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NEWS

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Naval Weapons Center/China Lake, California 93555

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STATEMENT ON THE SECOND EMERGENCY BURRO REDUCTION PROGRAM CONDUCTED AT THE NAVAL WEAPONS CENTER, CHINA LAKE, CALIF.

A second emergency burro reduction program was completed on March 21 and 22 at the Naval Weapons Center, China Lake, Calif., to lessen the strong possibility of a burro and aircraft collision on the Center's aircraft runways. Some 267 burros were destroyed in a quick and humane manner by a three-man team of civilian marksmen under the technical supervision of a Navy civilian natural resources specialist.

Despite the first emergency reduction of 381 burros, conducted on March 7 and 8, a significant number of burros remained in the area affecting the airfield. An aerial count of burros conducted on March 13 showed 129 burros in the inner test range area. However, it is estimated that up to 400 burros remained. More than 2,225 burros were counted during an aerial survey at the Center last July. Aerial surveys ordinarily show only one third to one half of animals actually contained in a given area.

Because of this development, another emergency reduction was necessary to ensure the safety of aviators in Navy aircraft using the Center's runways and civilian and military personnel driving these roads.

The number of burros within the Center's inner test range area, some 275 square miles, has been reduced sufficiently to relieve the immediate safety threat to aviators and motor vehicle operators. Considering the number of burros reduced in the past two programs, it is not anticipated that another similar

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THE NAVAL WEAPONS CENTER, an activity under the Command of the Chief of Naval Material, Department of the Navy, is located 155 miles north of Los Angeles, on the north Mojave Desert. The mission of the Center is to be the principal Navy research, development, test and evaluation center for air warfare systems and missile weapon systems; and the National range/facility for parachute test and evaluation.

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emergency reduction will be required in the near future.

Ironically, only one day after the first reduction program an aircraft almost hit several burros on the Center's primary runway. Within ten days after the same program a burro/motor vehicle accident did occur near the Center.

Specifically:

- On March 9 at about 4:30 p.m. four burros were spotted at the end of a runway by Navy air traffic control tower personnel as a military transport aircraft was making a landing. The pilot was alerted to the burro problem and emergency vehicles were immediately dispatched to chase them away. And while the same aircraft was taxiing after landing, the pilot spotted an additional four burros at the other end of the runway that tower personnel had been unable to view.

- On March 18 at 11:15 p.m. a car traveling on California State Highway 178 struck a burro within yards of the Center's boundary. The accident wrecked the vehicle. The driver, fortunately, received only minor injuries. The burro was killed.

Only 275 square miles of the more than 1,700 square miles encompassing the Navy's largest research, development, test and evaluation facility were involved by the two emergency reduction programs. Carcasses of burros were left in locations in which they were destroyed throughout the uninhabited area. Under California law carcasses must be left where the animals are destroyed unless they are close to a road or building and would cause a health hazard.

Each animal destroyed during the reduction programs was examined by a professional biologist to determine, among other things, its health. The majority of the jennies were found to be in poor health, apparently due to starvation. The jacks, in general, were healthy.

A long-term Center burro management program, developed by professional animal population specialists under the requirements of the National Environmental

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Policy Act, is nearing final stages. It is expected to be implemented by early summer.

The Navy has complied with all federal environmental and legal requirements that apply to the Center on the two emergency reduction programs.

The public has suggested that the runway area be fenced to keep burros out. Fencing, such as standard five-strand barbed wire or chain link, is not feasible. Fencing would deny ready access to the outside runway area to crash trucks and ambulances responding to emergencies if an accident occurred. Fencing would still not solve the burro over-population problem.

Burros, descendants of animals abandoned by miners and charcoalers, have created a long-term problem throughout the arid southwest because they have increasingly destroyed the natural habitat of native and endangered wildlife. Burro populations have exploded. The average jenny can produce 20 foals during her breeding lifetime.

The burro population pressure has increasingly driven the burros into the Center's inner test range areas. This has created mounting safety hazards to military aviators flying from the airfield and military and civilian drivers on test range roads.

The Navy attempted to solve the burro problem near the airfield last year through an arrangement with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) under its "Adopt-A-Burro" program. BLM wranglers removed 258 burros between March 1980 and January 1981. Because of the rapid burro population increases, this program did not solve the problem. Burros still roamed runways and roads. However, another recent agreement with the BLM has been made to allow BLM wranglers to continue a live removal program of animals still found in inner test range areas.

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(NOTE TO EDITORS: A complete package on burros, including background, a problem statement, early Center efforts to curb the burro population explosion, position statements on burros from various organizations, the Center's burro management plan, justification for the emergency direct reduction and general questions and answers on burros is available on request. A set of black and white photos for print media and a 5-minute film clip for television showing burro damage and burros on active Center aircraft runways is also available.)