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SUSTAINING CRITICAL MILITARY TRAINING FACILITIES: AVON PARK AIR FORCE RANGE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

AUGUST 4, 2001

Serial No. 107–106

Printed for the use of the Committee on Government Reform

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.gpo.gov/congress/house
http://www.house.gov/reform

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

81–854 PDF WASHINGTON : 2002

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SUSTAINING CRITICAL MILITARY TRAINING FACILITIES: AVON PARK AIR FORCE RANGE

SATURDAY, AUGUST 4, 2001

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM,
Avon Park, FL.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:04 a.m., at the Avon Park Air Force Range, Avon Park, FL, Hon. Christopher Shays (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Shays and Putnam.

Staff present: Lawrence J. Halloran, staff director and counsel; Grace Washbourne, professional staff member, full committee; and Jason M. Chung, clerk.

Mr. SHAYS. The Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs and International Relations hearing entitled, "Sustaining Critical Military Training Facilities: Avon Park Air Force Range" is called to order.

Good morning, everyone and thank you for being here.

My name is Christopher Shays. In Congress, I represent Connecticut's 4th District, the southwest part of the State, and I serve as chairman of this Government Reform subcommittee. Your very able representative, Adam Putnam, serves as our vice chairman, and it is at his request that we convene this hearing today.

I want to thank him for having us in his district and for all his hard work on the subcommittee. As I think you must know, Adam is a very intelligent young man, and in many ways mature beyond his years. When he chairs the subcommittee, he shows the steady hand, the quick wit and the cool head of a veteran member. In fact, I sometimes think he may be getting a little too good at it and he may not get the gavel back. That is why it is on the right side. [Laughter.]

But he has quickly become an important contributor to our oversight work and we, Republicans and Democrats alike, truly value his service.

We are an oversight panel, which means we do not write laws or appropriate money. We examine Federal programs to make sure they operate as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Last May, the full Government Reform Committee began examining a number of issues broadly termed "encroachment" that limit the use of the land, sea lanes and airspace needed for realistic combat training. The proximity of local housing and commercial development, over-flight and noise restrictions, the complexity of envi-

ronmental compliance, air traffic congestion and conflicts over use of radio frequency spectrum were cited as significant factors constraining the quality and quantity of military training at U.S.-based facilities.

Testimony also suggested that successful resolution of many encroachment issues depends on close cooperation between military and civilian leadership and effective community relations on the part of training facility managers.

Our purpose this morning is to bring that discussion to sharper focus by examining encroachment issues in the context of a specific training facility, the Avon Park Air Force Range. The record of these proceedings will be available to our committee colleagues, and ultimately to the public, and the testimony we hear today will help form the basis of our findings and recommendations to sustain, expand and improve critical training facilities such as this facility.

The planned closure of the Navy's facility at Vieques, Puerto Rico, and the need for increased training sorties to accommodate force transformations and the introduction of new airframes, suggest the Avon Park Range could assume a larger, not smaller, role in future military training. In that event, encroachment issues associated with current and potential range uses will have to be managed successfully to integrate military training requirements with local civilian economic development plans.

We look to our witnesses for a candid discussion of range management issues at Avon Park and for their assessment of efforts to sustain the range as an important military facility and an integral part of the area economy.

At this time, I would like to call on the vice chairman of this committee and I would say to you something that I have never said to Adam—this would probably please his parents. You know, when you are a new Member of Congress, your mother or dad sometimes thinks that maybe some day you will become President. And I would tell you that when you get to be about 55, you realize that will never happen. So then you think, well, you know, I probably know someone some day who may become President. And I looked around at all the Members and he is one of the people on my list of five. So some day I will be able to tell my grandchildren that I was chairman when there was a member of my committee who was vice chairman, who is now your President. Mr. President. [Laughter and applause.]

[The prepared statement of Hon. Christopher Shays follows:]

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Statement of Rep. Christopher Shays
August 4, 2001

Good morning.

My name is Christopher Shays. In Congress, I represent Connecticut's 4th District, and I serve as chairman of this Government Reform subcommittee. Your very able representative, Adam Putnam, serves as our Vice Chairman, and it is at his invitation that we convene here today.

We are an oversight panel, which means we don't write laws or appropriate money. We examine federal programs to make sure they operate as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Last May, the full Government Reform Committee began examining a number of issues, broadly termed "encroachment," limiting the use of the land, sea lanes and airspace needed for realistic combat training. The proximity of local housing and commercial development, over-flight and noise restrictions, the complexity of environmental compliance, air traffic congestion and conflicts over use of radio frequency spectrum were cited as significant factors constraining the quality and quantity of military training at U.S.-based facilities.

Testimony also suggested that successful resolution of many encroachment issues depends on close cooperation between military and civilian leadership and effective community relations on the part of training facility managers.

Our purpose this morning is to bring that discussion into sharper focus by discussing encroachment issues in the context of a specific training facility – the Avon Park Air Force Range. The record of these proceedings will be available to our Committee colleagues, and the testimony we hear today will help form the basis of our findings and recommendations to sustain, expand and improve critical training facilities.

The planned closure of the Navy's facility at Vieques, Puerto Rico, and the need for increased training sorties to accommodate force transformations and the introduction of new airframes, suggest the Avon Park range could assume a larger, not smaller, role in future military training. In that event, encroachment issues associated with current and potential range uses will have to be managed successfully to integrate military training requirements with local civilian economic development plans.

We look to our witnesses for a candid discussion of range management issues at Avon Park, and for their assessment of efforts to sustain the range as an important military facility and an integral part of the area economy.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for that very kind introduction and thank you for holding this important hearing. Avon Park Air Force Range is a cornerstone of economic development in the heartland of Florida and is vital to our national security.

The military needs to train, it needs to practice the missions it may be called upon to perform if commanded by our national leadership to defend our Nation's interests. This training needs to be as tough and as realistic as possible. A soldier once put it best when he said "Train hard, fight easy . . . and win. Train easy, fight hard . . . and die." We owe it to the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend our homes and our national interest, to give them the opportunity to train as hard as they need, to come back as live winners.

For almost 60 years, Avon Park has served our Nation in training the aviation arms of all three service branches as well as artillery and special operations forces. The climate provides our troops the ability to conduct their training year-round. We welcome units from all over the Nation that can use Avon Park while their home bases are socked in by winter weather. Avon Park Air Force Range is the largest facility of its kind east of the Mississippi and one of the most flexible training areas available to our armed forces, with a wide variety of terrain and facilities available that all services can use to hone their warfighting skills. Both our active forces and the Florida National Guard use it extensively, and with the Special Operations Command, the Southern Command, and the Central Command, all headquartered in Florida, it only makes sense to maximize their use here in Avon Park. Particularly now as it appears that the continued use of Vieques is uncertain, this committee and the military should examine what missions could be added to Avon Park. Even our allies are looking for new, realistic training facilities. Just this past week Jane's Defence Weekly reported that the Israeli Ministry of Defense has requested a permanent training base in the United States in order to conduct realistic combat exercises and train for long-range air strikes.

Avon Park has done well in coordinating its military activities with its civilian neighbors. The relationship it has with the Sebring Airport, the Avon Park Correctional Institution, the ranchers who lease grazing rights for their cattle, the hunters and fishermen who use the area, the managers of the State Park, and the foresters have been notable for the degree of cooperation involved. There are no major conflicts over environmental stewardship issues. I look forward to discussing with our witnesses how this has been accomplished and how it might be used as an example for other bases. The real-time air traffic control system in use by the Range and civilian air traffic controllers is a model of military-civilian cooperation.

There is always room for improvement. The Federal Aviation Administration should also proactively cooperate with the Avon Park military authorities to protect the range's special use airspace from vertical encroachment. In a fast-growing area such as ours, bringing all of the stakeholders, including the military, into the planning of new construction at local airports, high rise buildings, television, cellular and radio towers and other structures that might encroach

on the bombing range, military operating areas and training routes, is important to safety and to maximizing usage. Everyone needs to be kept in the loop so that potential problems can be worked out in advance before they cost money or jeopardize training.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to our witnesses' testimony so that the subcommittee can examine how Avon Park Air Force Range has served our Nation and our community and can continue to serve our 21st century defense needs.

On a personal note, Mr. Chairman, it is good to be home and I welcome you to the 12th District of Florida.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Adam H. Putnam follows:]

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

NEWS RELEASE FROM
Congressman Adam Putnam (FL-12)

For Immediate Release
August 4, 2001

Contact: George Rasley
202-225-1252
941-269-6826

Statement of the Honorable Adam H. Putnam
Vice Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans' Affairs, and International Relations
Sustaining Critical Military Training Facilities: Avon Park Air Force Range
August 4, 2001

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your holding this important hearing. Avon Park Air Force Range is a cornerstone of economic development in Central Florida, and it is vital to our national security.

The military needs to train; it needs to practice the missions it may be called upon to perform if commanded by our national leadership to defend our country's interests. This training needs to be as tough and realistic as possible. An anonymous soldier put it best when he said, "Train hard, fight easy...and win. Train easy, fight hard...and die." We owe it to the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend our homes and our national interests to give them the opportunity to train as hard as they need to come back as live winners.

For almost 60 years, Avon Park has served the nation in training the aviation arms of all three service branches, as well as artillery and special operations forces. The climate provides our troops the ability to conduct their training year-round. We welcome units from all over the country that can use Avon Park while their home bases are socked in by winter weather. Avon Park Air Force Range is the largest facility of its kind east of the Mississippi and one of the most flexible training areas available to our armed forces, with a wide variety of terrain and facilities available, that all of our services can use to hone their warfighting skills. Both our active forces and the Florida National Guard use it extensively, and with the Special Operations Command, the Southern Command, and the Central Command all headquartered in Florida it only makes sense to maximize the use of Avon Park. Particularly now as it appears that the continued use of Vieques is uncertain, this Committee and the military should examine what missions could be added to Avon Park. Even our allies are looking for new, realistic training facilities—just this week Jane's Defence Weekly reported that the Israeli Ministry of Defense has requested a permanent training base in the United States in order to conduct realistic combat exercises and train for long-range air strikes.

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Of course, there is always room for improvement. The Federal Aviation Administration should also proactively cooperate with the Avon Park military authorities to protect the Range's special use airspace from vertical encroachment into the Range's vital training and access routes. In a fast growing area, such as ours, bringing all of the stakeholders – including the military – into the planning of new construction at local airports, or of high rise buildings, television, cellular and radio towers and other structures that might encroach on the Avon Park Air Force Range Military Operating Areas, and training routes, is important to safety and to maximizing the use of the Avon Park Range. Everyone needs to be kept in the loop so that potential problems can be worked out in advance before they cost money or jeopardize training.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to our witnesses' testimony so that the Subcommittee can examine how Avon Park Air Force Range has served our nation and our community, and can continue to serve our 21st century defense needs.

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Mr. SHAYS. Thank you very much.

Let me get some housekeeping done. I ask unanimous consent that all members of the subcommittee be permitted to place any opening statement in the record and the record remain open for 3 days for that purpose. And without objection, so ordered.

I ask further unanimous consent that all witnesses be permitted to include their written statements in the record. And without objection, so ordered.

I am going to recognize our witnesses, I will then swear them in and then I am just going to have an announcement about how we are going to proceed, before we take testimony.

We have six witnesses in our panel: Lieutenant Colonel Earle R. Thompson, U.S. Air Force, Commander, 347th Rescue Wing, Detachment 1 and Avon Park Air Force Range; Lieutenant Colonel Charles Golden, Operations and Plan Officer, Florida National Guard, Camp Blanding; Ronald Liszt, Acting Assistant Air Traffic Division Manager, Southern Region, Federal Aviation Administration [FAA]; Mr. Steven Handley, rancher and councilman, city of Avon Park; Mr. Curt Olsen, Timber Management Operations, Avon Park Air Force Range; Mr. Dale Landress, Warden, Avon Park Corrections Institution.

Let me just announce as well, besides this panel, here is what we are going to do. After the invited testimony and our guests on the panel are finished and we have asked them questions, we will use the remaining time to hear from anyone in the audience who would like to address the issues under discussion. We will not swear you in, but we will ask you to sign one of the forms available in the back so the court reporter will have you name and we will know where to send the transcript.

So after the panel concludes and we have asked the questions, we will invite anyone who would like to make some comments. And we will see first, before I figure out how much time you have, how many people would like that opportunity.

So let me administer the oath, invite all of you, please, to stand and we will swear you in.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. SHAYS. Note for the record that all of our witnesses responded in the affirmative. Let me say that it is a practice of the Government Reform Committee, being an investigative committee, that we swear all our witnesses in. I only chickened out once when Senator Bird came to the committee and I did not swear him in. But that is the only one who I have not sworn in. All other Senators and Congressmen have.

But it is a privilege to be here today and it is a privilege to have your testimony and we expect that we will learn a good deal—I certainly will—and I thank you all for participating and we are going to go right down the row.

This is what we are going to do, your statements have been, true to the request, fairly concise. I am going to have the clock on for 5 minutes. If you go over 5 minutes, I am going to roll it over again and I do not think any of you would go the full 10. So I cannot even begin to say if you went to 10 what would happen. [Laughter.]

So, 5 minutes and you will see a red light and then I will flip it to 5 again.

Colonel Thompson, you have the floor.

STATEMENTS OF LT. COL. EARLE R. THOMPSON, USAF, COMMANDER, 347 RESCUE WING, DET 1 & AVON PARK AFR, MACDILL AFB, FLORIDA; LT. COL. CHARLES GOLDEN, OPERATIONS AND PLAN OFFICER, FLORIDA NATIONAL GUARD, CAMP BLANDING, STARK, FL; RONALD J. LISZT, ACTING ASSISTANT AIR TRAFFIC DIVISION MANAGER, SOUTHERN REGION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION; STEVE HANDLEY, RANCHER/COUNCILMAN, CITY OF AVON PARK, FL; CURT OLSEN, TIMBER MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS, AVON PARK AIR FORCE RANGE, AVON PARK, FL; AND DALE LANDRESS, WARDEN, AVON PARK CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION, AVON PARK, FL

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Putnam. Thank you for the opportunity today to speak to you on the unique challenges we have here at Avon Park Air Force Range in managing our ranges and the airspace that we also feel is very vital to the Air Force's combat readiness.

Maintaining access to these ranges and the airspace is very important to us if we are to continue building the combat-ready forces to decisively engage our adversaries. Combat and combat support units from all services in the Department of Defense, including the U.S. Coast Guard, utilize Avon Park Air Force Range for readiness training activities. Additionally, we also support public use and recreation activities on our range.

As you mentioned, we are uniquely positioned to allow access from many avenues, both from the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic, not to mention the land access that we have. Our range is comprised of about 106,000 acres and we have got vertical spaces that we can extend up to 31,000 feet when we work closely with the FAA. The dimensions of our range permit the weapons employment tactics driven from our lessons that we learned in Desert Storm and Operation Allied Force and the new standoff weapons technology that is emerging today. Our range has the space to allow those weapons to be utilized out here. Avon Park Range personnel work closely with other users of the airspace to deconflict range airspace usage with other competing demands. We also work real time with the Miami Center to ensure that airspace is available to airlines and the public as much as possible. We have had this coordination center with Miami Center in place for a number of years and to date our efforts have been very good in that regard.

