



Biodiversity Activist

Action Alert Network of the Center for Biological Diversity

What's At Stake?

Keep Mercenary Training Camp Out of San Diego Backcountry!

Founded in 1997, Blackwater USA has rapidly grown into one of the largest U.S. firms providing private military and security services. With close connections to the Bush administration, Blackwater received over \$320 million through the State Department between 2004 and 2006 for providing private soldiers in Iraq and other countries, according to *The Nation*. Blackwater already maintains two large training centers in the United States.

The proposed western training camp would be located about 45 miles east of the city of San Diego, near the community of Potrero. The training camp would include multiple firearm ranges, a live-fire tactical training area, an "urban simulation training area," a "tactical driving track," a helipad, "ship simulators," and other military training installations. These facilities would be located on an approximately 700-acre site that now consists of valley floor and mountain foothills filled with grasslands, oak woodlands, chaparral, and wetlands. The site is almost entirely surrounded by undeveloped public lands, including portions of the Cleveland National Forest that the Forest Service has identified as a potential wilderness area due to its "excellent opportunities for solitude" and its extreme remoteness.

The grasslands on the site provide foraging for many raptor species found nearby, including golden eagles. Several nesting pairs of golden eagles are located near the site, with one pair occurring within a half-mile. The shooting ranges, simulated combat exercises, driving tracks, helipad, and other activities are likely to produce substantial amounts of noise that nullify the site's value for wildlife. The site also contains several rare plant species, including the Tecate tarplant. Full biological surveys have not yet been made available to the public.

The gun ranges and live-fire exercises will deposit tons of lead on the site, some of which may be ingested by wildlife. The training exercises will also increase the risk of wildfire in an area that is already extremely vulnerable to fire.

San Diego County is preparing an environmental impact report for the project. It also must issue a "Major Use Permit" to allow the camp on the site. The County can and should refuse to permit this mercenary training camp. It is not compatible with the quiet wilderness character of surrounding lands, nor with wildlife that visits the site, including golden eagles. Please ask the San Diego County supervisors and planning director to deny the Major Use Permit for the Blackwater camp.