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Exhibit No. A

Meeting Date: 09/10/2025 Agenda No. 09

Presented by: Robert Germann

Political Implications of Potential New San Diego International Airport Locations

# Politics

## MBA Masters Project

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## **Abstract**

This study outlines the political implications of developing a new international airport in three different locations; Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Campo/Boulevard, and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. In 2006, the Ricondo & Associates Consulting Group created a report evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of building an airport at each of these sites. This study builds on the Ricondo Study by analyzing modern political issues which support or discourage each development scenario. It is meant to assist decision-makers determine where to build a new airport by providing a clearer understanding of this complex issue. Each scenario outlines the major political barriers to building an airport in that location. Following each scenario is a description of additional obstacles associated with each site, as well as recommendations on how some of these barriers may be overcome.

Marine Corps Air Station Miramar was selected in the Ricondo Study as the most favorable site. A proposition was added to the San Diego Ballot in November of 2006 to determine whether San Diego citizens wanted an airport at Miramar. The results came back negative. Section I explains why the proposition failed and provides information on the political power groups which must be satisfied before the project can succeed. It also includes a list of jurisdictional, environmental, and ecological complications associated with developing on MCAS Miramar. The Marine Corps and communities around MCAS Miramar oppose the project.

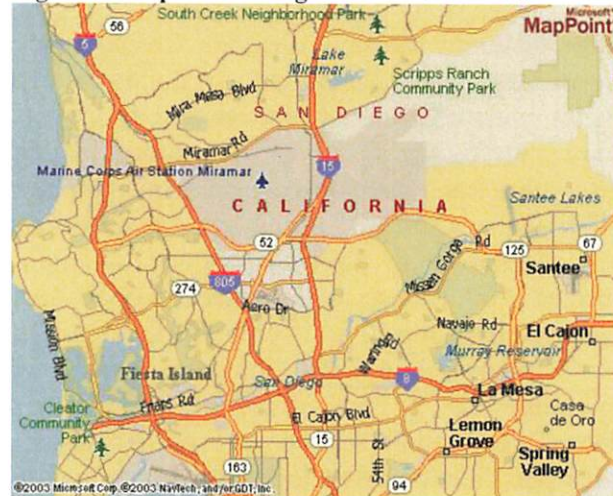
Campo/Boulevard is an attractive development site because it is remote and there are fewer political barriers to building an airport there. The main complications for this scenario are distance, cost, and ecological impact. The only way to create a cost-effective airport in this region is to install a rapid mass transit system to ferry cargo and travelers into the more populated areas of San Diego. Opponents of this project claim the transit system is cost prohibitive. Section II describes these ecological and financial barriers in detail. In the last year, this region has been targeted by a group of green energy companies for a green energy corridor for San Diego County. In ensuing years it will become heavily populated with solar arrays and wind turbines. The residents of small communities in the Campo and Boulevard regions oppose the project.

Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton is an attractive site because it is located on the northern tip of San Diego and has a great deal of undeveloped land available. Like MCAS Miramar, the land is owned by the Marine Corps and acquiring it requires action on a Federal level. Section III describes the social, environmental, and ecological impact of developing an airport in this location. The Marine Corps and communities around Camp Pendleton oppose the project.

## Introduction

San Diego International Airport is the second busiest single-runway airport in the world. Since the early 1980's the City of San Diego, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), and the San Diego Regional Airport Authority (SDCRAA) have conducted numerous studies on where to build a new international airport to better serve San Diego's growing air transportation needs. The most thorough of these studies is the 2006 Decision Document created by the Ricondo & Associates Consulting Firm. In this Decision Document a series of potential development sites are sorted and evaluated based on aeronautical, environmental, market, military and financial criteria. Despite tremendous support, it has yet to be built mainly for political reasons. The nuances of building an international airport in the San Diego area are discussed in the Ricondo & Associates Decision Document. The potential sites are Miramar (MCAS Miramar), Campo/Boulevard (Pentagon), and Pendleton).

**Figure 1: Map of San Diego & MCAS Miramar**



Source: Microsoft Map Point, 2013

**A. SDCRAA (San Diego County Regional Airport Authority)**

The SDCRAA was created on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001 by the California State Assembly Bill AB 93. Prior to this, air traffic planning in San Diego County was controlled by SANDAG (San Diego Regional Planning Agency). The SDCRAA is governed by a board of nine individuals who represent San Diego's nine districts. Three of these people serve as the Executive Committee. The Airport Authority has public meetings at 9:00 AM on the first Thursday of every month in the Commuter Terminal of Lindberg Field.