Our ability to modify our range and airspace to accommodate new training needs to be ensured. However, the legal and procedural requirements are becoming very complicated and time-consuming for us to do that. One item that needs to be monitored closely, we feel, is the potential for portions of the range to be designated as critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act. When critical habitat is designated we are required to consult with the relevant regulatory agency to make sure that any changes in our range activities do not adversely affect the modification of the critical habitat area. The key to addressing those critical habitat issues is to have the adequate science and good communication in place and have our good relationships that we currently have with

our neighbors and regulators. And that will enable us to develop cooperative strategies that allow us still to accomplish our mission.

At Avon Park Air Force Range, we have the good fortune to have sufficient area around us that protects us from encroachment concerns, but we do have a few challenges in this area. We have worked very hard to mitigate community concerns by developing resolutions that resolve the conflict while ensuring good access to our range. As an example, one area just to the north of us that has seen quite a bit of development, had a bombing pattern that overflew a housing area. Some of the individuals in that area complained about the noise and because of this, we modified our pattern at no loss to training and we have alleviated all of those noise issues in that area.

Another issue is the large amount of wetlands on Avon Park Air Force Range and we are also home to 12 endangered species. By entering into inter-agency consultation processes, proposed range modifications are harmonized to protect those wetlands and the endangered species. Our installation has implemented a comprehensive fire management program that minimizes our change of having fire losses. We do have the fires that we saw today, this morning, that happen just from lightning strikes out there, but our efforts there have made that minimal.

Cooperative efforts with the State have also been very successful. Large tracts of land to the east and west of our range have been acquired by the State of Florida to serve as conservation lands. And they also at this time are studying the feasibility of acquiring property to the northern boundary that will help us with future encroachment issues to the north. The State of Florida, we feel, has been very proactive in this regard and continues to help us.

Another issue is the range operations with unexploded ordnance. We have been in operation since World War II in one form or another and have a wide variety of munitions that have been employed on the range. Air Combat Command has got a very comprehensive set of policy directives that will ensure our long-term sustainability and safety of personnel on the range. We have a range residue removal contract that last year—or this year in fiscal 2001, ACC budgeted $230,000 to recycle and safe all of our training sub munitions in the range's holding areas. The Defense Reutilization and Management Office we are working with to remove about 1.5—between 1.5 and 1.8 million pounds of residue from the range. Unfortunately, a lot of that effort is funded through our operations and training budget, and that decreases other training opportunities that we would have.

In summary, maintaining our edge in air combat is directly linked to robust training capabilities and those capabilities depend upon continued access to the range and airspace. Avon Park Air Force Range serves our warfighters well. We need to continue to work closely with the community to ensure that we have the operational flexibility, efficiency and realism of readiness training on this range, while minimizing the impacts on the mission that affect

the community and the environment. Your kind consideration of these comments and your interest in Avon Park Air Force Range is deeply appreciated. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you, Colonel.

Colonel Golden.

[The prepared statement of Lt. Col. Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF
LT COL H. EARLE THOMPSON, JR.

COMMANDER, 347 RESCUE WING, DETACHMENT 1
and AVON PARK AIR FORCE RANGE

THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

4 AUGUST 2001

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on the unique challenges we at Avon Park Air Force Range face in managing our ranges and airspace that we feel are so vital to the Air Forces' combat readiness.

Maintaining access to our range and airspace is extremely important if we are to continue fielding combat ready forces to decisively engage our adversaries. Combat and combat support units from all services in DOD, including the US Coast Guard utilize Avon Park Air Force Range for readiness training activities. Additionally, the range supports public use and recreation activities.

We are uniquely positioned to allow access from many avenues; both from the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic, not to mention the land access. The Range is comprised of approximately 106,110 acres on the land with vertical spaces that can reach up to 31,000 feet. The dimensions of the range permit the weapon employment tactics driven by lessons learned from DESERT STORM and OPERATION ALLIED FORCE and new

standoff weapons technology. Avon Park Range personnel work closely with other users of the airspace to deconflict range airspace usage from other competing demands. We work real-time with the Miami Center to ensure that the airspace is available to the airlines and public as much as possible. We have had this coordination system in place for a number of years and to date our efforts have been very successful.

Our ability to modify our range and airspace to accommodate new training must be ensured. However the legal and procedural requirements are becoming more complicated and time consuming. One item that needs to be monitored closely is the potential for portions of the range to be designated as critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act. When critical habitat is designated, we are required to consult with the relevant regulatory agency whenever any of our range activities result in the destruction or adverse modification of the critical habitat. The key to addressing critical habitat issues is adequate science and good communication; when we have good relationships with the regulators and with the public, we have been able to develop cooperative strategies to allow us to accomplish our mission.

At Avon Park Air Force Range we have the good fortune to have sufficient area that protects us from encroachment concerns. But, we have had a few challenges in this area. We have worked very hard to mitigate community concerns by developing solutions that resolve the conflict while ensuring good access to the range. As an example, one area that has seen development is just to the north of us. Certain bombing patterns over flew a housing development. Some individuals in that area complained of

the noise. Because of this, we modified the pattern, at no loss of training—relieving almost all of the noise issues.

Another issue is the large amount of wetlands on APAFR, which are home to twelve threatened species. By entering into interagency consultation processes proposed range modifications are harmonized to protect the wetlands and the endangered species. Our installation has also implemented a comprehensive fire management program that minimizes the chance of fire loss.

Cooperative efforts with the state have also been very successful. Large tracts of land to the east and west of our range property have been acquired by the State of Florida to serve as conservation lands. In addition, the state is studying the feasibility of acquiring property on the range's northern border. We fully support these measures as it will help mitigate the impact of future encroachment issues. The State of Florida continues to be proactive in helping us with these issues and we continue to actively dialogue with federal and state regulatory and wildlife agencies.

An additional issue that affects range operations is the disposal of residue material and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). APAFR has been in operation since WWII and a wide variety of munitions have been employed on the range over the years. Air Combat Command (ACC) has a comprehensive set of policy directives in place that will ensure long-term sustainability and safety of personnel on our range. This includes a command wide range residue removal contract that includes Avon Park. In FY01 the command has

budgeted $230K to safe and recycle all training sub munitions in the range's holding areas and through the Defense Reutilization and Management Office we are working to safely remove between 1.5 and 1.8 million pounds of residue from the range. Unfortunately, much of this effort is being funded through the operations and training budget, which ultimately decreases funding available for range enhancements for the purposes of improving training.

In summary, maintaining our edge in air combat is directly linked to robust training capabilities, capabilities dependent upon continued access to AF ranges and airspace. Avon Park Air Force Range consists of approximately 106,110 acres of range area that serves our warfighters well. We will continue to work closely with the community to ensure we preserve the operational flexibility, efficiency, and realism of readiness training on the range while minimizing the impacts of the mission on the community and the environment. Your kind consideration of these comments and your interest in Avon Park Air Force Range are deeply appreciated. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today at this hearing.

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Putnam.

Sir, I would like to let my written statement serve as my opening statement here today.

The only caveat being that Florida National Guard considers Avon Park Bombing Range a strategic asset for us, primarily because of the distance that our units would have to travel to the only other facility in north Florida at Camp Blanding. To us, the viability of Avon Park in the future is very distinct in our needs.

That is all I have to say, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you, Colonel.

Mr. Liszt, welcome. Your mic is on.

[The prepared statement of Lt. Col. Golden follows:]

STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES R. GOLDEN
DEPUTY COMMANDER, CAMP BLANDING TRAINING SITE
FLORIDA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD
FOR THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AUGUST 4, 2001

The Florida Army National Guard (FLARNG) has used the Avon Park Air Force Bombing Range (APAFBR) since the early 1970s. FLARNG units from South and Central Florida are the primary users and conduct weekend Inactive Duty Training at APAFBR two weekends out of each month. This training consists of small arms (rifle, pistol, machine-gun) live-fire qualification courses conducted on two ranges leased to the FLARNG. Artillery and mortar live-fire exercises are also conducted by 105mm howitzers, 81mm, and 60mm mortars. Aerial gunnery training is accomplished by the 1st Battalion, 111th Aviation Regiment out of Jacksonville, Florida using their AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. Maneuver training is available to Infantry, Air defense, Artillery, and Combat Support units.

A small full-time maintenance team, an environmental compliance officer, and a four-man detachment of soldiers attached from Camp Blanding Training Site support this training. Camp Blanding Training Site is located 45 miles southwest of Jacksonville and is the primary training center for all FLARNG units. On an average year 10,000 training mandays are supported at APAFBR by these units. A training manday is defined as the number of soldiers per day times the number of days they are present for training. It should be noted that these figures include United States Army Reserve soldiers and other Reserve Components in addition to FLARNG soldiers.

All training is conducted within the environmental guidelines established by Army and Air Force doctrinal guidance and regulations. All FLARNG units have assigned Environmental Compliance Officers who have received environmental policy training in addition to their other standard duties. Units conducting training at APAFBR receive range safety and environmental compliance briefings prior to each training event. The FLARNG has also developed a Soldiers Handbook that identifies pertinent environmental compliance issues specifically for APAFBR. These handbooks are issued to all using units.

The FLARNG considers APAFBR a strategic asset based on the maneuver space and training facilities available for our use. The use of this facility is critical to the training needs of FLARNG units due to the difference in the amount of travel time between APAFBR and Camp Blanding. It takes approximately 3-4 hours for units from the Miami area to drive to APAFBR versus a 9-10 hour drive to Camp Blanding. This reduction in travel time provides unit commanders with additional time to conduct

training, resolves some safety issues, and reduces operational hours on their organic equipment.

Another issue for consideration would be the impact of additional Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) initiatives. When bases close and the force structure and size remain the same, training area opportunities and sites are reduced. As a result the utilization of available assets becomes more competitive and users begin to look for non-traditional areas to support their training needs. As an example, during the last fiscal year 60% of the users at Camp Blanding were non-FLARNG units. In the early 1990s this figure was closer to 30% due to a combination of available defense dollars and a larger selection of bases on which to train. The majority of these users were the Active Components of all branches.

In addition to the BRAC issue, the increase in the overall growth of urban areas adjacent to many military installations now presents potential encroachment conflicts. APAFBR may be one of the few bases in the Continental United States that is in a favorable position to turn both the increased usage and encroachment issues to its advantage. It has enough landmass to support large multi-component exercises and is currently sited far enough away from commercial development to avoid major encroachment problems. This places APAFBR in a strategically competitive position for future use and possible growth opportunities that are not realistically available to other military installations.

It is the intent of the FLARNG to continue our training partnership with the United States Air Force at APAFBR for the foreseeable future. In fact, the FLARNG has asked that we be allowed to expand our usage at APAFBR with the addition of a multi-million dollar automated range program. The accompanying infrastructure expansion to support these ranges has been included in our five-year range construction budget. These ranges will not only support FLARNG units but they would also attract other service components and law enforcement agencies to the base. The opportunity for increased usage of APAFBR would be substantial and could provide the local area with a positive economic impact.

Mr. LISZT. Chairman Shays and Congressman Putnam, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of Administrator Garvey to discuss access to airspace issues relevant to military operations in general and Avon Park Air Force Range in particular.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Liszt, I am just going to ask a question—can you hear in the back?

Mr. LISZT. I would like to briefly outline how the FAA and the military services work together to manage our responsibilities in a way that affords the most safe and efficient use of the national airspace system for both military and civilian aircraft.

The FAA is the single manager of the airspace in the United States. Our primary mission and responsibility is to operate a common system of air traffic control and navigation for both civil and military aircraft, while maintaining the highest standards of safety. Our fundamental charter from Congress includes direction to give full consideration to the requirements of national defense as well as commercial and general aviation, a direction that we take very seriously. We have a close day-to-day working relationship with the armed services, aided by the presence of military personnel who work along with us in FAA offices both at Washington headquarters and in most regions of the country. These military personnel represent their individual services—Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force—at working group level meetings in order to ensure that their interests and perspective are known and considered by the FAA. And vice versa, FAA personnel are stationed at important military commands to ensure that the FAA interests are taken into account by the Department of Defense. At a more senior level, DOD has established the Policy Board on Federal Aviation as its highest level conduit to the FAA to discuss and dispose of matters of mutual concern and interest. Currently the Board is headed by a former FAA official. We find that this approach—to have both liaison representatives at a working, staff level, as well as a senior policy board—promotes a very cooperative and successful working relationship between the FAA and DOD.

One of the primary ways we aid the military in accomplishing their national defense mission is to designate airspace for military training and testing. We do this by identifying what is known as special use airspace to accommodate military activity. By designating this airspace, it serves to protect other users of the airspace system—for example, commercial airlines and general aviation—and provides for safe and orderly operations within the national airspace system between civil and military users. DOD submits proposals to establish or modify special use airspace based on its mission requirements. Throughout the United States and off our coasts, there are over 900 special use airspace designations. Some designations are more restrictive than others. In reviewing a request for a special use airspace, we present the proposal to the public for comment and complete an aeronautical study, which assesses the impact of the designation on other users of the airspace. Under a memorandum of understanding between the FAA and DOD, DOD is the lead agency for required environmental reviews and assessments for proposals it initiates. We then make a decision

about the designation after considering national defense requirements together with the needs of other users.

With regard to the Avon Park Air Force Range, a portion of its airspace has been designated as restricted special use airspace. The current designation has been in place since 1963. The restricted category means that civil flights, while not wholly prohibited, are subject to restrictions at certain times due to the hazardous activities by military flights or ground operations.

In establishing the special use airspace designations, it is our policy to promote joint use of the special use airspace as much as possible, allowing for use by civil aircraft when it is needed for military missions. We also subdivide or stratify the special use airspace in order to enhance joint use by military and civil aircraft. This approach enables us to make the most efficient use of the national airspace system while accommodating national defense requirements. For example, at Avon Park, several changes have been made over the years concerning the times of military use and subdivision of the airspace resulting in better access by civilian aircraft to the otherwise restricted space. The interface between the military and civilian use of the airspace surrounding Avon Park is a good example of how both types of operations can be accommodated safely and efficiently.

Congress has directed us, along with DOD, to build on this joint use of special use airspace to develop a system to share information about the near real time use of such airspace. This will enable greater access to areas that otherwise would be restricted for large spans of time. To this end, DOD is developing the Military Airspace Management System while the FAA has deployed the Special Use Airspace Management System that will provide more timely information to users. For example, the designated hours of restriction for the special use airspace at Avon Park extend for most of the day Monday through Friday. The practice in the past has been that if there are no planned military operations for the entire period, the special use airspace is made available for civil aircraft use. With better near real time information available through these new data systems about what military operations are actually taking place on a particular day or part of the day or even hour of the day, DOD and FAA will be able to adjust access to the space accordingly.

In summary, the FAA and DOD have a successful partnership in making sure the efficient and safe operation of the national airspace system accommodates both military and civilian uses. I assure you that the FAA and DOD will continue to work hard on a day-to-day basis to coordinate our respective missions and responsibilities. This will further enhance military training necessary for our national defense and access for commercial and general aviation to the national airspace system.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you, Mr. Liszt.

