuge lands should be put off-limits to the American public.

Congress must preserve sensitive desert resources by precluding expanded military training in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. The plants, animals, rock writing, and other cultural and natural resources of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge are too important to be surrendered to military training. Allowing expanded bombing, road and runway construction, and other activities on these lands could forever harm or destroy their value. Not another acre of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge should be subjected to military training.

Congress must protect Desert National Wildlife Refuge wildlands from intrusive and destructive military combat exercises. The Service first recommended wilderness designation for approximately 1.4 million acres of Desert National Wildlife Refuge in 1974. These remarkable, intact habitats retain their wilderness character today and provide a safe haven for bighorn sheep and other sensitive and imperiled species. These exceptional wildlands must be permanently protected for future generations.

Congress must provide more support to the Fish and Wildlife Service to conserve resources on the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. Under current policy, the Air Force is supposed to coordinate with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the public to balance training needs with refuge management. It's not working. The Service needs additional authorization and funding to work with the Department of Defense and partner with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, Native American tribes, and scientific organizations to study, monitor, and improve management of wildlife, cultural, and historical resources on the Desert National Wildlife Refuge where access is currently limited by the military.

Congress must continue to review refuge lands withdrawn for military purposes every twenty years. Military needs change over time. Americans' expectations for their public lands also evolve. The currently required twenty-year legislative review is an important, regular opportunity for Congress and the public to determine the best use of public lands withdrawn for military purposes and make necessary adjustments.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers * Basin and Range Watch * Center for Biological Diversity
Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife * Conservation Lands Foundation * Defenders of Wildlife
Fraternity of the Desert Bighorn * Friends of Nevada Wilderness * Nevada Conservation League
National Wildlife Refuge Association * Natural Resources Defense Council * Sierra Club
Veterans for Peace * Wild Sheep Foundation * The Wilderness Society