The goal of the SDCRAA is to manage airports within San Diego County and to meet the long term air traffic needs of San Diego County as a whole. SDCRAA is funded entirely through user fees, and no tax dollars are allotted to this organization. If an international airport is built in San Diego County, it will be the SDCRAA who arranges its citing, financing, planning, construction and operation. The SDCRAA will also issue the bonds needed to pay for the development of the airport. Other local, state, and Federal agencies have the ability to obstruct this project in various ways. Understanding who these organizations are, what motivates them, and what powers they possess is the key to making an airport project work.

### B. FAA (Federal Aviation Administration)

The FAA is a Federal agency dedicated to improving the safety and efficiency of aviation in America. They have a series of requirements which must be met before any airport can be constructed in the US, and they study all new airport proposals carefully to make sure they are in compliance with these standards. It is important for this organization to remain strict and impartial because often local business communities will try to "rush" development of an airport

for financial gain without stopping to consider the safety or long-term consequences of the project.

The FAA looks at several things when deciding whether or not to allow development of a new airport. These considerations include the impact of aircraft noise on local communities, geographic and meteorological hazards, ease of access and departure, storage of fuel and equipment, traffic capacity restrictions, and similar issues. The FAA is a national organization and has no political stake in whether or not an airport gets added to San Diego. If the correct process is followed and it is determined that San Diego wants a new airport, then the FAA will perform its duties for each development scenario. Without the blessing of the FAA, a new airport cannot be built in San Diego.

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## Section I: MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR

### A. History

MCAS Miramar was founded in 1917 during World War I by the US Army as a facility to train infantrymen. At this time, the site was called Camp Kearny. During World War II the site was renamed Camp Elliott and used as a training and operations center for the 2nd Marine Division, tasked with defending the California coast. In 1940 new runways were constructed and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing was stationed there, and later in 1943 the Navy created an auxiliary air station nearby to train crewmen for patrol bomber planes. Shortly after, the Marines added an air depot nearby and renamed it MCAS Miramar to avoid confusion with the neighboring Navy facility. The Marines were moved offsite to Orange County in 1947 and the Navy transformed Miramar into a school for fighter pilots (See Figure 2).

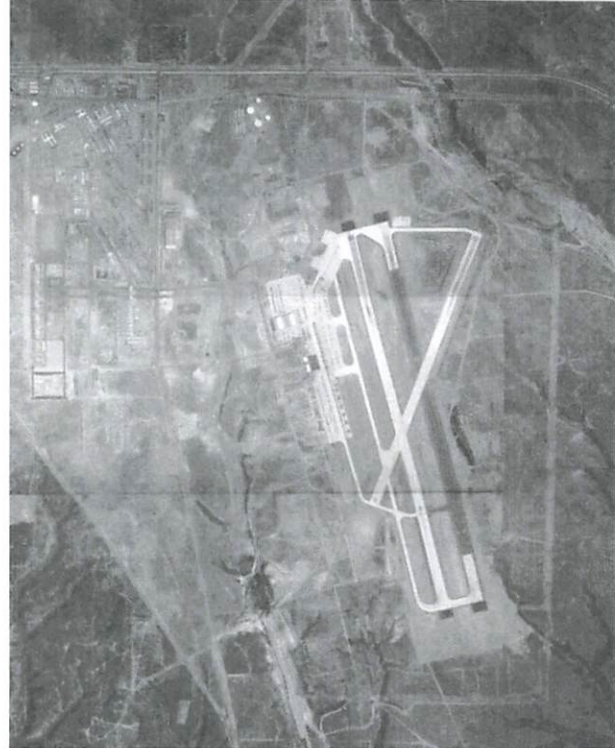
In 1999 when the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) commission closed bases in El Toro and Tustin the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing was transferred to Miramar and the Navy was moved offsite. The BRAC commission transferred training of fighter pilots from Miramar to a base in Florida in 2005. All fighter pilot training at Miramar will be phased out by 2015. In 2006 San Diego County Proposition A proposed obtaining 3000 acres of land at Miramar to build a commercial airport. The proposition was defeated by 62% of opposed votes to 38% in favor (Shettle, 2013). The reasons are detailed in the Public Opinion section.

### B. Major Political Barriers

#### i. Marine Corps

The US Marine Corps is a division within the Department of the Navy responsible for amphibious and expeditionary warfare. It is the smallest of the United States Armed Forces and accounts for 6% of the US annual military budget. In San Diego the First Marine Expeditionary Force is based in Camp Pendleton and MCAS Miramar, while the Navy occupies facilities in Coronado, Point Loma and North Island. The forces stationed at MCAS Miramar comprise the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (made up of 43 squadrons). In 2006, the year Proposition A was on the San Diego ballot, the commanding officer of MCAS Miramar stated that a commercial airport at Miramar would negatively impact the mission of the U.S. Marine Corps (Caughlan, 2006). The Secretary of the Navy also stated that a commercial airport at Miramar would harm Navy and Marine readiness.

