

STATEMENT OF SYLVIA V. BACA

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR LAND AND MINERALS MANAGEMENT

ON S. 2757,

**TO PROVIDE FOR THE TRANSFER AND OTHER DISPOSITION OF CERTAIN LANDS AT MELROSE
AIR FORCE RANGE, NEW MEXICO,**

AND YAKIMA TRAINING CENTER, WASHINGTON

BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE OF FORESTS AND PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT

JULY 20, 2000

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on S. 2757. This bill provides for the permanent transfer of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed public domain lands located within two military training ranges to the respective military services which manage the particular ranges. S. 2757 addresses this transfer at two ranges: the Melrose Air Force Range in New Mexico and the Army's Yakima Training Center in Washington. The Department supports the passage of this bill.

Melrose Air Force Range, New Mexico

S. 2757 would transfer administrative jurisdiction over the surface estate of 6614 acres of BLM land from the Secretary of the Interior to the Secretary of the Air Force. Subject to valid existing rights, the mineral estate of the transferred lands would be withdrawn from all forms of appropriation under the public land laws.

The acquisition of lands for the Melrose Range was authorized by the Military Construction Authorization Act of 1967 (Public Law 89-568). Pursuant to this authority, the Air Force requested the assistance of the BLM to remove 6,634 acres of State-owned lands and 80 acres of private lands (a total of 6,714 acres) through an exchange from within the range boundaries. The BLM accomplished these exchanges in 1970 and 1973. In 1975, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, on behalf of the Air Force, filed an application for withdrawal and reservation of these lands with the BLM.

Melrose Range, including the BLM acquired parcels, has been in continuous use since the initial Air Force lease of lands from the State of New Mexico and private land owners in 1952. The Air Force has been responsible for natural resources management on these lands during this same period. The BLM has not exercised natural resources management on the lands it acquired for the Air Force within this active training range. The six parcels which the BLM acquired for the Air Force include 1,811 acres within the bomb impact zone; the remaining acres are within the range safety buffer.

One Federal Endangered Species Act candidate animal, the black tailed prairie dog, has been documented on the acquired lands. Management for the species is currently under development by the Department of Defense in association with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. There are no other threatened, endangered or sensitive species known on the acquired parcels and the proposed transfer is not in conflict with either the Endangered Species Act or BLM policy.

The Department of the Interior supports the transfer of the surface estate and withdrawal of the mineral estate of the BLM acquired lands for the following reasons:

1. These lands were acquired for the sole purpose of completing the range acquisition authorized by Public Law 89-568.
2. The lands contain ordnance and explosive waste from 43 years of Air Force use.
3. The acquired lands represent less than 10% of the entire range and are divided among six separate parcels.
4. The BLM has never managed and has no interest in managing these lands located within an active training range for natural or cultural resources.

Yakima Training Center, Washington

S. 2757 would transfer administrative jurisdiction over the surface estate of 6640 acres of BLM land from the Secretary of the Interior to the Secretary of the Army. Under the bill, these lands will be withdrawn from mining law and geothermal leasing, but not from oil and gas leasing.

The acquisition of lands for an expansion of the Army's Yakima Training Center was authorized by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993 (Public Law 102-190) and the Military Construction Authorization Act of 1992 (Public Law 102-136). Within this expansion area lie 6,640 acres of BLM-managed public domain lands and an additional 3,090 acres of subsurface mineral estate. The Army filed an application for a withdrawal and reservation of these lands and minerals in May 1992.

Nineteen small parcels of public lands, aggregating 6,640 acres, are within the Army's acquisition area. These public lands represent approximately 10 percent of the expansion area. These lands have been managed by the BLM for recreation and grazing.

One federal Endangered Species Act candidate plant, *Erigonum codium* (Umtanum Wild Buckwheat) has been documented on habitat adjacent to the Yakima Training Center (Hanford property) in Yakima County. Unsurveyed potential habitat occurs within the Yakima Training Center near the southern boundary. There are no threatened, endangered, or sensitive species known in the expansion area and the proposed transfer would not be in conflict with the Endangered Species Act or BLM policy.

The Department of the Interior supports the transfer of the surface estate and withdrawal of the mineral estate of these lands for the following reasons:

1. These lands are within the range expansion authorized by Public Law 102-190.
2. The 19 scattered parcels are an integral part of the Army's maneuver training. If these parcels are not under Army control, the usefulness of the expansion is severely degraded.
3. These parcels are approximately 10 percent of the range expansion.
4. Any attempt by the BLM to manage resources on these scattered parcels within an active maneuver area would be very difficult. Adequate coordination of any Department of the Interior resource management concerns can be achieved through the provisions of the Sikes Act, as amended (Public Law 86-797).

We have identified two technical corrections to the land descriptions and this information has been passed to Committee staff.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this Bill, I am happy to answer any questions you might have.