



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

NAWS CHINA LAKE

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT



With a commitment to being a conscientious steward of natural and cultural resources, NAWS China Lake manages its lands with the goals of preserving habitat for plants and animals, protecting historic and prehistoric sites, and developing cooperative efforts with other federal agencies, state governments and private conservation groups.

China Lake Ranges

NAWS China Lake is located in the upper Mojave Desert of California, approximately 150 miles northeast of Los Angeles. China Lake is responsible for the research, development, test, and evaluation of weapons systems for the Navy, Air Force, Army, Joint Service, commercial, and foreign military weapons systems and is blanketed by 17,000 square miles of restricted airspace. The ranges occupy over 1.1 million acres (1,735 sq. miles) of withdrawn public land, and are the Navy's largest landholding. Elevation varies from 2,500 feet to 8,500 feet above sea level.



Resources of NAWS China Lake



China Lake abounds with a diversity of plant and animal forms. Approximately 675 plant varieties are found within the boundaries. Additionally, China Lake has 35 species of reptiles and amphibians, 58 species of mammals, and 322 species of birds. Resident Federally Threatened and Endangered species consist of Mohave Tui Chub (Endangered), Desert Tortoise (Threatened), and the California Inyo Towhee (Threatened). The state-listed Mojave Ground Squirrel is also present.

China Lake also contains a wealth of significant historic and prehistoric resources. Thousands of archeological sites are found within the Station's boundaries. China Lake is famous for its large obsidian quarries, world-class rock art, and concentrations of early man artifacts on the ancient shores of China Lake playa. Human occupation on China Lake dates back 10,500 years.



Habitats vary from desert playa to pinyon woodland. On China Lake, over 70% of the land is dominated by Creosote Bush Scrub and Mojave Mixed Scrub. The Station also contains over 34,000 acres of Joshua Tree Woodland and Pinyon Woodland, plus hundreds of acres of scattered willow riparian woodlands and over 122 known springs. Most of the springs on China Lake serve as a desert riparian oasis for many species of wildlife.





The extensive pinyon woodlands are a unique habitat on station, being similar in elevation and plant varieties as the adjacent Sierra-Nevada mountains. Pinyon nuts from these trees also provide an important cultural resource to local Native American tribes. Protection of this forested habitat is an important resource stewardship focus at China Lake.

Stewardship of Resources at China Lake

By using a small portion of China Lake's lands for test and evaluation activities (less than 5%), protection of those unused and undisturbed habitats and protection of cultural sites is central to China Lake's stewardship efforts. Specifically, the protection of habitat for the federally threatened Desert Tortoise and the protection of archeological sites are ensured through use of previously disturbed sites for testing.

The management and protection of archeological sites and prehistoric resources are done in accordance with federal historic preservation laws and regulations. All proposed actions that would result in ground disturbance are subject to a rigorous NEPA review process. NAWs China Lake continues its obligation to identify significant cultural resources by annually assessing and documenting hundreds of acres of lands that may potentially contain sensitive cultural resources. So far, 79,704 acres have been surveyed for archeological resources, resulting in the recordation of 1,494 archeological sites.

Examples of On-going Stewardship Actions at NAWs China Lake

The discontinuing of cattle grazing on station lands: By removing cattle, the rangeland sensitive and declining habitats and desert springs are preserved.

Co-managing wild horse and burro populations on Station, with BLM, and on the adjoining BLM lands: Managing herd sizes to reasonable levels helps sustain healthy wild horse herds in the mandated herd management areas.

Resource Stewardship Briefings: Environmental briefings are provided to all Station and contractor personnel who traverse areas that may contain sensitive biological (Desert Tortoise) or cultural (petroglyph) resources. Such briefings help promote conscientious personnel.

Mountain Quail reintroduction: China Lake has one of the largest populations of Mountain Quail and provides for the capture excess Mountain Quail to reintroduction sites throughout the intermountain west.

Population census of Mojave Tui Chub: An annual census of Mojave Tui Chub is conducted in chub habitats. Also, an annual habitat enhancement is performed to maintain healthy chub populations.

Annual Christmas Bird Counts: This survey, conducted by Kerncrest Audubon Society since 1953, provides significant scientific information on the status and distribution of native birds during the winter months. Results are incorporated into the INRMP.