Mr. Handley, you are going to be recognized next for your statement. I am going to encourage you to put the mic closer. We will have your mics off for now. Thank you. Wonderful to have you here.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Liszt follows:]

STATEMENT OF RON LISZT, ACTING ASSISTANT AIR TRAFFIC MANAGER FOR THE SOUTHERN REGION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, ON SUSTAINING CRITICAL MILITARY TRAINING FACILITIES: AVON PARK AIR FORCE RANGE. AUGUST 4, 2001

Chairman Shays and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of Administrator Garvey to discuss access to airspace issues relevant to military operations in general and Avon Park Air Force Range (APAFR), in particular. I have worked for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for over 31 years, starting as an air traffic controller in Pensacola and working in various positions in our agency's Southern Region, which includes the State of Florida. I am presently the Acting Assistant Air Traffic Division Manager for the Southern Region. I was formerly the head of the FAA's Miami Air Route Traffic Control Center. I would like to briefly outline how the FAA and the military services work together to manage our responsibilities in a way that affords the most safe and efficient use of the National Airspace System for both military and civilian aircraft.

The FAA is the single manager of the airspace in the United States. Our primary mission and responsibility is to operate a common system of air traffic control and navigation for both civil and military aircraft while maintaining the highest standards of safety. Our fundamental charter from Congress includes a direction to give full consideration to the requirements of national defense, as well as commercial and general aviation--a direction that we take very seriously. We have a close, day-to-day working relationship with the

armed services, aided by the presence of military personnel who work along with us in FAA offices both at headquarters and in most regions of the country. These military personnel represent their individual services--Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force--at working group level meetings in order to ensure that their interests and perspective are known and considered by the FAA. And *vice versa*, FAA personnel are stationed at important military commands to ensure that FAA interests are taken into account by the Department of Defense (DOD). At a more senior level, DOD has established the Policy Board on Federal Aviation as its high level conduit to the FAA to discuss and dispose of matters of mutual concern and interest. Currently the Board is headed by a former FAA official. We find that this approach--to have both liaison representatives at a working, staff level as well as a senior policy Board--promotes a very cooperative and successful working relationship between the FAA and DOD.

One of the primary ways we aid the military in accomplishing their national defense mission is to designate airspace for military training and testing. We do this by identifying what is known as "special use airspace" (SUA) to accommodate military activity. By designating this airspace, it serves to protect other users of the airspace system--*i.e.*, commercial airlines and general aviation--and provides for safe and orderly operations within the National Airspace System between civil and military users. DOD submits proposals to establish or modify an SUA based on its mission requirements. Throughout the U.S. and off our coasts, there are over 900 special use airspace designations. Some designations are more restrictive than others. In reviewing a request for an SUA, we present the proposal to the public for comment and complete an

aeronautical study, which assesses the impact of the designation on other users of the airspace. Under a memorandum of understanding between the FAA and DOD, DOD is the lead agency for required environmental reviews and assessments for proposals it initiates. We then make a decision about the designation after considering national defense requirements together with the needs of other users.

With regard to the Avon Park Air Force Range, a portion of its airspace has been designated as "restricted" special use airspace. The current designation has been in place since 1963. The "restricted" category means that civil flights, while not wholly prohibited, are subject to restrictions at certain times due to the hazardous activities by military flights or ground operations.

In establishing the SUA designations, it is our policy to promote joint use of the special use airspace as much as possible, allowing for use by civil aircraft when it is not needed for the military mission. We also subdivide or stratify the special use airspace in order to enhance joint use by military and civil aircraft. This approach enables us to make the most efficient use of the national airspace while accommodating national defense requirements. For example, at Avon Park, several changes have been made over the years concerning the times of military use and sub-division of the airspace resulting in better access by civil aircraft to the otherwise restricted space. The interface between the military and civilian use of the airspace surrounding Avon Park is a good example of how both types of operations can be accommodated safely and efficiently.

Congress has directed us, along with DOD, to build on this joint use of special use airspace to develop a system to share information about the "near real time" use of such airspace. This will enable greater access to areas that otherwise would be restricted for large spans of time. To this end, DOD is developing the Military Airspace Management System (MAMS) while the FAA has deployed the Special Use Airspace Management System (SAMS) that will provide more timely information to users. For example, the designated hours of restriction for the SUA at Avon Park extend for most of the day, Monday through Friday. The practice in the past has been that if there are no *planned* military operations, the special airspace is made available for civil aircraft use. With better "near real time" information available through these new data systems, SAMS and MAMS, about what military operations are actually taking place on a particular day or part of the day or even hour of the day, DOD and the FAA will be able adjust access to the space accordingly.

In summary, the FAA and DOD have a successful partnership in making sure the efficient and safe operation of the National Airspace System accommodates both military and civilian uses. I assure you that the FAA and DOD will continue to work hard on a day-to-day basis to coordinate our respective missions and responsibilities. This will further enhance military training necessary for our national defense and access for commercial and general aviation to the National Airspace System.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my remarks. I will be happy to answer any questions you or the Members of the Subcommittee may have.

Mr. HANDLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Putnam; thank you for allowing me to testify today.

Today I am wearing two hats. I am a cattle lessee on the bombing range and have been for 20 years. I worked for and with other cattle lessees for 5 to 7 years prior to being a cattle lessee myself here.

If you would accept my written statement.

Mr. SHAYS. We will do that.

Mr. HANDLEY. And also if I could enter into testimony a tape produced by the Florida Department of Agriculture, and a lot of the footage was shot here on the bombing range on grazing public lands.

Mr. SHAYS. Without objection, we will include that in the record.

Mr. HANDLEY. Thank you.

Also, I would like to say that I have been a partner as well as other people, other lessees on this range for the entire time that there has been cattle on the range. We have a very close working relationship with the military. We have good procedures in place for our safe entrance and exit of the military training exercise areas. I currently have a lease on one of the ranges where ordnance is delivered, and I graze that range. In the past 20 years, there have been very few incidents that have not been able to be resolved and I would like to say that we have been good stewards. The environmental regulations, in my opinion have been exemplary and they have followed—the Air Force has followed everything and we have been a partner with them.

Changing hats, as a city councilman of Avon Park, I would like to say that if we have a change in mission at the range, then I would hope it would help improve our economic development and possibly increase job opportunities for the citizens of Avon Park and local communities.

Thank you very much for your time and thank you for having me.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you, Mr. Handley, very much.

Mr. Olsen. And we are going to move that mic over. Is that still on? There we go.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Handley follows:]

Statement of Steve Handley

Before the

Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs

and International Relations

Government Reform Committee

August 4, 2001

Avon Park Air Force Range, Avon Park, Florida

On range management issues; I have been an active partner on the Avon Air Force Range for about 20 years, as a cattle lessee. To my knowledge, every attempt has been made to comply with environmental regulations and good stewardship practices have been followed. If the proposed change of use includes the principles and methods to meet the current land uses, as grazing, public recreation, hunting and research, as well as the military mission, I have no objections. I have nothing to address on issues of access to air space, and use of radio frequency spectrum.

Wearing my city council hat, my views on any proposed changes must address the compatibility of current and potential uses of the facility with local development, and the influence of range usage on neighboring communities. There are two issues that are foremost on my mind; noise and jobs. Many people complain about the noise associated with military exercises, especially the roar of jets and helicopters overhead, gunships and artillery. I guess we must all weigh the slight annoyance of the noise associated with military training against the assurance of a well-trained and competent military that will protect and keep our great country free. I will choose a well-trained military every time. It is my hope that any change in the current mission at the Avon Park Air Force Range would result in more job opportunities for the citizens of Avon Park and other local communities.

Please accept my abbreviated comments as they are meant to be, respectfully.

Steve N. Handley

Mr. OLSEN. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and Members of Congress. I am honored to have this opportunity to speak before this congressional hearing. My name is Curt Olsen and I am the Supervisory Forester of the Forest Management section at the Avon Park Air Force Range and have been at this installation for over 24 years.

Mr. SHAYS. Wow.

Mr. OLSEN. Although I primarily deal with forest management issues, I have a good overall working knowledge regarding most aspects of the Environmental Flight management.

Avon Park Air Force Range has a long history of natural resources management. Since the early 1950's, the property has been leased for cattle grazing. In 1952, the Air Force signed a cooperative agreement with the State of Florida allowing for public access for recreational purposes. Since that time, the natural resources program has evolved into a multi-disciplinary program involving programs including forest management, range management, outdoor recreation, wildlife and fire management.

Approximately one half of the installation is occupied with threatened or endangered species or is potential habitat for these species. Management by the Environmental Flight has protected the natural habitat with 54,000 acres identified as being in outstanding condition. In fact, 50 percent of the actual bombing impact areas are considered to be in this condition, suggesting that military activities have not historically degraded environmental quality.

The three revenue generating programs—these are forest management, outdoor recreation and range management—provide a yearly income back to the Air Force of approximately $800,000. The funds are used to support employees' salaries, scientific research, prescribed burning, wildfire protection, road maintenance, construction and maintenance of boundary and impact area fences, as well as the purchase and maintenance of vehicles and heavy equipment.

With many State and Federal threatened and endangered species, wetlands, rare habitats, high public recreational use, commercial forestry, cattle grazing and a military mission, there is potential for conflicts.

The program managers of Environmental Flight work together to develop a natural resources program that achieves multiple objectives with emphasis on sustaining and enhancing the military mission.

Our adaptive and proactive management of the property has greatly benefited the Air Force by demonstrating that we are good stewards of the property and at the same time provide military training necessary for our national defense.

Over 20 years ago, the State of Florida developed a land acquisition program to purchase environmentally sensitive lands. The Avon Park Air Force Range was identified as a critical hot spot of regional biodiversity and the centerpiece for land acquisition in south central Florida. Substantial properties on our eastern and western boundaries have been acquired by the State as conservation lands, while much of the property on our north boundary is currently under consideration for land acquisition.

Due to the fast rate of growth Florida is experiencing, with these adjoining conservation purchases, Avon Park Air Force Range could have potentially been subjected to increasing encroachment that could ultimately impact military use of the property.

The Environmental Flight prescribe-burns approximately 25,000 acres of habitat every year. Without this management practice, the fuel loads would be extremely high and fires started from military missions would be much more frequent and harder to suppress. There would also be a greater chance of fires getting out of control and spreading off the property. If this should happen, the Air Force could be held liable for such action. Prescribed burning is also necessary to protect the $20 million of forest resources and to manage the fire adapted flora and fauna on the installation. Without fire, many of the environmental attributes that make Avon Park a unique ecosystem would eventually disappear.

The primary goal of the Forest Management Section is to maintain a healthy forest in a way that benefits the ecological community and the Air Force. We provide direct benefit back to the Air Force by using funds generated from the sale of timber resources to support services that assist the military mission.

Recently we removed timber from 10 different locations requested by the Army National Guard for training sites for their multiple launch rocket systems. For this fiscal year that we are in right now, we will produce a total of $430,000 from the sale of forest resources. After our expenses, we will generate a profit in excess of $173,000 of which 40 percent or almost $69,000, will be distributed back to Highlands County and Polk County to be used for public schools and roads.

The Outdoor Recreation Program averages 40,000 public visitor days per year and generates approximately $250,000 in the sale of various permits. The program provides many recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking and bird watching, just to mention a few. The program supports the mission by providing law enforcement to control illegal trespass.

The Range Management Program generates $147,000 from the lease of native pastureland for cattle grazing. The installation is divided into nine leases, each lease is divided into separate pastures and cattle are rotated according to guidelines determined by the rangeland specialist. Cattle grazing also helps control vegetation and fuel loads, thereby reducing the fire potential. Funds from this program are used to build and maintain boundary fences around the installation and, most importantly, along active impact areas.

The Wildlife Management Program is responsible for managing and monitoring fauna population of both listed and non-listed species on the installation. The program also ensures that military training and other natural resources programs do not violate State or Federal law.

In conclusion, the Avon Park Air Force Range is a unique military and environmental showcase. The Air Force has shown that through team work, military training can be conducted in an environmentally friendly manner.

Finally, I would like to express my personal appreciation to the Operations Flight here on the range for their cooperation in managing this unique environment. Thank you.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you, Mr. Olsen.

I was just thinking when you were mentioning bird watching, if I were out there, I would be looking for gators, not birds. [Laughter.]

Mr. Landress.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Olsen follows:]

Congressional Report

By

Kurt E. Olsen, Forester

Avon Park Air Force Range

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and members of Congress. My name is Kurt Olsen and I am honored to have the opportunity to speak before this Congressional Hearing. I am the Supervisory Forester of the Forest Management section at the Avon Park Air Force Range, and have been at this installation for over 24 years. Although, I primarily deal with forest management issues, I have a good overall working knowledge regarding most aspects of the Environmental Flight management.

Avon Park Air Force Range has a long history of natural resources management. Since the early 1950's the property has been leased for cattle grazing. In 1952 the Air Force signed a Cooperative Agreement with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission allowing public access for recreational purposes. In 1966, Forest management was initially established with the reforestation of 2,000 acres of cut-over habitat. Since that time, the natural resources program has evolved into a multi-disciplinary program including forest management, range (grassland) management, outdoor recreation, wildlife management, and fire management. Our staff consists of foresters, range-land specialists, wildlife biologists, a botanist/ecologist, a fire manager, engineering operators, and a geographic information system specialist.

Approximately one-half of the installation is occupied with threatened or endangered species or is potential habitat for these species. Management by the Environmental Flight has protected the natural habitat with 54,000 acres identified through the Natural Areas Inventory process as being in exemplary condition. In fact, 56 percent of the actual bombing impact areas are considered to be in this condition, suggesting that military activities have not historically degraded environmental quality.

On these impact areas there are rare habitats with threatened and endangered flora and fauna species. An on-going plant inventory has thus far documented 1,080 different plant species or 47 percent of all native plants found in the Central Florida region. According statistics complied by our staff botanist, this numbers currently exceed that documented for any other south or central Florida preserve, including Everglades National Park, thereby exemplifying the tremendous biodiversity significance of the Avon Park Air Force Range.

The three revenue-generating programs, forest management, outdoor recreation, and rangeland management, provide a yearly income back to the Air Force of approximately $800,000. The funds are used to support employee's salaries, scientific research, prescribed burning, wildfire protection, road maintenance, construction and maintenance of boundary and impact area fences, as well as purchase and maintenance of vehicles and heavy equipment, just to mention a few.

With many state and federally listed flora and fauna species, wetlands, rare habitats, high public recreational use, commercial forestry, cattle grazing, and a military mission, there is potential for conflicts.

The program managers of the Environmental Flight work together to develop a natural resources program which achieves multiple objectives, with emphasis on sustaining and enhancing the military mission. The Flight has been highly recognized as a benchmark for other DoD units and outside agencies to follow. Priorities are established with guidance from Air Force regulations, federal law, scientific research, assistance from other agencies, and a cooperation between staff members and military mission objectives.

