

Thousands Oppose Trump Administration's Attempted Seizure of Nevada's Desert National Wildlife Refuge for Expanded Bombing Range

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

Global Research, March 10, 2018

[Center for Biological Diversity](#) 8 March 2018

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Law and Justice](#),
[Militarization and WMD](#)

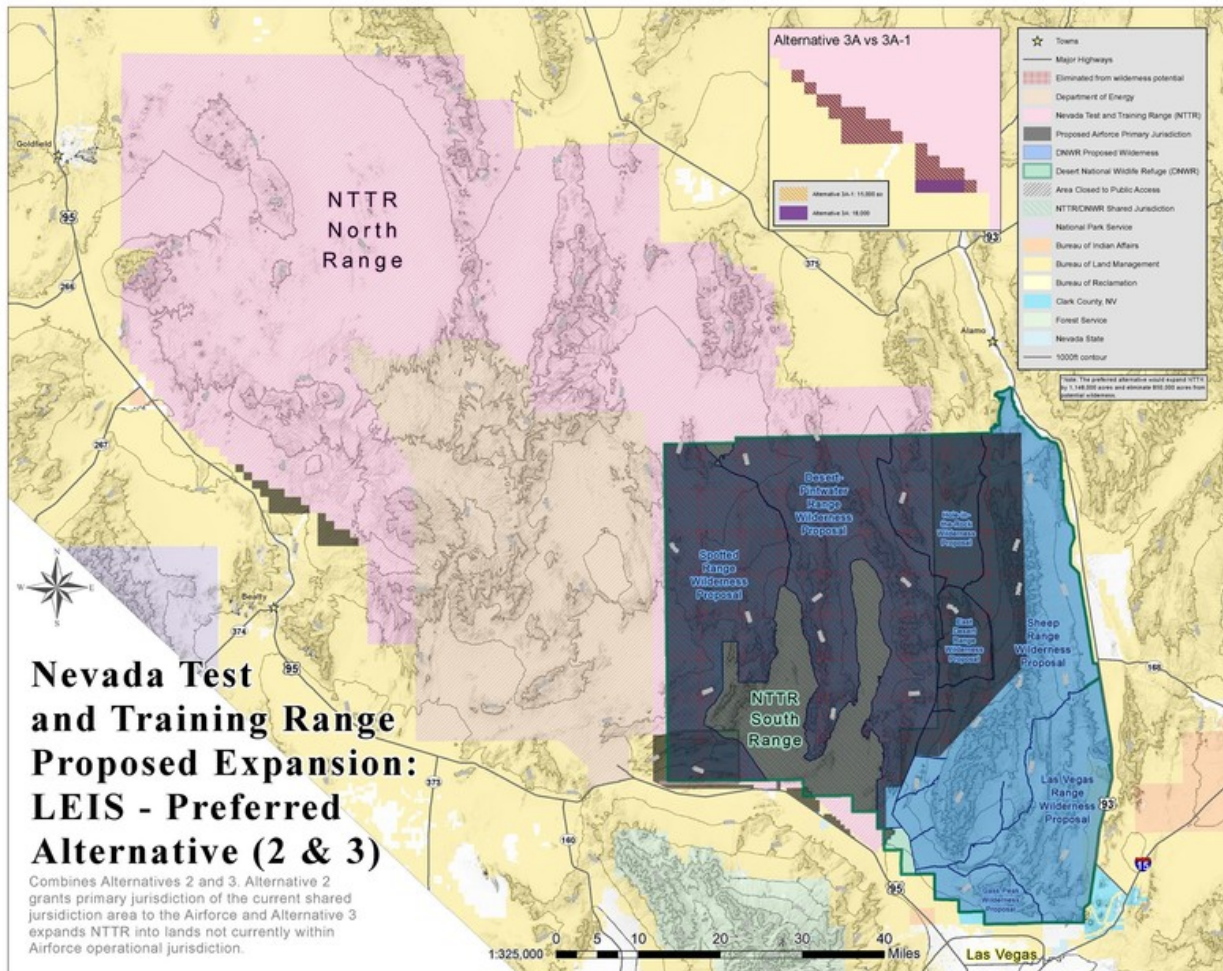
More than 32,000 people have submitted comments opposing a military takeover of most of Nevada's Desert National Wildlife Refuge ahead of a deadline today. The refuge was created more than 80 years ago to protect the largest herd of desert bighorn sheep in the United States.

The Air Force wants to assume control of nearly 70 percent of the 1.6 million acre refuge to expand the vast Nevada Test and Training Range. Handing more than two-thirds of the refuge over to the military would strip protections for wildlife and wildlands and cut off public access.

Desert National Wildlife Refuge, the largest national wildlife refuge in the lower 48 states, was designated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936 to protect the desert bighorn sheep, Nevada's state mammal. It also provides vital habitat for a variety of vulnerable species, including the imperiled Mojave desert tortoise.

"People from Nevada and across the United States are urging the Air Force not to take this destructive step," said Patrick Donnelly, Nevada state director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "They love this wildlife refuge and they want bighorn sheep to remain protected. Not one acre of the refuge should be handed over for military industrialization."

The Air Force's proposal would harm bighorn and other wildlife by expanding military combat operations on the refuge. Plans call for industrializing the largely untouched wildlands with dozens of miles of new roads, constructing more than 100 miles of fencing, bulldozing two air strips and building radio signal emitters.



Map of NTTR and Desert NWR prepared by Friends of Nevada Wilderness. The proposed military takeover areas are shaded black.

“Desert National Wildlife Refuge holds Nevada’s most important unprotected wilderness quality lands,” said Jose Witt, Southern Nevada director at Friends of Nevada Wilderness. “It is imperative that the Air Force not be allowed to irreparably destroy those wilderness qualities by expanding their bombing range. These lands need permanent protection.”

“Our national wildlife refuges, from Izembek and Arctic in Alaska to Desert in Nevada, are under attack,” said Jenny Keatinge, senior policy analyst for Defenders of Wildlife. “The Air Force’s bid to take over a huge swath of wildlife habitat within Desert Refuge sets a dangerous precedent for the National Wildlife Refuge System. These lands were specifically designated to protect wildlife, and they are part of our national heritage. The Air Force should heed the thousands of people who oppose its heavy-handed attempt to seize control of Desert Refuge, and continue the collaborative approach to managing refuge resources that balances wildlife conservation, cultural resource protection and military use of these lands.”

The strong public opposition follows public meetings held by the Air Force in January, where hundreds turned out to oppose the plan. More than 200 people attended a Las Vegas meeting, and everyone who spoke opposed the land seizure. Many joined together chanting, “Don’t bomb the bighorn!”

“From Native American tribes to rural counties to horsemen to wildlife watchers, the people are united: The military should not expand into this beloved national wildlife refuge,” said Christian Gerlach, national organizer with the Sierra Club. “The wildlife, culture and history at stake here are far too valuable to sacrifice for unnecessary militarization on our public lands.”

The Air Force is required to respond to the public comments in a final [environmental impact statement](#), expected next autumn. Congress will ultimately decide the fate of Desert National Wildlife Refuge when it takes action on the Air Force’s final recommendation.

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