



Highlights of [GAO-09-32](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Recently, the Army forecast that it would experience a 4.5-million-acre training land shortfall by 2013 and proposed to purchase additional land adjacent to certain existing training ranges. In response to a congressional request, GAO reviewed the Army's approach for acquiring training land. This report (1) evaluates the Army's approach to the acquisition of training land, (2) describes the Army's consideration of alternatives and assessment of the environmental and economic effects, and (3) analyzes the Army's effectiveness in communicating its approach for making decisions to pursue these acquisitions before the Office of the Secretary of Defense's (OSD) approval. GAO reviewed the Army strategic plan for training lands and other relevant documents, and focused on all five land acquisitions since 2002 at Fort Irwin, California; three training sites in Hawaii; and the proposed expansion of the Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site in Colorado.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) the Army develop and implement a process to update periodically its strategic plan for training ranges to reflect current needs and (2) OSD and the Army jointly review their strategies for communicating major land acquisitions and agree on a common practice that would address concerns about early disclosure and provide the Army and the other services some flexibility to engage the public. DOD generally agrees with the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-32](#). For more information, contact Brian J. Lepore at (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov.

DEFENSE INFRASTRUCTURE

Army's Approach for Acquiring Land Is Not Guided by Up-to-Date Strategic Plan or Always Communicated Effectively

What GAO Found

The Army has established an extensive, analytical approach to making decisions regarding training land acquisitions, but has not ensured that its strategic plan remains current. The Army's approach uses as its basis a strategic plan for training ranges and an analytically based range requirements model. In addition, the Army has a process during which training land shortfalls and capabilities are analyzed in multiple ways, by multiple parties, and at multiple times. However, the Army has not updated its strategic plan since it was developed in 2004. As a result, new initiatives that affect training land needs, such as base realignment and closure actions, are not explained in the plan. This is because the Army does not have a mechanism to ensure that the strategic plan is updated at regular intervals to reflect up-to-date training land requirements resulting from new initiatives. As a result, the training land needs articulated in the strategic plan are now 4 years out of date.

To support the Army's requests to pursue major land acquisitions to support training, it conducted initial conceptual analyses in which it identified potential alternatives and assessed environmental and economic effects of its proposed land acquisitions at Fort Irwin, three sites in Hawaii, and Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site. After OSD approved the Army's land acquisition proposals, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and Council on Environmental Quality regulations required the Army to conduct additional assessments, which it did at Fort Irwin and in Hawaii. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, stated that none of the funds made available in the act may be used for the expansion of the Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site. Army officials stated that they did not start the National Environmental Policy Act process at Piñon Canyon because of uncertainly over congressional support for the expansion and redirected their efforts to respond to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, which required the Army to submit a report containing an analysis of the existing facilities at Fort Carson and Piñon Canyon. The Army delivered the required report in July 2008.

Because of a lack of specificity in OSD and Army communication strategies, the Army has not been consistent or always effective in communicating its approach to acquire training land. According to OSD's policy, no major land acquisition proposal may be made public through official notice until OSD has approved the acquisition. The policy is unclear what public notification, such as informal community outreach, is permissible prior to approval. While the Army's strategic plan emphasizes that it is important to engage the public early in the process, it lacks specificity as to when and in what form this outreach should take place. In California and Hawaii, the Army followed the strategy articulated in its plan, openly explaining why it was acquiring land, which helped ease the start of the acquisition process. Army officials and community groups said that the Army did not adequately explain its reasoning for the proposed expansion at Piñon Canyon. In this case, the public at times relied on rumors and leaked documents. These information sources often did not provide clear, complete, or accurate data. Without a consistent and clear DOD-wide practice that both addresses concerns about early disclosure of land acquisitions and permits some flexibility to engage the public, the Army and other services are likely to experience communication problems similar to those encountered at Piñon Canyon.