

JAN 19 2017

The Honorable Beto O'Rourke  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative O'Rourke:

We appreciate your efforts to ensure that Castner Range is conserved with public access to areas determined to be safe from an explosives safety perspective. Given your tireless efforts to work with your constituents on this important issue, we wanted to provide a short summary of some of the work that has been done or is currently underway, and the next steps in this process.

As you know, we were pleased to have representatives from our agencies at the public meeting that you held in El Paso, Texas, on November 19, 2016. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Deputy Director, Mr. Steve Ellis, and the Garrison Commander at Fort Bliss, Colonel Michael Hester, attended the meeting and appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from the public and local community. They were impressed by the strong public support for permanently protecting the 7,081-acre Castner Range.

Moving forward, the Army will continue to work with the State of Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to determine the cleanup required for military munitions to allow the land to be used for its intended purpose. Before the land can be considered suitable to transfer to the State of Texas consistent with the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act or some other entity pending future legislative or executive action, the Army must ensure the cleanup allows for its intended use. These conversations are ongoing, and we will ensure that the required cleanup of military munitions at Castner Range is a priority. We will keep you informed of the status.

As we have discussed with you on previous occasions and as indicated in Ms. Hammock's letter of October 20, 2016, the Army is currently conducting a remedial investigation to determine the extent to which military munitions are present within Castner Range pursuant to its responsibilities under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. The Army has already completed a preliminary assessment and site inspection and expects to finalize the remedial investigation later this year.

Using the data obtained during the remedial investigation and information about how this property will be used, the Army will develop a feasibility study to evaluate cleanup alternatives. Given the local community's interest in increasing public access in the higher elevation, western

portion of Castner Range, the Army will consider this interest as it investigates the feasibility of designating portions of this former range for varying levels of public access. The feasibility study can help inform future decisions about potential phasing of parcel conveyances and the degrees of public access feasible for each parcel.

Once the cleanup alternatives are evaluated in the feasibility study, the Army, in coordination with the State of Texas, will recommend what cleanup should be performed. Public comment on the proposed cleanup will be invited, and a cleanup decision document, that selects the remedial action, will be signed. Based on the current schedule, the Army anticipates completion of the selected remedial action (cleanup) at Castner Range in 2023. The Army intends to continue its quarterly briefings with you and your staff. Additionally, both the Army and BLM stand ready to work with you to reach your goal of ensuring Caster Range is conserved with compatible public access where feasible.

The Army and BLM will work cooperatively to review and document the historical, natural, and cultural values within Castner Range. In order to document the area's values, the BLM will review all appropriate studies and literature and other available information. Upon completing its review, BLM will share this information with the Army and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Thank you again for your leadership on this important issue.



Neil Kornze  
Director  
Bureau of Land Management

Sincerely,



Maureen Sullivan  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
Environment, Safety and Occupational Health