Our adaptive and proactive management of the property has greatly benefited the Air Force by demonstrating to the public, state, and federal regulatory agencies that we are good stewards of the property and at the same time provide military training necessary for our national defense. These agencies have put their confidence in the Avon Park Environmental Flight as a trusted source for the management of the resources that they are legally mandated to protect. Consultation with any of these agencies is generally necessary only when unexpected situations occur. In almost all cases questions relating to sensitive habitats, endangered species, etc., are handled directly by the Environmental Flight. We do not have outside agencies critiquing our work and management decisions. The Air Force has shown that they have a vested interest in the management of the

natural environment, and they will do what is right. This attitude has encouraged strong support from the public and other agencies for the installation.

Over 20 years ago the state of Florida developed a land acquisition program to purchase environmentally sensitive lands. The Avon Park Air Force Range was identified as a critical "hot spot" of regional biodiversity and the centerpiece for land acquisition in south-central Florida. Substantial properties on our eastern and western boundaries have been acquired by the state as conservation lands, while much the property on our north boundary is currently under considered for land acquisition.

Without these adjoining conservation purchases, and the fast rate of growth Florida is experiencing, Avon Park Air Force Range could have potentially been subjected to increasing encroachment that could ultimately impact military use of the property.

The Environmental Flight prescribe-burns approximately 25,000 acres of native habitat every year. We also burn the bombing and gunnery ranges whenever there is a buildup of flammable vegetation. This reduces fires on these impact areas that would interfere with military training. Prescribed burning is also performed prior to cleaning up the impact areas which makes it easier to find spent and live ordnances. Florida has fast growing, highly flammable vegetation. Without this management practice, the fuel load would be extreme and fires started from the military mission would be much more frequent and harder to suppress. There would also be a much greater chance of a fire

getting out of control and spreading off of the property. If this should happen, the Air Force could be held liable for fire suppression costs incurred by the state and the loss of property. It might also interfere with the flying mission of the Air Force and would definitely limit military ground operations. Prescribed burning is also necessary to protect the $20,000,000 of forest resources and to manage the fire adapted flora and fauna on the installation. Without fire, many of the environmental attributes that make Avon Park a unique ecosystem would eventually disappear.

Speaking as the forester of the Forest Management Program, we have been very successful in managing the timber resources on the installation. Our primary goal is to maintain a healthy forest it in a way that benefits the ecological community and the Air Force. Methods of managing approximately 35,000 acres of forested habitat vary according to prescribed objectives. We provide direct benefit back to the Air Force by using funds generated from the sale of timber resources to support the military mission.

Some of these services include the purchase and maintenance of heavy equipment used for fighting natural and mission-related fires, personnel to help suppress these fires and also prescribed burn, and maintenance of roads used by the public, contractors, the Air Force, the Army National Guard, and other ground military units. Recently we completed removing timber from ten different locations requested by the Army National Guard for training sites for their multiple launch rocket system (MLRS). For fiscal year 2001, we produced a total of $430,000 from the sale of forest resources. Minus our expenses we will generate of profit $173,000 of which 40 percent, or $69,000, will be

distributed back to Highlands County and Polk County for public schools and roads. The remainder will support other forest management programs in the Air Force or be placed in a Forestry Reserve Account. The funds in this account can be requested by any DoD base to support environmental projects.

The Outdoor Recreation Program provides excellent public relations for the Air Force. They average 40,000 public visitor days per year and generate approximately $250,000 in the sale of various permits. The program provides hunting for a variety of species, as well as fishing, hiking, bird watching, biking, boating, horseback riding, and other nature studies. There are four available campgrounds with various types of facilities and designated hiking trails of different lengths. Avon Park has been recognized as one of the top public wild turkey hunting locations in Florida. This program directly supports the mission by providing law enforcement to control illegal trespass. They are also responsible for protecting Air Force assets, and ensure the public does not venture into hazardous areas. They also trap and remove wild hogs on the airfield which greatly increases the safety of landing and departing aircraft.
The Range Management Program generates $147,000 from the lease of native pastureland for cattle grazing. This program was radically changed in 1977 when the Air Force actively started managing the native grassland resource. The installation is divided into nine leases. Each lease is divided into separate pastures, and cattle are rotated according to guidelines determined by the Rangeland Specialist. This prevents overgrazing which protects the unique understory of the property. Cattle grazing also helps control vegetation fuel loads thereby reducing the fire potential. One of the big

advantages of cattle grazing is that the funds generated from the program are use to build and maintain boundary fences around the installation and, most importantly, along the active impact areas. These services have saved the Air Force thousands of dollars over the years.

The Wildlife Management Program is responsible for managing and monitoring the fauna population of both listed and non-listed species on the installation. Extensive data and information are gathered through scientific research conducted by Air Force biologists and independent contractors. The program also ensures that military training and other natural resources programs do not violate state or federal law.

In conclusion, the Avon Park Air Force Range is a unique military and environmental showcase. The Air Force has shown that through cooperation military training can be conducted in an environmental friendly manor. Finally, I would like to express my personnel appreciation to the Operations Flight for the continuing effort they extended allowing us to manage this unique environment.

Mr. LANDRESS. Mr. Chairman, as one of the few remaining natives of Avon Park, I would like to welcome you to this area. We are certainly happy to have you and we look forward to our visit here.

Mr. SHAYS. Now Mr. Landress, let us 'fess up. Your folks must have been from Michigan or Ohio, or Connecticut?

Mr. LANDRESS. Well, my folks were. [Laughter.]

Mr. SHAYS. OK.

Mr. LANDRESS. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to this subcommittee and to Congressman Putnam for the invitation to testify concerning the interaction between Avon Park Correctional Institution and the Avon Park Air Force Range.

Four months ago, I assumed the duties as Warden of our correctional facility. This is my third tour of duty as Warden of Avon Park Correctional Institution, having served during 1985 to 1987 and 1993 to 1995. I have a good understanding and respect for the mission of our correctional facility as well as the mission of the Avon Park Air Force Range.

During my time as warden at Avon Park Correctional Institution, I have had the opportunity to interact with four different base commanders, including Lieutenant Colonel Earle Thompson, Jr., the current commander. A spirit of cooperation and mutual respect has always existed between our agencies.

For over 43 years, the Department of Corrections and the Air Force have coexisted as good neighbors and friends. We have shared resources and personnel to accomplish our missions. In the past, utilizing inmate labor, we have assisted the Air Force, the Department of Natural Resources in completing numerous projects. Additionally, our agency provides security at the entrance gate. Our officers man this post 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

In the 1950's, the Department of Corrections was facing an overcrowding problem. To alleviate this over-crowding, the Department searched the State for possible prisonsites, finally selecting the former Federal Bureau of Prison facility located at Avon Park Air Force Base. The Federal prison was active until 1953 when it was closed. Since the Bureau of Prisons still held the lease, the State of Florida subleased the property in 1957 and the Avon Park Correctional Institution began.

For approximately 15 years, the State leased the property from the U.S. Government. In the early 1970's, the leased property was declared surplus and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, donated 143 acres to the State of Florida to use as a State prison. Shortly thereafter, the State purchased an additional 455 acres from the Federal Government.

In accepting the donated property, the State agreed to maintain the wastewater and potable water systems. It also agreed to provide road maintenance from the main gate through our property.

Mr. SHAYS. Got a little work on that area. [Laughter.]

Mr. LANDRESS. I am going to address that shortly.

Mr. SHAYS. OK.

Mr. LANDRESS. At one time, the State owned and maintained the electrical delivery system. Recently, we transferred ownership to the Peace River Electric Cooperative, who is now responsible for maintaining that system.

It should be noted that the attorneys from the Department of Corrections and the Air Force have begun a dialog to determine the Department's obligation as a result of the Federal Government donating the property.

Recently, Joel Anderson, our Department's Deputy Director of Administration and I met with Lieutenant Colonel Thompson to discuss several issues. At that time, Mr. Anderson indicated that our Department would set a priority to resurface the entrance road from the main gate through our property. In conversations with him a couple of days ago, he indicated that engineers have been hired to prepare bids and hopefully that process is moving along.

The Avon Park Correctional Institution is a major facility of the Florida Department of Corrections. From 1957 to 1978, the institution housed over 700 minimum custody inmates in 18 old dormitories which served as barracks during World War II. In 1977, a close custody unit was constructed to house 542 inmates.

In 1992, it became obvious to the Department that the antiquated buildings in the old unit had outlived their usefulness and a new facility was built and those were torn down.

For the protection of the public, people who work here at the range and our own staff who life on the property, our perimeter is encompassed by a double fence with eight rolls of razor ribbon on the inside of the outer fence, two rolls on top of the inner fence and two perimeter alert systems; one a microphonics system which is on the fence which detects motion and then we have a microwave system between the fences. We also maintain armed roving patrols.

There is currently one issue I think that all of us here would think would be a serious concern and that has to do with the bridge over Arbuckle Creek. We have discussed this issue with Congressman Putnam and this bridge is in a bad state of repair. Polk County technically owns the property, they provide minor repairs, but we are in an area that is away from Polk County. You have to come through Highlands County to get to this little nick of Polk County, but there is a lot of large semis, military vehicles, tankers. And one of these days, we are going to have a serious problem. I am not sure what this committee can do, but that problem needs to be addressed at some level.

In conclusion, I believe the Air Force Range is a model for land utilization. I hope that the subcommittee will continue to support the mission of the Air Force, as they attempt to expand, and all the other government agencies who utilize the property, as well as the thousands of citizens who use the property for recreational purposes.

I would like to thank you again for allowing me to share a few comments.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Landress follows:]

Testimony of Warden Dale Landress to
The Subcommittee on
National Security, Veterans Affairs and International Relations
Avon Park Air Force Range

August 4, 2001

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to this subcommittee and to Congressman Putnam for the invitation to testify concerning the interaction between the Avon Park Correctional Institution and the Avon Park Air Force Range.

Four months ago, I assumed the duties as warden of our correctional facility. This is my third tour of duty as Warden of Avon Park Correctional Institution, having served during 1985-87 and 1993-95. I have a good understanding and respect for the mission of our correctional facility as well as the mission of the Avon Park Air Force Range.

During my time as warden at Avon Park Correctional Institution, I have had the opportunity to interact with four different Base Commanders, including Lieutenant Colonel Earle Thompson, Jr., the current commander. A spirit of cooperation and mutual respect has always existed between our agencies.

For over forty-three years, the Florida Department of Corrections and the Air Force have co-existed as good neighbors and friends. We have shared resources and personnel to accomplish our missions. In the past, utilizing inmate labor, we have assisted the Air Force and the Department of Natural Resources in completing numerous projects. Additionally, our agency provides security at the entrance gate. Our officers man this post 24-hours a day, 7-days a week.

In the 1950's, the Florida Department of Corrections was facing overcrowding problems. To alleviate this overcrowding the Department searched the State for possible prison sites, finally selecting the former Federal Bureau of Prisons facility located on the Avon Park Air Force Base. The federal prison was active until 1953, when it closed. Since the Federal Bureau of Prisons still held the lease, the State of Florida sub-leased the property in 1957 and the Avon Park Correctional Institution began.

For approximately fifteen, (15) years, the State leased the property from the U. S. Government. In the early 1970's, the leased property was declared surplus and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare donated 143 acres to the State of Florida. Shortly thereafter, the State purchased an additional 455 acres from the Federal Government.

In accepting the donated property, the State agreed to maintain the wastewater and potable water systems. It also agreed to provide road maintenance from the main gate to the hanger area.

At one time, the State owned and maintained the electrical delivery system. Recently, we transferred ownership to Peace River Electric Cooperative who is now responsible for maintaining the system.

It should be noted that attorneys from the Department of Corrections and the Air Force have begun a dialogue to determine the Department's obligations as a result of the Federal Government donating the property.

Recently, Joel Anderson, our Department's Deputy Director of Administration and I met with Lieutenant Colonel Thompson to discuss several issues. At that time, Mr. Anderson indicated that our Department would set a priority to resurface the entrance road from the main gate to the Air Force hanger area.

The Avon Park Correctional Institution is a major facility of the Florida Department of Corrections. From 1957 to 1978, the institution housed over 700 minimum custody inmates in eighteen, (18) dormitories, which served as barracks during World War II. In 1977, a close custody unit was constructed to house 542 inmates. This unit included three, (3) two story, T-shaped dormitories, control room, kitchen and multi-treatment complex. By the early 1980's, the facility added an academic building, vocational building, tire recapping plant, furniture factory and a recreation building.

In 1992, it became obvious to the Department that the antiquated buildings in the old unit had outlived their usefulness. In early 1993, the buildings were demolished and three, (3) prototype 144 man open-bay dormitories were completed and occupied. In June of 1993, three, (3) more 144 man open-bay dormitories were constructed in the main unit.

For the protection of the public our perimeter is encompassed by a double-fence with eight, (8) rolls of razor ribbon on the inside of the outer fence, two, (2) rolls on top of the inner fence and two, (2) perimeter alert systems, which sound an alarm when the perimeter is breached. Additionally, we maintain armed roving patrols at all times.

There is currently one issue that is vitally important to all those who use the Avon Park Air Force Range. The bridge over Arbuckle Creek at the entrance to the property needs to be replaced. Polk County is responsible for maintaining the bridge and they have on numerous occasions performed minor repairs. I am seriously concerned that the bridge will one-day collapse. On a routine basis concrete trucks, tanker trucks, military vehicles and loaded semis use the bridge. I respectfully request the subcommittee to consider funding the construction of a new bridge.

In conclusion, I believe the Avon Park Air Force Range is a model for land utilization. I hope the subcommittee will continue to support the missions of the Air Force and all the government agencies who utilize the property, as well as the thousands of citizens who use the property for recreational purposes.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my thoughts with your subcommittee.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you, Mr. Landress.

Truth be told, this hearing is really a subterfuge to get us here to talk about making sure you maintain those roads well.

Mr. LANDRESS. Oh, I have been catching enough heat already, Congressman, I did not need you to come down here——

Mr. SHAYS. I mean I heard the words "set a priority," hopefully that process is moving along. I mean, those are dangerous words. I am teasing you.

Mr. LANDRESS. I know.

Mr. SHAYS. At this time, the Chair would recognize Mr. Putnam and we will proceed to have questions.

If you are curious, the way we do it back home when we have more Members, is we have a 5-minute rule for Members and we go to different Members. Sometimes we do the same rollover, 10 minutes. But given that we are in friendly country here, we are turning off the clock now, Mr. Putnam.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate the testimony of the witnesses. You can tell that we are outside of the beltway when people let their written statements stand as the only thing that they feel like they need to say. We appreciate the brevity.

Mr. Handley, as a city councilman—that is the hat that I would like you to put on for this question—the Department of Defense did an economic impact study for the range that estimates the economic impact on Highlands County to be nearly $70 million. Do you see that in the community? Do the merchants and businessmen feel the impact of the range and what is the sense of the neighborliness among the neighboring communities about the range?

Mr. HANDLEY. Traditionally, Congressman Putnam, Avon Park, the city of Avon Park, relied very heavily on the range when they were flying sorties every day from 8 until 10 p.m., and there was a lot of military people here. And the support in the community has been, in my opinion, great for the Avon Park Air Force Range and we look forward to continuing that and I think that it would be very beneficial to the local communities. And I think that it has—to Highlands County itself, yes, we welcome the activities.

