

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: UTAH TEST AND TRAINING RANGE ENCROACHMENT
PREVENTION AND TEMPORARY CLOSURE ACT

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(INSTALLATIONS)

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BY THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Written Statement:

The Air Force's operational capabilities are advancing at a rate that challenges the geographic boundaries of our ranges; these constraints compromise effective test and evaluation and our ability to conduct realistic and relevant live training. One important aspect driving the need for larger geographic containment is the increasing size of weapon safety footprints. Paradoxically, as precision guided munitions become more accurate and reliable, the safety footprints become larger in part due to design but also due to greater employment distances. For safety reasons, the Air Force must control, for the duration of a mission, access by non-mission related personnel and the public to areas where there is even a very remote chance that debris or components could land if the weapon employment went catastrophically wrong. The Air Force's enviable test safety record is testimony to this extraordinary level of caution.

In the past and under select circumstances, the Department of Defense (DOD) components have assumed administrative jurisdiction over buffer lands, with full responsibility for land management. Generally, however, it is not efficient for the components to expend resources on full-time land management when all that is required is restricted access for short periods. Most military missions affecting extended buffer areas will only last a matter of hours; DOD component jurisdiction would result in significant additional restrictions on other government agencies and on compatible public uses such as recreation, hunting, and grazing.

The Utah Test and Training Range (UTTR), provides a singular capability to test our advanced systems and to advance warfighting capabilities. However, with the emergence of weapons technology and the first operational basing of the F-35 Lightning at Hill AFB, the current safety buffers may be insufficient to meet future requirements. If enacted, HR4579 would provide the Air Force the capability to employ larger safety buffers at the UTTR through the temporary closure and use of current Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and any State land transferred to BLM. This capability would only be exercised when needed, thus resulting in fewer impacts on other Federal, State, and local agencies and the public. The Air Force and the Department of the Interior (DOI) would enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to address the management of the affected lands, and no land would be transferred to the Air Force. Exercise of the new measures provided in the legislation would be limited to a maximum of 100 hours per year in increments of no more than three hours.

This bill is similar to legislation allowing the overlap of weapon safety footprints on the Cabeza Prieta wilderness in Arizona. The use of the Cabeza Prieta is an example commonly cited by the Air Force on how to successfully enable the military mission while minimizing the impact on other agencies and the public. We believe that the bill's concept of short, periodic closures would serve the public interest better than

the alternative of a complete withdrawal, reservation, and closure of the lands at issue, but the Administration opposes several provisions in HR4579 that would prevent the effective management of these lands. We would like the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee and the sponsor to address these significant concerns.