Mr. PUTNAM. Is there a standing advisory committee or community relations committee that meets on a frequent basis between the military officials and the surrounding communities? Is there a group of Chamber folks that meet on a routine basis to talk about the future of the range?

Mr. HANDLEY. I would have to defer that question to the colonel.

Mr. PUTNAM. Colonel Thompson.

Lt ColTHOMPSON. There is not, that I am aware of, sir, a standing committee with the local governing authorities. However, we do have a standing committee that deals with environmental issues that includes people from as far north as Lake Wales and down into Sebring. And we had our last meeting at the Sebring Airport Authority's facility. We make sure—and they kind of help us as a watchdog, if you will, to make sure that we are complying with all the environmental concerns we have here.

Mr. PUTNAM. Mr. Olsen, I believe you stated in your testimony, but how much in outside revenue does the range generate through its environmental stewardship activities?

Mr. OLSEN. The total program generates about $800,000 from the three programs.

Mr. PUTNAM. That is generated onsite.

Mr. OLSEN. On site, correct.

Mr. PUTNAM. That is not Pentagon money, that is not DOD money.

Mr. OLSEN. No, that is exactly what is brought into—from the sale of timber, permits for hunting, fishing, camping, things like that and revenue we get like from Mr. Handley for leasing native lands for grazing.

Mr. PUTNAM. And does all of that stay here or does it get sent back to Washington?

Mr. OLSEN. No, it does not get sent back to Washington. Every program is a little bit different how they deal with the money; but generally yes, the money does go back to the program.

Mr. PUTNAM. So the money generated here through these multiple use management arrangements are put back into the property.

Mr. OLSEN. Generally speaking; yes, sir. They usually go back—in our case, they will go up to Langley Air Force Base or they are distributed for the next year's budget.

Mr. PUTNAM. OK. Now Colonel Golden, the guardsmen who train here at the range, are they mostly from units that are from central and south Florida?

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. Yes, sir, pretty much.

Mr. PUTNAM. So how much do they save in maintenance and gas and time if you are only dealing with a weekend training window by not having to drive to Camp Blanding?

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. Sir, depending on the location of the unit, if it is—particularly units that are located down in the Miami area, they save approximately—coming to Avon Park versus going to Camp Blanding—probably about 6 hours of windshield time. Of course the fuel consumption is of course a plus, but primarily the other thing that we really appreciate about being able to be down here is the fact that you do not have troops out driving on the road, that is additional safety problems that you have got too. So it is less wear and tear on the equipment and a lot more training time.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you.

Colonel Thompson, the range, as evidenced by the testimony, appears to have a good working relationship with its neighbors and with the different governmental entities that come into play when you are managing these types of encroachment issues. How have you been able to work on the airspace issue with the FAA and the surrounding airports? Where do you see that relationship heading?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Well I think we have, as I previously stated, a very good relationship with the FAA and the local airports in the area. My deputy, Mr. Cutshell, has been the airspace manager for this area on the military side for quite awhile. He has a very good personal relationship with the people——

Mr. SHAYS. Colonel, is your mic on?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. I believe it is.

Mr. SHAYS. Just pull it a little closer.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. And that has allowed us to have this real time system we have when we utilize the range airspace. In addition, Mr. Mike Willingham down at the Sebring Airport, they are in the process of looking at possible expansion down there and possibly putting in an additional runway. Early on, they brought us into the planning process to discuss that with them because, depending on how they are going to lay out that particular runway could significantly have some impact on the southern portion of our range, in the MOA area, the military operating area to the south. But they had the foresight to bring us in early on that and make sure we address those issues before they get too far along in the planning process.

Mr. PUTNAM. When you view the utilization of this range on a 365-day basis where are some areas where you can increase utilization, what types of training missions best fit this range's profile, and what impact do you think the potential closing of Vieques would have on the mission here?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Well, as far as our training opportunities right now, as has been previously stated, I think Mr. Handley said it, when MacDill had an F–16 training base there, the range was much more utilized than it is now. There has been some additional units in the last few years that have shut down, most notably the fighter wing at Moody is no longer there, there is now a rescue wing there. And we are training with the rescue element there but we do not have the fighter sorties coming down here that we had previously. We have air time and range time right now that if the Navy were to enter into talks with us, we could certainly discuss with them and we are ready to discuss with them the opportunities for them to utilize our range and our airspace. It is just a matter of working out the details with them and as long as it fits in our range mission and our environmental concerns, we should be able to accommodate most of their training here.

Mr. PUTNAM. Are you geographically situated for carrier-based forces to train here?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. We feel we are, sir. They could set a carrier in the Atlantic or the Gulf of Mexico and access the range either through high level ingresses at altitude or we have approximately 14 low level routes that terminate on the Avon Park Air Force Range and they could enter it that way. So we do not feel coming in from either coast would be a problem for them.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you, Colonel.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SHAYS. I thank the gentleman. I have a number of questions that I would like to ask. I would like to first start with you, Colonel Thompson and ask, the utilization of the range right now, can you quantify it? Is it used 10 percent of the time, is it used—you know, how would you quantify the usage right now?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. It is kind of difficult to do that, sir. I will give you a round-about answer on that.

Mr. SHAYS. OK.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. In 1992, when we closed the F–16 training unit at MacDill, the utilization went down tremendously on this range. And that is what Air Combat Command kind of looks at

when they talk about the utilization on this range. But what you have got to take into account there also is post-Desert Storm, we were in a drawdown mode so throughout the combat air forces in the Air Force, there has been a utilization drop in all the ranges. This range had a fairly dramatic drop and I would say we are probably operating now about 15 to 20 percent of the level we were operating at when MacDill had a training unit there. I may be off on that, but that is off the top of my head.

Mr. SHAYS. I tell people that being a Member of Congress is like being asked to go to a large university, take every course and get a passing grade. Every day we learn new things and one of the things that I had not thought of, we are over-utilized in the number of bases that we have and that is a waste of resources. But my sense is that if we come to grips with that, then there are more resources for the places that we have open, but what you are saying to me is that what happens to neighboring bases obviously impact you in this facility.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. But one of the things about this facility that is somewhat unique is that you do have a fairly large footprint and you do not have some of the encroachment problems that exist elsewhere. So I did not know what to expect, I did not know if coming down here we would hear a lot of cautious words about let us be careful what we do here.

The message that seems to be pretty loud and clear from the panel and even from people I have spoken with privately, this is an under-utilized facility, it could be used better and you would like to see that happen.

During certain times, does it get pretty intense here? I mean are there—when you have a training activity going on, is the mood in the area a little different?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Yes, sir. In October, we are going to have a large combat search and rescue training exercise here that will basically take over the range for 2 weeks. It will be not 24 hours a day, but it will run much more than our normal range schedule. We have those kind of things that happen occasionally, we host National Guard units occasionally. Part of my unit is a deployed unit complex at MacDill. We can bring a fighter unit into our ramp over at MacDill and allow them to use the Whiskey 168, which is a warning area over the Gulf to the west of MacDill and then also they can turn around and come 15 minutes in this direction and utilize Avon Park Range. So we really feel like we have got a one stop shop in that regard for training.

But right now, those would be the exceptions. We have the opportunity to increase that kind of training here.

Mr. SHAYS. Going to you, Mr. Landress, you used a word that concerned me but was a very honest word and it was the word "surplus" and then the State basically stepped in to take advantage of this "surplus" space. It seems to me that there is a compatible use here. I mean the prison system does appear to work in harmony with the other needs, as obviously the prison system is far enough away.

But my sense is that over time, we are going to consider range space like this with a large footprint a very valued place and we

are not going to want to be reckless in terms of calling something surplus, even if at present it seems to be under-utilized. Even if this system was not fully utilized for a long time, it represents a reserve that we should, I think, hopefully protect and I hope that the military does not begin to see edges of it as surplus, which kinds of gets me to the whole issue of the FAA.

If Sebring is expanded as it will be, and other local airports, what are the implications of how that will impact the freedom of the military to do their exercises without too much restraint in coordination with FAA?

Mr. LISZT. I think the first thing the Colonel spoke to was the runway configuration, if it is designated properly. And predominantly in Florida, as most of us know, the winds are southeast-northwest in thunderstorm activity and fronts. So if they correctly align——

Mr. SHAYS. Just a little louder.

Mr. LISZT. If they correct align those runways, they will not touch the lateral limits of the current designated space.

Mr. SHAYS. Because we are basically having aircraft come in directly in line with the——

Mr. LISZT. And it will permit you a downwind on the other side of the airport, away from the range.

Mr. SHAYS. But the position of the airfield landing area is extraordinarily, is your term.

Mr. LISZT. The alignment, yes.

Mr. SHAYS. The alignment.

Mr. LISZT. Yes, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. In Connecticut, literally we try to fly them—when they come into LaGuardia, we bank them to come over the Sound, but straight alignment, they come right along the coastal towns. Is this something—let me come back to you, Colonel Thompson—is this something that the Air Force is going to pay close attention to or is this something that could happen, in that before we know it, we are put at a disadvantage?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Well, I believe that in Sebring's instance, they are out at the forefront of this issue. They are a number of years yet from breaking ground and pouring concrete for a new runway, but early on, they wanted to make sure that we were not going to have encroachment issues and that our training would not be affected by instrument approaches into their airfield.

Mr. SHAYS. We have Colonel Wheeless, who is here, who is your supervisor, he has nine of these facilities to manage. Colonel Wheeless, I would just like it if you could just stand up so people could see you here, if anyone wants to ask you a question.

[Colonel Wheeless rises.]

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you.

Colonel, I am just concerned that, you know, you get a promotion, you go somewhere else, Colonel Wheeless goes to other activities. Is there something that is written down that says to your replacement or Colonel Wheeless' replacement, you know, if Sebring is expanded, this is something that we have to pay close attention to, or is it so obvious that I do not even need to be concerned about it?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. That is a valid concern, sir. The beauty of the operation here at Avon Park Range, out of the whole unit, there are only four military members in my Command. Everybody else is Civil Service, and so we have a continuity here at this range. I have got people here in the employ of Avon Park Range that have been here, like Mr. Olsen, for 24 years or longer and so these issues will not easily get dropped.

Mr. SHAYS. Colonel Golden, you said something that would be obvious to someone else, but I am—our committee is kind of getting into this issue. You talked about travel time. In my simple mind, I just think of the amount of time it takes a plane to get here. Describe the other support that you need to—I guess they take the highway here?

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. Yes, sir. And it is troops not only from the southern part of the State but also from the Orlando area all the way over to Tampa. Just the savings in dollars to the taxpayers that we do not have to spend using additional fuel requirements, maintenance costs on vehicles is critical to us.

Mr. SHAYS. Is your mic on?

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. Yes, sir, I believe so. Without pulling the table off——

Mr. SHAYS. It will not go any further—good judgment.

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. Yes, sir. The other thing, sir, with the Florida Guard, what I want to see happen with Avon Park over the years is that I believe they are in a unique position, just because of the size of the base. I have got 20 something years in combined arms stuff and Colonel Thompson has got a nasty little secret, he was actually in the Army before he got in the Air Force, so—[laughter]—we still treat him the same, but——

Mr. SHAYS. Well, it ain't a secret now, is it? [Laughter.]

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. I get that $20 from him later—but for us, it is going to remain critical because of just the cost of the budget, the budget is downsizing. And the other part is if we go through another round of base closures——

Mr. SHAYS. We will go through another round, we have to.

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. Yes, sir, in 2003. When you reduce the number of available sites to train, and you do not reduce the force structure or size, you have to have some place to go to train because it becomes compacted. And I think Avon Park in the future is going to have an opportunity to take some of that compaction and spread it out down here for not just the Navy or the Air Force, but for all branches. You should see an increase in the number of just combined branches of the service coming here to train all the time.

Mr. SHAYS. One thing that is fairly clear to me, that even when you close down some bases and you allow the State or the local community to consider it surplus property that they should purchase, we do not want to do that to our ranges, because we may come back—even if a range—and this is not just a hearing on what happens at Avon Park, it is a hearing about what happens in all our potential ranges. But if some range is ultimately so under-utilized as to not be deemed cost effective to keep it open, I think Congress—and this is something I would like the staff to take a good look at—that should be warehoused space because we may come back years later and say, you know, we need this place.

One of the things that I think that Adam can share with you as well as I can, the longer we are in this position, the more people in the military, active and the Reserves and the National Guard and veterans, the more sensitized we become to the extraordinary gratitude we feel for our military and for their service. But the obligation that we have to make sure they never go into battle without superior equipment, the best training in the world and the most realistic training. And to give them superior equipment without the training is just a dereliction of our duty. So we just need to make sure we have the sites.

I would love to just ask you, Mr. Handley—I feel a little more affinity toward you only because you are a politician—[laughter]—you may not want to acknowledge that in this community, but you are, be proud of it.

Describe to me, if you would—not to bring controversy in here, but there must be constituents who say, you know, I like the open territory, I like the hunting, I like the fishing, I like the open space, I do not appreciate the noise or I am concerned that this could become much more active. They like it the way it is. Are there constituents that you have like that and what is the tradeoff that you see happening here?

Mr. HANDLEY. There are constituents who—and property owners on the north and south side and friends of mine, who graze cattle, do business with Avon Park, live in communities adjoining, under the flight patterns, and mostly, in my opinion, the people who have been here for a number of years appreciate the military and they would like for the land use regulations to remain the same, they would like to see continued public recreation, they would like to see continued hunting, research and those things. And as I wrote in my statement, the flight annoyance and noise associated with military training versus the assurance of a well-trained and competent military, I think most of the constituents in this area will choose a well-trained military to keep our great country free. You have, in my opinion, a very loyal bunch of people around Avon Park and in Highlands County.

Mr. SHAYS. So there is some pride that this facility exists here and that they are contributing very clearly to our national defense?

Mr. HANDLEY. Yes, sir, that is my opinion.

Mr. SHAYS. One of the places we are going to later is to Vieques and I have been there once. It is an extraordinarily important site because it is the one area on the east coast where we can do land assault, sea assault as well as air assault, and even from the sea, the use of submarines. So it is an ideal site and it has been heartbreaking for me to have this become such a nationalistic issue on the part of our friends in Puerto Rico, who do not realize what a valued site this is and the pride they should feel that they are in fact contributing to the national defense. All of our pilots who went to Vietnam from the east coast trained at that facility. So I am grateful to know that you have a sense that your constituents have a sense of pride about this facility.

Mr. HANDLEY. Yes, sir. The only thing that some of the constituents have relayed to me is occasionally there will be some ordnance that falls off one of these airplanes and maybe the Colonel can address that because he is more attuned to the type of ordnance that

these planes carry, but occasionally a piece of ordnance will fall off on private property and most of the times, the ordnance that is currently used on the bombing range is not HE or high explosive.

If the proposed mission is for the use of high explosive ordnance, then the constituency of Highlands County would probably have a different opinion.

Mr. SHAYS. See, what happened in Vieques was you had a young man who was killed. The implication was that he was in the village 9 miles away, that is the way the press reported it. He was actually on the observationsite and there were two planes and, as you obviously, most people know, they cannot go after the target until they have been cleared from the observationsite. But the two planes cleared, which was a breaking of the policy, without the observation deck knowing. So they cleared the first plane and the second plane was targeted right on the observationsite, thinking he was cleared.

But any one tragedy can change the dynamics of acceptance. So a bomb landing on a farmer's field or a rancher's field, would not be, with high explosives, too appreciated.

I am going to come back to you in 1 second. Let me just ask you this question though. I have often wondered why you would even need to have a high explosive. I mean, other than—it would seem to me that as long as they know they have hit the mark, as long as they are using a weapon that is totally balanced the way a real weapon—a total high explosive weapon—is balanced with all the dynamics, why would you need at times to practice with extraordinarily high explosives?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. You can practice with inert weapons, concrete filled bombs that provide just about all of the training, but it is like going out and hunting. Shooting a blank is not going to get you anything.

Mr. SHAYS. But in other words, so you have some explosive to it, but—I do understand that. But as long as you have a minimal amount to show the explosion, to show that it happened——

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. There are some planning considerations that go into planning actual employment of live weapons, especially as you employ at lower altitudes that need to be practiced from time to time.

Mr. SHAYS. Are you saying even just loading the plane——

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Not only for the pilots but for the weaponeers, the guys who actually physically buildup the bombs and the fuses and then load them onto the aircraft. There is training that is involved there that they cannot receive as realistically with inert ordnance.

Mr. SHAYS. Are you saying that even for a pilot to have an inert ordnance, the feeling they have versus having a very high explosive weapon on board is——

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. It is different. You know that you are not going to hurt yourself past a certain altitude, you do not know that, you know that you have to completely honor the explosive capability of that weapon and the potential for ricochets also when it explodes. And it brings a certain different sense when you are dropping high explosive weapons.

Right now in Air Combat Command, we only require our pilots in single seat business anyway, that I am most familiar with, to drop high explosive weapons once a year. And generally we train with inert ordnance other than that.

Mr. SHAYS. So you are saying at least once a year, pilots need to experience what it is like to use the actual weapon with the detonation capability that exists in the actual weapon.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Yes, sir, that would be my experience.

Mr. SHAYS. I hear you. Colonel Golden, anything to add to that?

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. Yes, sir. In fact, today, our Apache Battalion out of Craig Field in Jacksonville will be down here today firing high explosives with Hellfire missiles, which is anti-armory. And it is—right now, this is the only place in the State of Florida that we can do it.

Mr. SHAYS. I know how we could raise a lot of money. Just allow the public to watch it. High liability, but it would be darned interesting.

Lt. Col. GOLDEN. But you just want to be as far away from it as you can with binoculars.

Mr. SHAYS. I understand, I understand.

OK, thank you for your patience, Mr. Putnam, you have the floor.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Olsen, as we have conducted these hearings about ranges and facilities all over the country, and really all over the world, there are several issues that come up. When we are talking about international facilities in Puerto Rico, Okinawa, some parts of Japan, there is just a certain level of nationalism and anti-Americanism and other issues to deal with when we are on other people's soil. On American soil, you have issues of encroachment. Subdivisions who buildup over time, new people move in, do not appreciate the noise, do not have the same sense of community pride. And environmental regulations. The Marines have a substantial swatch of coastline on the Pacific coast of California at Camp Pendleton. They have to adjust their amphibious training maneuvers around the mating habits of a particular bird.

You have testified that we have 40,000 user days at this range from sportsmen, world class Osceola turkey hunting, you manage a $20 million timber inventory and you generate $800,000 a year in revenue from the leasing and the timber and related multiple use issues.

Is it your—do you believe that those in any way detract from the primary mission of this facility of preparing soldiers and pilots for their mission in combat?

Mr. OLSEN. Generally speaking, I do not think it detracts from it much at all. I think we can accommodate all users out here and we can have the recreation, we can have the camping, hunting, fishing, timber operations and still have the military operations out here. The military needs to be compatible. In some situations where we do have some wetlands and they are extremely wet or we do have certain endangered species that, you know, maybe we do not need to train right here, but guess what, we can train over here. There are enough acres out here to where I think we can be compatible with all the different users out here, and sometimes they need maybe to adjust themselves and not just say well, that

is the only place we can do it. Well, maybe there are some other places out there which are also compatible that we can also accommodate all parties. I think in most situations it is. I would say with my operation, I deal with forest management——

Mr. SHAYS. Could the gentleman yield for just 1 second?

Mr. OLSEN. Certainly.

Mr. SHAYS. I am unclear as to who your direct employer is. Is it the Air Force or is it the——

Mr. OLSEN. I am the Air Force; yes, sir. I am a civilian employee with the Air Force.

Mr. SHAYS. OK.

Mr. OLSEN. I am in charge of the forest management program out here.

Mr. SHAYS. OK.

Mr. OLSEN. Part of the Environmental Flight.

My program, forest management, if not done properly, it can be extremely disruptive. We are able to come out here and manage timber resources, vital resources this country needs, and be compatible with the endangered species and the sensitive wetlands and things like that we have out here. You know, every year we will move out 800 trucks, anywhere between 70,000 to 80,000 pounds of timber coming out. Plus we have large shears out there, skidders, and we are able to work with our botanist and the biologists and accommodate them, to satisfy them that we are not so-called stepping on their toes, on their little piece of the pie here that they have.

Mr. PUTNAM. Of the 106,000 acres that comprise the range 56 percent have been designated exemplary environmental condition by the Natural Areas Inventory?

Mr. OLSEN. That is correct.

Mr. PUTNAM. The Natural Areas Inventory, that is a State program run through the preservation program.

Mr. OLSEN. That is correct.

Mr. PUTNAM. That is not an arm of the Air Force, they have solid environmental credentials in making these evaluations.

Mr. OLSEN. We have them come out here and inventory our property. Same thing with the wetlands too, we hired contractors to come here and delineate all our wetlands on the property.

Mr. PUTNAM. So even the areas that are routinely shelled, have Hellfire missiles shot at them, have inert bombs dropped on them, they still remain an exemplary environmental——

Mr. OLSEN. Well some of the areas. Now maybe where they are shooting the Hellfire missiles may not be, but a lot of the other habitat——

Mr. PUTNAM. At least for a few weeks.

Mr. OLSEN. Some of our other habitats, we have grasshoppers, sparrows on the ranges, we have red cockaded woodpeckers, things like that, and they are able to exist in harmony with the ranges.

Of course you have got to look at the ranges, the actual impact areas, what they actually drop on, is usually not that large. Most of it is just all buffered area in many situations. They do not bomb out here on 20,000 acres, they only use small little places where they actually—and most of the bombs are inert anyhow, the only ones are the Hellfires.

Mr. PUTNAM. Could you elaborate on the larger area when you talk about the buffer zones, how many acres adjacent to the range are in some kind of a conservation management program and who manages those and how do they integrate with the flora and fauna at the range?

Mr. OLSEN. You mean outside the Air Force property or——

Mr. PUTNAM. Yes, you have adjacent State forests and conservation areas. When you talk about the greater public lands area, how much area are we talking about?

Mr. OLSEN. I could not give you an exact figure off the top of my head. You know Avon Park Air Force Range is 106,000 acres, so if you want to make comparisons to there, we are talking almost double that, maybe another 106,000–100,000 acres outside.

Mr. PUTNAM. And those are all essentially State-owned property, either through Water Management or——

Mr. OLSEN. Water Management Districts or something like that. They have generally been purchased through Preservation 2000 funds, most of them.

Mr. PUTNAM. So the environmental footprint, the wildlife habitat areas, the wildlife corridor, is vastly greater even than 106,000 acres.

Mr. OLSEN. That is correct. That is what made Avon Park so significant, is because we had such a unique environmental community here. The big thing, what they are looking to do now is they want to expand, they want big large tracts of land. So purchasing everything around Avon Park became critical.

Mr. PUTNAM. So would that be then a target for one of the State land purchasing programs? Do they have their eye on 106,000 acre contiguous parcel in the middle of a ridge, scrub habitat?

Mr. OLSEN. If the Air Force decided to get rid of it, there would be people waiting in line. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service would like to have it maybe, the State of Florida.

Mr. PUTNAM. So there are those people out there then who would like to see the training component removed and make it an environmental reserve.

Mr. OLSEN. I should not say that, I think a lot of them just happen to leave it the way it is and let the Air Force do the management on it. Most regulatory agencies are extremely happy with the way we manage the property. If you read my report, we do not have them looking over our shoulder and critiquing our every movement. We hire a lot of outside contractors, local and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, we use Archibald Biological Station, we use these contractors to give us research data on these species we have out there. So we work in a team effort with that.

Now we have unique situations, we may get some direct consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. This happened recently, 6 or 8 months ago, we had extreme wildfire out there in some red cockaded habitat and we had some of those people come down and I got together with the biologist and their biologist and we went out in the field and we looked at the impact this may have about possibly salvaging some of the wood, what we could take out, what we may want to plant back. So it is more of a cooperative effort. I have sort of heard from the agency that they would like Avon Park to stay the way it is, let the Air Force take care of it

because you have the dollars to maintain it. You know, even if the Fish & Wildlife Service did get ahold of this place, a lot of times they just do not have the funds to manage it the way the Air Force is doing it.

Mr. PUTNAM. Neither does the State.

Mr. Handley, you mentioned a couple of potential impacts of the range, the noise factor and local economic development impact, jobs and things of that nature. Does the fact that there is these large buffer zones around the range mean that essentially for the long term, for the foreseeable future, Highlands County's noise issues would be mitigated by having those buffer zones around the range?

Mr. HANDLEY. I would say generally speaking, yes. But from the area south of us in Lorida, that is one of the low altitude—I believe that is one of the low altitude corridors. I know there are not a lot of people that live in Lorida, but you know, they are constituents.

Mr. PUTNAM. I see a few of them out there.

Mr. OLSEN. Yeah, there are a few of them out there. Commissioner Stokes, one of our county commissioners, is here with us today and he might could address that issue more than I could. And our neighbors to the north along Highway 60 and one of the air corridors that go up over Lake Kissimmee is one of the low altitude corridors that approach the range.

That is about really all I have to say.

Mr. PUTNAM. Colonel Thompson, we hear a lot about these environmental concerns and the additional precautions and preparations that the base commanders have to take. You have an impressive stockpile of troop carriers out there for potential targets and F–4 shells and Sikorski helicopters. You take——

Mr. SHAYS. That is very sensitive for me because we make Sikorski helicopters just outside my district and we just do not like to ever see them shot at. [Laughter.]

Mr. PUTNAM. That is just one more they have to buy.

Mr. SHAYS. Good point. Actually, we like it, we like it.

Mr. PUTNAM. You have got to drain the fuel tanks, drain all the hydraulic fluid, drain all the oil plans out of these large pieces of equipment. How many manhours does it take to prepare a target to meet your environmental regulations and do you believe that the environmental restrictions placed on this mission are backed by sound science and are in an equilibrium?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. I think we proved that they are backed by sound science. It has cost us a shift in the way we operate in the last 15 years. We did not worry about hydraulic fluid leaking into the ground and things of that nature 15, 20 years ago. In addition to those things you have mentioned, we also have to remove the batteries from those and dispose of them, which is not a cheap operation. I would guess, and this is a guess because I have not physically watched them do it, but I would venture to say we probably spend close to 100 manhours per vehicle to prepare them to become a target out there. It takes a team of people to do that and it will take a couple of days to do it, so I could easily see 100 manhours per vehicle—per target of that type, which is one of the reasons we are shifting toward some of our more environmentally safe targets, although we like the realism and will continue to use the excess personnel carriers and other things that we can get our hands on.

Mr. PUTNAM. I know that members of the audience have heard about $600 toilet seats and $40 wrenches and $4000 hammers and things like that. Could you elaborate on ways that—we have heard from Mr. Olsen how you use multiple use management to generate the dollars to hire wildland fire fighters and biologists and things of that nature. On the targeting side, could you elaborate on some things that you all are doing to keep costs down, that are environmentally sound and are stretching out these ever-shrinking defense dollars?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Well, obviously, first off, the targets that we have out there now, we try to utilize them as long as they remain viable targets and present a recognizable target in the area. And then and only then do we pull them off the range and then have to dispose of them as residue, which is another program in and of itself.

But I have a supply person who works here in our organization, who I feel went above and beyond the call of duty and she found an avenue to allow us to obtain at no cost to the government some excess decommissioned, if you will, sea/land containers. And we are utilizing those now to build target arrays with. They were delivered here free of cost to us, the only cost we have had is some small painting costs to paint them to look proper and paint windows on them and then we bought some premade roof trusses and threw some 4 by 8 sheets of plywood on top of that to make roofs out of them and we have been able to configure them in different shapes to build an urban target array on one of our ranges. So for the cost of about, so far, around $10,000 to $12,000, we have been able to build a fairly nice target array and will continue to expand on that.

I am sure once somebody figures out we are utilizing them, then we will not be able to get them as cheaply as we have so far, but we have got just over 200 sitting out there now.

Mr. PUTNAM. You mentioned the urban warfare target array, as we shift the focus of the entire military, not just this range, away from the traditional sight bomber scenario and we get into more complicated situations, urban warfare zones as we have seen in central Europe, how has this range evolved and adjusted to meet the changing needs of the training requirements for the personnel? And could you elaborate some more on that urban center?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Certainly. If I can backtrack just a little bit. One thing this range has always prided itself on, if a user, somebody who wants to utilize this range, will tell us the type target arrays they would like, we will do everything we can to build that particular array for them. I will give you a particular instance.

In the previous couple of years, Aviano has not been able to train the fighter wing there, the 31st Wing at Aviano, S–16 wing. They have not been able to train in Italy to the full extent they would like. This year, we have not seen them, but the two previous years to this year, we had a month long deployment of a squadron from Aviano come over here. They told us the type target arrays they would like to see, we built them for them before they ever arrived and had them out there. And that greatly enhanced their capability to drop precision-guided munitions like laser-guided bombs.

That is one of the reasons we are building the urban target array. As we move into peacekeeping type operations and other

issues like we have seen in Bosnia, the targets are not like they were in Desert Storm where you have got the republican guard entrenched out in the desert and bunkered up and where we could go do our tank clinking. We are finding targets that are out sitting beside government buildings in towns or beside houses and that takes a particular type of training, because even though we are dropping those bombs from 20,000 to 25,000 feet, you have got to train properly to put that laser on the spot to enable the bomb to hit it and there are issues involved there with lasing that you do not want to mask the laser spot by having a building between you and the target. So there are a lot of different things you need to train to, to perfect that ability and be ready to do it when our national command authority calls on us to do that.

So we are trying to construct those type target arrays that will enable us to better train in that regard.

Mr. PUTNAM. Mr. Liszt, Florida is growing rapidly, we have 600 to 700 new residents per day that come down here. We have tremendous challenges in our commercial airports, Tampa International Airport is in the process of greatly expanding their capacity, Orlando, Miami, Hardee County is in the process of trying to lure a major commercial airport there.

As these growth patterns continue, the peninsula is only so big, will we be able to continue through your real time airspace management strategy to maintain essentially a protected hole in the sky as large as this range requires, 10, 15, 25 years down the road?

Mr. LISZT. Yes, I believe we will. And the way that will happen is with the near real time and new automated equipment. Currently, we have in every one of our en route air traffic control centers a traffic management unit that knows where every airplane in the sky is, time estimates and controls the flow of those through the command center.

Florida, unlike most of the rest of the country, runs north-south. So we in Florida are procedurally designed around the area we are speaking of. Where there might be an impact is how high these missions require, should they change. If they go up very high, then we are going to affect the traffic that runs east-west across Florida. So that would be the impact. There is enough space to get around south, we are looking at a fourth runway at Orlando and new arrival fixes to the east coming out over the ocean. We are looking at reduced vertical separation over the ocean, so I think we will see more traffic over the ocean and the Gulf of Mexico in the future.

Mr. SHAYS. Let me just interrupt the gentleman just for a second, if he would yield. We have two individuals who would like to address the committee. I would also say that whoever addresses the committee, if they would like, could address question to the panel. We will ask the panel to stay, if they would like that.

Right now, we have two, and we are happy to just have two. We are not looking to encourage someone else, but anyone else who would like to speak, there are these forms. The two we have right now, the forms will be brought to you—Robert Babis has requested, and Alec Fulford. If there is anyone else—Jason over there is passing out the forms and we will be using a live mic, so you will be able to address the committee in a statement and address a question to the panel if you would like.

I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that.

Colonel, do you see down the road the future of aviation tactics and strategic weaponry—is there going to be a need to raise that ceiling for ranges such as this? Is that the direction that the technology is moving, is that going to be an issue that we are going to have a hearing in 12 or 15 years to address the fact that 31,000 feet is inadequate?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. I think for the foreseeable future, the next 15 to 20 years, 31,000 will be adequate. We do not routinely use 31,000 day to day, but we do it when we have large exercises, when we are bringing in large fighter packages, we need the airspace then to coordinate all that.

Generally speaking, we employ our ordnance below 25,000, but the potential to have that, we need to keep that and protect that, but I do not see us expanding above that. What we currently have, I think will be adequate.

Mr. PUTNAM. Is that fairly standard for ranges around the country?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. No, it is not. In fact, 10 years ago, I do not believe we had up to 31,000 on an as-needed basis. That has been a development in that timeframe.

Mr. PUTNAM. So you have more space than average?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. We do.

Mr. PUTNAM. More vertical airspace.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Correct.

Mr. PUTNAM. We are, again, in a better position than some other ranges in terms of the encroachments.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Many ranges are capped at 18,000 foot and below, some lower than that, but 23,000 is probably about the highest most of them go without other special use airspace above that.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SHAYS. I thank the gentleman. I just have a few other questions.

I would like to know, Colonel Thompson, what happens when there is a misplaced bomb, either inert or not, that—what do you do with it, do you track it down, do you—I mean——

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. We have got very set procedures on when we can arm up our weapons system and generally speaking you have to be over range property proper to arm up a system to allow a bomb to come off the aircraft. Now occasionally we will have stray electrons that run through airplanes because of a maintenance malfunction that will allow a weapon to come off unintended, without anybody pushing the button or when you throw a switch that it should not cause a bomb to come off. That is very rare, we have not had a bomb come off outside this range in quite awhile and as soon as we do that, the pilots advise us of that. It is back to a basic integrity issue then. We expect them to notify us of that. Hopefully it was seen to come off and we are able to pinpoint the location, but generally speaking, the targets we have, we know the area they will be flying over to employ that ordnance and we are able to track that down. If it occurs off range, then we are going to send a team out there first off to find that piece of ordnance, whether it is live or inert, and then we are going to make sure that it has

not damaged any civilian property and we are going to cordon it off and have our emergency ordnance disposal team come out and make sure that the weapon is safe and then remove it.

Mr. SHAYS. The sea/land containers that you were able to purchase are basically containers that somehow have lost their integrity to be precisely measured and fitted in, so they are of no use obviously to shipping companies. You have answered a question that I have often wondered, why I see six stories worth of containers stacked in Newark, NJ. One of my staff suggested that since we have such precise ability to hit the target, we could just leave them right where they are and—[laughter]—but that not being feasible——

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. I am sure there would be other issues there, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. Yes. But it does make me wonder if we have a best business practice policy that would make sure that your success in your space with obtaining these is shared with not just the rest of the Air Force, obviously Colonel Wheeless knows about what you are doing, but I am just wondering if there are not other—the other branches that do have sites, if they should not be made aware of this. I am wondering if you have made an effort to share this with other facilities.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. We have made an effort in Air Combat Command to do that. We have not with our sister services and that is certainly something that we need to pursue.

Mr. SHAYS. Yes. I love the competition truly among the branches, so if you were to tell the Army about this, they would consider you a traitor, you would just get hit again a second time.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Probably, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. OK, well, with the power vested in me, please feel free to do it.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. OK. I have no power to have you do that, but it is a suggestion. [Laughter.]

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. I understand.

Mr. SHAYS. But one of the things that, for instance, this committee may do in our report is suggest that this practice be pursued very quickly. One thing I know I want in the report fairly quickly is I do not want our ranges being viewed as surplus property without a tremendous amount of long-term planning. Obviously some smaller ranges may not have the capability to continue, but a jewel like this facility, we do not want to start having—and it seems to me that the success, Mr. Olsen, you are having working with your Command to utilize the facility to also—you do not handle, or do you, the whole issue of the campers. You are just totally with the forest side, the hunters and so on.

Mr. OLSEN. Yes, that is correct. But I am familiar with the program.

Mr. SHAYS. But would that be handled out of your—directly out of your office?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. We have a separate group of people in the organization that handle our camping and recreational hunting and they do a very good job for us, but it is a separate section of the Environmental Flight.

Mr. SHAYS. It just seems like it is a win-win. I mean as long as—I know the sense of when your constituents, Mr. Handley, will start to complain is when if for some reason we saw, you know, do not trespass signs going up and not being able to utilize it, then the whole success of what you have been able to achieve will go down the drain.

I do not really have other questions. Mr. Landress, I would—except for this—I am interested to know if the personnel that you have, the inmates, and are you also involved with the younger inmates or that is a different area.

Mr. LANDRESS. That is a different area.

Mr. SHAYS. But I know that some of the public sometimes wonders why we should let people in corrections facilities produce a product that competes with the private sector. But I just have a hope and a prayer that people who are in prisons are made good use of and develop skills and ultimately can leave those facilities as a contributor to society, not a cost. I am just interested if you have worked with this range to see if there are ways that your inmates can be utilized to provide a service.

Mr. LANDRESS. Well, we have inmate work squads who do contribute to natural resources, we recently built walkways and assisted in building bird houses that they use on the range.

Mr. SHAYS. OK.

Mr. LANDRESS. So our inmates do a lot of work. We do have our own industry program there where we have a tire recapping plant that sells mostly to the counties for school buses. We have a sanitary supply operation where we provide all cleaning supplies for State government. This is a big pride operation here in Florida. So we do utilize the inmates. Of course, many of them are trusty levels that do not permit us to let them outside.

Mr. SHAYS. I understand that.

Mr. LANDRESS. But we do have a work camp where we have 200 or 300 inmates who are at the level that we can permit to go into the community to work on our Department of Transportation and around the base here.

Mr. SHAYS. And when Mr. Putnam invites me down again to have another hearing or to see something in his Congressional District and I come here and I drive on those roads, we are going to know they are all taken care of and the obligations of the State are——

Mr. LANDRESS. We will either have that road built or I will be retired. [Laughter.]

Mr. SHAYS. Well, I hope you do not retire.

Mr. PUTNAM. We are going to do our part for the bridge.

Mr. SHAYS. Now is there any—I said I had one more question and I really digressed slightly. I do have one last question that is kind of broad, but would any of you like to address this question—what do you see as the long term potential for Avon Park Range as a training facility, a recreation facility or for other uses? Would any of you like to—why do we not start with you, Colonel Thompson.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. I would be happy to make a stab at that, sir.

I think long term we have the capacity here to handle more training than we currently handle. We also have the ability to have

our recreation use continue in its present state and we have the opportunity to bring our sister services in once we work with them to make sure that we are not going to violate any current conditions we have in our environmental permits and modify those as necessary if we need to. And then also reach the funding levels we need to be able to handle the increased range usage. I think that could potentially be a challenge there, but I believe there are avenues to address that.

Mr. SHAYS. Would anyone else like to respond?

Mr. OLSEN. Yes, I just want to add one thing. The recreational program adds a great PR to this range, there is no doubt about it. There is a lot of public that utilizes this place for all these different opportunities and the Air Force has done an excellent job to try to accommodate them and we just hope it can continue.

Mr. SHAYS. Any other comments?

[No response.]

Mr. SHAYS. OK, this is what we are going to do—I am going to just—we have five people who have requested to address the committee. We have Robert Babis, we have Alec Fulford, we have Roy Whitten, Edgar Stokes and the last name, Donelle Schwalm. Am I saying your name correctly? Good, that is unusual. My staff has a good laugh sometimes when I call our witnesses and our guests to make comment.

What we will do then is recognize in the order that I called them, Robert Babis, if you would raise your hand and we will make sure you get that mic. Right over there. We are going to wait until you get a mic. Do we have a mic. We have one mic, so Jason will—let us just be sure that—is that mic not working? OK, the mic is not working, it worked before. Let us not give up too quickly here.

VOICE. It needs a new battery.

Mr. SHAYS. Just wait 1 second. Do we have a second mic? Let us just check to see if the other one works. Jason, is there another mic?

The REPORTER. Just use the Colonel's right there.

Mr. SHAYS. Yeah, we will, we will in a sec. Court reporters are not allowed to overturn the chairman here yet. [Laughter.]

I will acquiesce soon, but—I get pushed around enough by my leadership to give up control here. [Laughter.]

Adam understands that.

OK, that is what we will do. Let us just see how far we can pull that one up. Thank you. Mr Babis, welcome.

Mr. BABIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to you. My name is Robert Babis, I live in Tampa, FL. I am a commercial pilot and a former military aviator as well. I do a lot of flying in the State of Florida and the Avon Park Range, I have bombed on it and——

Mr. SHAYS. Hopefully that was when you were in the military. [Laughter.]

Mr. BABIS. So I know the geography and I know the airspace. I have a question I would like to address to the FAA.

In the Special Use Airspace Management System, is it implemented here now? And that is one of the questions. Has it been implemented for Avon Park.

Mr. SHAYS. Why do you not ask all your questions and then we will—so that is one question. Do you understand the question, Mr. Liszt?

Mr. LISZT. No, I do not understand what you mean by implemented.

Mr. BABIS. The Special Use Airspace Management System that you mentioned in your remarks. Is it implemented here at Avon Park?

Mr. SHAYS. OK, that is one question. Do you have another question?

Mr. BABIS. The other one was in designing the system for the Special Use Airspace Management System, was there civilian input as far—I know you had DOD input, but did you have civil input from general aviation and commercial aviation? That was the other question to the FAA.

Mr. SHAYS. OK, thank you.

Mr. LISZT. The answer to the first question is yes, Avon Park is inputted into this Special Use Airspace, into SAMS. That is currently done on a scheduled basis when it becomes active and when it closes down, and that information——

Mr. SHAYS. Make sure you keep talking to the mic.

Mr. LISZT [continuing]. Is populated directly to the control work force.

As far as the second question, I cannot give you a yes or no. The process would have been that civilian input would have been taken into consideration.

Mr. SHAYS. Let me just say that as a general rule, there usually are hearings and there should be. If there is not, it is something that Mr. Putnam can followup on because there needs to be that citizen input.

Mr. LISZT. That is the process.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you.

Our second question is Alec Fulford. You need to stand in front. I am sorry that we are doing it this way.

Mr. FULFORD. It is about taller than I am.

I appreciate being able to ask this question. I lived here for 26 years on the bombing range, the family did, with cattle, and then moved up to Highway 60 in 1988. And that low flight pattern is right over the top of my TV antenna coming off that lake, Lake Kissimmee. Since you have quit flying, we do not have that problem, but I do have the National Guard shooting the other way shaking the windows.

The question I have really got to ask about is do you foresee the State or the Air Force increasing their area such as on the River Ranch property north of the bombing range as far as accessing or purchasing?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Well, I do not see the Air Force buying any more property.

Mr. SHAYS. Let me do this before you respond. Do you want to make a comment as well and then we will have you sit down, but I get nervous when you keep holding the mic because——

Mr. FULFORD. What did I do?

Mr. SHAYS. No, no, you are doing great, you are doing great. It is just that I am going to make sure we do not have a continued

dialog. So I would like to request that you ask your question and I also want to make sure that you address any point. Is there a question here that you want us to be aware of before he answers?

Mr. FULFORD. My question is do they foresee expanding the area north.

Mr. SHAYS. And what is your sense if they do that? Is that a good thing or a bad thing or an in-between thing?

Mr. FULFORD. Well, it would put me out of business, yeah, from that standpoint.

Mr. SHAYS. OK, fair enough. So we have a real need here to address that question. Thank you, sir.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. In response to that, I do not see the Air Force buying any additional property to the north. I know there is an area that is depicted on the map behind you that the State of Florida is considering buying as conservation land, to preclude any encroachment on our range property. But I do not see the military buying any more land.

Mr. SHAYS. Do you want to followup?

Mr. FULFORD. Do you foresee——

Mr. SHAYS. No, you need to use the mic.

Mr. FULFORD. Do you foresee the Air Force using that conservation land?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Well currently our military operating area, not range airspace but military operating areas that we refer to as MOAs, do expand north of the range, as we are currently set up. It does not go down to the surface down there though.

Mr. SHAYS. So you want another question? I am happy to have this dialog because it is educational for the committee.

Mr. FULFORD. Just a comment. Down to the surface could be 100 foot over my house.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Well, the range space we have up there right now, sir, none of it goes below 500 feet and most of it is 1,500 foot and above.

Mr. SHAYS. If you do not mind, I would love to understand something. As much as we have a buffer zone, the flight pattern to get here requires them to fly low or are they actually on a target assignment? Are they actually practicing?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. There are 14 military training routes that terminate in Avon Park Range. They either come in from the north or from the south portions of the range to terminate on the range airspace itself. Some of those low level routes do run over property up there. They have been established for a number of years, some of them in excess of 20 years, they have been out there already.

Mr. SHAYS. So as much as we have a buffer zone, they still are—before they even get to the buffer zone, are flying at a fairly low altitude in some areas and the only reason that—and evidently it is still fairly open spaced areas with selected ranches and homes.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. That is correct. There—I am sorry—the military——

Mr. SHAYS. But the danger would be, if this gentleman ended up selling—not that—I am speaking with very little knowledge here, but what has happened in other places, sells his land to a developer who starts to put up 100 homes and then we start hearing

from 100 people, not from 1 person. I mean there are some real challenges that develop there.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. And Florida has been known to put up 100 homes in small areas. Did you have a——

Mr. PUTNAM. If the gentleman would yield. If you could quantify how long that ingress and egress is, is it 30 miles, is it 50 miles that they drop down to that 1,500 foot deck?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Some of the routes are more than 100 miles long, but generally speaking, we are not going to linger over somebody's house. They will be doing—in the case of an Air Force fighter, they might be somewhere between 500 and 1,500 foot above the ground and they will be traveling about 480 knots, which is about 8 miles a minute. So they will be out of that airspace relatively quickly.

Mr. SHAYS. Yes, but that is a low flight.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. PUTNAM. Has there ever been a situation—are they traveling at a speed where they could potentially create a sonic boom over——

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. No, they do not, not on these military training routes. They are restricted to subsonic air speeds, they do not come close to approaching——

Mr. SHAYS. But as this gentleman would point out, when you fly 500 to 1,000 feet, it hardly matters if it is a sonic boom or not. It is an exciting moment in his life. [Laughter.]

Mr. PUTNAM. Mr. Fulford, are you sure some of that artillery sound is not just those guys at River Ranch shooting those propane tanks?

Mr. FULFORD. No, because it comes back over the house. [Laughter.]

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you for addressing the committee, that is very helpful.

We now have Roy Whitten. You know, I really would like to ask if any of the speakers are from Connecticut because I would give them twice as much time. [Laughter.]

Mr. WHITTEN. Well, I did spend some time in Connecticut, so if that will give me a little extra——

Mr. SHAYS. Any time means you were in prison.

Mr. WHITTEN. OK. Mr. Chairman, Congressman, my name is Roy Whitten. I have been affiliated with the Air Force off and on, shall we say, for the past 60 years. I was in that regular Army Air Corps before World War II on the flight line, during World War II as a sergeant on the flight line and during Korea as an information officer with a training base in Arizona. I ended up my career out of the Reserve in the Secretary of the Air Force's office in Washington.

I have lived here now for the past 20 years, in this area. I have been affiliated with the Air Force Association, the Retired Officers' Association and the Highlands County Veterans' Council. And I think I would speak for the large majority of all the members of that group and all veterans in this county to say that training is so important. Some very wise general perhaps or sergeant many

years ago said "The more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in combat." I think that everybody would agree.

On April 28, 1993, General Chuck Horner, who as you remember was the air boss in Desert Storm, stood outside here near where the flagpole is and in one of his remarks he made he said "The training that the pilots received at Avon Park and other training ranges saved many a life in Desert Storm, both in the air and on the ground." I think that is a good testimony for the value of this.

Now this community I think has supported the range and vice versa. And I think we should take that and realize how much the range has supported the community, financially and otherwise.

This occasion that General Horner was here was because we were at that time downsizing the military down to, as the Colonel said, to he and four other persons. At that time, we had 200 and some odd people here. But all—and during that time, Steve, we did have a military affairs committee with the Chamber of Commerce, of which I served on during that time. So we had a good relationship and I think it would continue to be, whether it is run by civilian or whether it is run by military, because also as a former economic developer, I know the economic impact that a range like this has upon the community, in more ways than one.

Thank you for having the opportunity to make this presentation.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you.

I would now—I am going to come back and ask a question of our second speaker, if he would remain. But we will go to Edgar Stokes.

Mr. STOKES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Putnam; Edgar Stokes from the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners. Just a short statement and to recognize that we do have an economic impact analysis of the Avon Park Air Force Range from the Economic Development Commission in Highlands County.

Mr. SHAYS. We will make sure that is a part of the record, if it is not already.

Mr. STOKES. You should have one. If you do not, we have some more copies.

Mr. SHAYS. We will make it a part of the record. It is part of the record? OK.

Mr. STOKES. We recognize the economic impact that it has on this county, also the recreational impact that it has, and to recognize that you are looking at all avenues of impact to enhance the use of this range.

Just a comment from Mr. Handley's statement about the Lorida area south of the bombing range. I know it is misleading when you go through that town to realize you are in town, but we have got blinker lights there now to bring that out. [Laughter.]

And also this study will show that 75 percent of the residents that live in Highlands County live in the rural areas and there are several developments out there, good size developments just south of the range.

As it happens, at this time, we are looking at a noise ordinance in Highlands County. The airboats some up quite a bit, but they are nothing compared to one of those low flying jets. So if you would consider that. Thank you.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you, sir.

Mr. PUTNAM. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SHAYS. Yes.

Mr. PUTNAM. Commissioner Stokes, as you know, the range sits in sort of a precarious way between Polk and Highlands County. Do the two boards of county commissioners ever meet to coordinate planning or strategy for the range or ways that they can work together for things like the bridge or repaving or putting a best foot forward for a looming BRAC Commission or things like that? Do you have pretty good communication with the Polk County Commissioners on these things?

Mr. STOKES. Yes, we communicate from time to time. Fact is I think we just took over some maintenance on mowing on the roads, some of the roads out there; so, yes, we do occasionally if something comes up, we're in correspondence with them.

Mr. PUTNAM. So you feel like there's a pretty good working relationship down there?

Mr. STOKES. Oh, yes, sir.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you very much, Commissioner. Our last speaker is Donelle Schwalm.

Ms. SCHWALM. It is Donelle Schwalm, but I do not take offense, nobody ever gets it right.

Mr. SHAYS. You cannot be too fussy with me, that is about as good as you are going to get.

Ms. SCHWALM. That is all right, it is usually Danielle—I am over it.

I am a contractor for Archibald Biological Station——

Mr. SHAYS. Speak more slowly.

Ms. SCHWALM. I am a contractor for Archibald Biological Station.

Mr. SHAYS. Yes.

Ms. SCHWALM. And I am in charge of gathering the biological data associated with RCW, red cockaded woodpecker, here on the range. I also help, to an extent with the Florida scrub jay work, but not a lot, I am not very familiar with that.

Anyway, my question is at this point in time we have, through working with the Air Force, we are able to get the bombing schedules, we are able to keep out of their way and still get the good biological data that you need to make the decisions concerning endangered species.

Mr. SHAYS. Right.

Ms. SCHWALM. Now I'm getting the feeling that the activity has a good potential to increase here and I am curious how that would affect—this is probably a question for you, Commander—how that would affect our ability to get the data that you need in order to make informed decisions.

Mr. SHAYS. And before he answers the question, let me just ask you a question. You work directly for whom?

Ms. SCHWALM. Archibald Biological Station, it is located in Lake Placid.

Mr. SHAYS. OK, and that is funded by whom?

Ms. SCHWALM. I believe our research is funded through the Air Force but I am employed through Archibald, a private contractor.

Mr. SHAYS. I have got you. And is the private contractor basically hired by the Air Force?

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. One of the things that—just of the observations, one of the cleanest sites in Puerto Rico right now, one of the nicest Reserve sites, is the—the island is divided into thirds. You have the range on one end, you have the village 9 miles away and on the other side you have where all the munitions are kept for the larger base in Puerto Rico. And that is now being given to the Puerto Rican Government for practically noting, $1.

One of the pluses that we find, we have some environmental concerns with the military in terms of what, you know, has happened in terms of chemicals and so on, but how the military has managed their ranges and so on, hiring you in that sense, to monitor it, has been pretty exemplary. We have been pretty pleased in government how that has happened. I just wanted to say that.

But I would love—you will get your question answered. You can stay up here if you have a followup question.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Well currently, as you know, we have our contractors go out to do their work very similar to how we do real time range scheduling with Miami Center. And so we do not allow the contractors out on the property when we have training going on out there obviously, but even in the foreseeable future, if the usage of the range were to increase significantly, it still will not probably, except during exercises, encompass the whole range at once. So I believe that your efforts would still be able to pretty much proceed like they are. They may have to change hours a little bit, but we should be able to still do what we are doing.

Mr. SHAYS. Donelle, when you go on the site, what hours usually are you on the site?

Ms. SCHWALM. For me personally, studying red cockaded woodpeckers requires that I be out just before sunrise, so I am usually there, during the breeding season at 5:30 a.m. Depending on how intense the work is during the day, I may be there throughout the day and again, I have to work around their bombing schedule, I do not want to get my brain blown out and I do not want to shut down the mission.

Mr. SHAYS. I fear the gators more than the bombs. I have got a thing for gators here. [Laughter.]

Ms. SCHWALM. Oh, man, there are some big ones, go down on the river. Personally, they are not an issue for me, I work in the flat woods. But yeah, we spend a lot of time out in the field but it is generally early in the morning and then again late at night.

Mr. SHAYS. And early in the morning and late at night is when you observe, it is easiest to observe them?

Ms. SCHWALM. Exactly. For red cockaded woodpeckers, they have a range forage of like 400 and some odd acres, so we want to catch them at their trees early in the morning.

Mr. SHAYS. But if you miss a week or two, is that a problem?

Ms. SCHWALM. Yes. Depending on at what point in time you are collecting your data. If you want to know what the breeding productivity of the group is, for the breeding season you need—for example, right now, we visit every cluster every 3 days, we monitor their nesting attempts, how successful they are, fledge attempts, and if you miss 2 weeks in there, you might miss nesting attempts.

Mr. SHAYS. During the breeding season.

Ms. SCHWALM. During the breeding season, which for Florida scrub jays begins in mid to late February. For red cockaded woodpeckers, it begins in mid to late April and then it continues through July.

Mr. SHAYS. Well, I can tell you one thing, that the Air Force has to be sensitive to that, because they do not want a position where they are ultimately having to shut down because they are not, so you carry a bigger stick than you may realize and so use it judiciously.

Ms. SCHWALM. OK.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you very much.

I just would like to make sure I am clear, because we really did not have a lot of testimony on this. Mr. Fulford, you basically were raising an issue that I honestly would have left the hearing without realizing. I made an assumption that the buffer zone was so large that aircraft would come in high, then dip down beforehand and what I am hearing is that to even as large as this area is, they are still having to come down pretty low. And so the question I am really going to ask you. For one, I want to make sure that is right, but the second question I want to ask is, is there value in the government buying development rights. In other words, Mr. Fulford, without you coming up, I am assuming you have a ranch there?

Mr. FULFORD. No, sir, I live on 60, I lease property there.

Mr. SHAYS. Yeah, OK. And it is a fairly large space?

Mr. FULFORD. Yes, sir.

Mr. SHAYS. So what you obviously do not want, it would seem to me, Colonel, is to have this suddenly become a developed area. Is there ever thought to buying development rights to allow it to continue the way it continues, so no one is being economically disadvantaged, in fact they may be helped because they have some resources, but then in perpetuity, it maintains less dense space.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. We have not done that in the Avon Park Air Force Range area, sir, but I know it has been done in other locations. So that is certainly a viable tactic to keep us from having the problem. Now as our training has evolved and our employment techniques changed in the last 10 to 15 years, we have less emphasis on low level training now than we did previously, because the threat has changed. A lot of the low level training was predicated on fighting a European scenario of war where we were going to have the weather as a factor. We do not—we still train to that, but not to the level we have in previous years. Most of the precision guided munitions are brought in at a higher altitude and so we do not have nearly the low level flights that we have seen in the past.

So I think it is much less of a problem now and will continue to be less of a problem than what it was 10 to 15 years ago.

Mr. SHAYS. But you would agree, would you not, if activity increased nine-fold——

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. There would be——

Mr. SHAYS [continuing]. That we would start to have people in this room who would say, you know, we are being negatively impacted.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. There would be some increase in that; yes, sir. And we would do our best to accommodate them and try to change flight paths to——

Mr. SHAYS. Vary it so you are not always coming over the same area.

Lt. Col. THOMPSON. Yes, sir, exactly.

Mr. SHAYS. One of the challenges that we had in LaGuardia coming over our property is the FAA can be so precise now with their locking into the line of the runway that the plane high up does not vary but a few feet and we started having consistently residents saying something terrible is happening, we are getting all these new flights. And what it was was they were able to direct it so precisely and so we asked the FAA to periodically vary that path so that, you know, more residents would feel it, but they wouldn't feel it enough to have it be the challenge it was for a few.

Mr. PUTNAM. If the gentleman would yield. The map, the State has tremendous designs on this entire ridge area, as they call it. The green area that moves south from the range to Lake Okeechobee is wholly owned now by the State, I think they have completed their purchase of the entire area. The yellow area above there is also managed by the State and the River Ranch area, for good or for ill, is also slated to be part of a purchasing program by the State. So I think that actually the Air Force benefits from the fact that the State is doing their work for them, using State dollars, as they continue to buy up these conservation easements and development rights in outright purchase.

Now wearing my non-Air Force Range hat, I do not know that is necessarily a good thing, but it will ultimately benefit you, from an encroachment standpoint.

Mr. SHAYS. We are going to close and then I will recognize my colleague, but before closing, I want to thank Colonel Len Wheeless. Colonel, it is nice to have you here, I enjoyed my conversations with you last night and I appreciate the work you do throughout the country. We have Colonel Earle Thompson, who has I think been appreciated by your commanding officers and I can understand why, I appreciate what you have done as well.

We appreciate the use of this facility. We also thank the fine staff at Avon Park for their skill and help and kindness in arranging these hearings—Kenneth Beers, Michael Goodson, Richard Cutshell, Wayne Stewart and Anita Shock.

And I also want to thank our court reporter William Warren, who almost wanted to take over control of this hearing—[laughter]—you need to put that in that hearing transcript, Mr. Warren. [Laughter.]

And also a final special thanks to Jason Chung, the subcommittee clerk who artfully mastered the thousand details it took to put this hearing on, and appreciate his very good work.

At this time, I would also thank you again, Mr. Putnam. I have enjoyed being in your district and would say to those present, it is fascinating to know a Member up in Washington and appreciate the good work they do, it is particularly valuable to see the districts they represent and the people they interact with and it helps you understand your colleague. We all are, in a sense, creatures of the districts we represent. We grew up there in many cases, we are shaped by the district and we tend to, as we should, reflect the interests of the district. That is what our founding fathers intended. And I think I understand you a bit better by being in your district

and have always appreciated your work and am grateful that you got me down here.

Mr. PUTNAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank you for accepting my invitation and indulging in our request to hold a subcommittee hearing in the district, particularly as we are beginning now our month long August recess in the Congress. I can think of no other Member of Congress who has earned a month long recess than you have, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank my district staff and my Washington staff, who worked with the subcommittee and the local organizers and the Range to put together an outstanding hearing.

And I want to thank the people who came out. We had a lot of young people in the audience earlier. I think some of them are still here and others have left, who I think benefit greatly from the opportunity to see Congress in action in their hometown and in their community. It is important for Congress to get out of the beltway from time to time, to hold these kind of hearings and to hear from local officials and local stakeholders.

And I want to thank the veterans who are here. There is an awful lot of members of the veterans service organizations who have come out to participate in this hearing. And Colonel Thompson, I want to commend you. If you were not managing this range well, it would be standing room only. And I think that the fact that we have a few empty chairs is indicative of the relationship that you have forged as a good neighbor to the community and to the county and to the local governments.

And as we continue to work through these things, I look forward to the continued participation from the airport authorities and the local city councilmen and our environmental community and our National Guard folks. It is an honor to be a part of this process where we go around to different communities like Avon Park and hold a U.S. congressional hearing to hear what people need and what their concerns are and how we can move forward in the Congress to resolve some of those issues in the context of the national interest. And so I thank everyone for coming out and participating in this.

And Mr. Chairman, again, I cannot thank you enough for allowing the subcommittee to hold this hearing in my district.

Mr. SHAYS. Thank you. You can adjourn the committee then.

Mr. PUTNAM. With that, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:18 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

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