Figure 2: Historic Aerial Photo of NAS Miramar

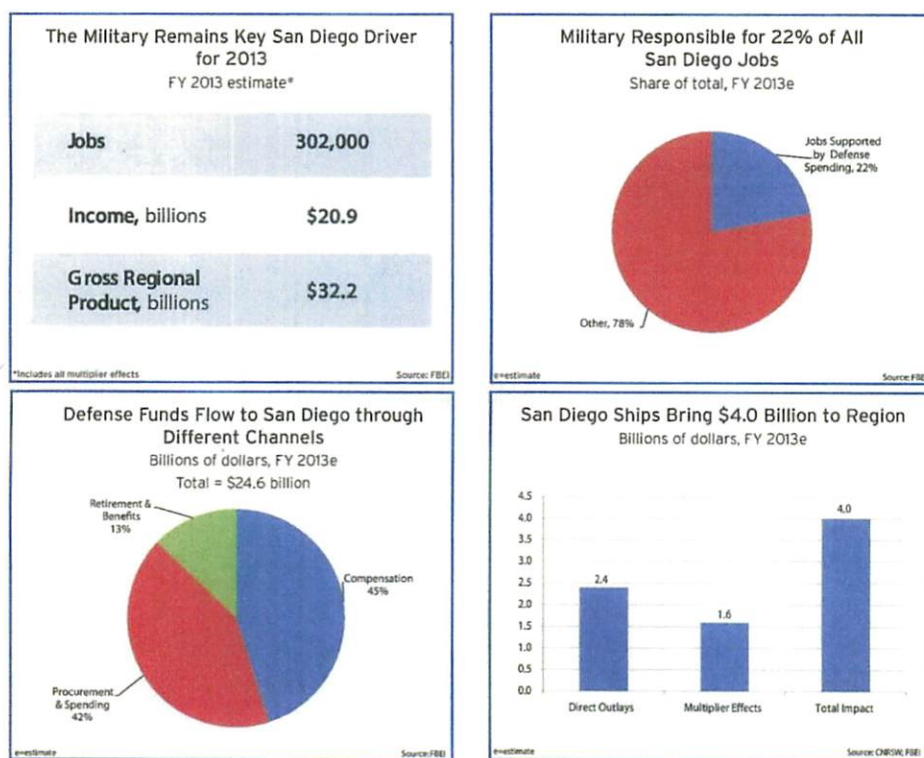


Source: National Naval Aviation Museum



An estimated \$20.9 billion in direct spending related to defense has been sent into San Diego County during fiscal year 2013 – an amount equal to about \$7800 for each of the county’s residents (Fermanian, 2013). Indirect spending on defense contracting, benefits payments and military-related tourism bring this Figure closer to \$24.6 billion (Johnson, 2013). Money enters the local economy in the form of wages, contracts, grants, tourism, etc. Camp Pendleton also saw \$87 million of approved construction in 2013, while Miramar received nearly \$28 million. The military sector is responsible for about 302,000 of the regions total jobs as of 2013 – 22% of the jobs in the county (Fermanian, 2013). An overview of San Diego military spending for 2013 is included in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Military Spending in San Diego in 2013**



Source: San Diego Military Advisory Council. (2013). Military Economic Impact Study. Retrieved at [http://www.sdmac.org/uploads/docs/Executive\\_Summary\\_5th\\_Annual\\_SDMAC\\_Military\\_Economic\\_Impact\\_Study.pdf](http://www.sdmac.org/uploads/docs/Executive_Summary_5th_Annual_SDMAC_Military_Economic_Impact_Study.pdf)

These factors give the Department of the Navy a great deal of political power in San Diego County. A substantial portion of the voting populace supports the Navy and Marines because they owe their livelihood to the military. In 2006 when San Diego Proposition A was defeated, the military spending associated with MCAS Miramar was partially responsible (SDMAC, 2013). In recent years the United States has seen substantial cutbacks in military spending. For example, military spending in 2012 accounted for 25% of all jobs in San Diego, while in 2013 it now accounts for only 22% (SDMAC, 2013). In 2014 with continued military withdrawal from Afghanistan, military sector jobs in San Diego may drop to 295,000 (Johnson, 2013). If this trend continues in ensuing years, then the economic influence of the military over San Diego may wane.

Until the Marine Corps is relocated from MCAS Miramar to another site, it is impossible to build an international airport there. The Marine Corps has a large amount of support from the public because military spending accounts for a large percentage of the jobs in San Diego. As

time progresses, this spending may decrease and with it the Marine Corps' influence over the voting public may decline (Bilbray, 2013).

## ii. San Diego City Council

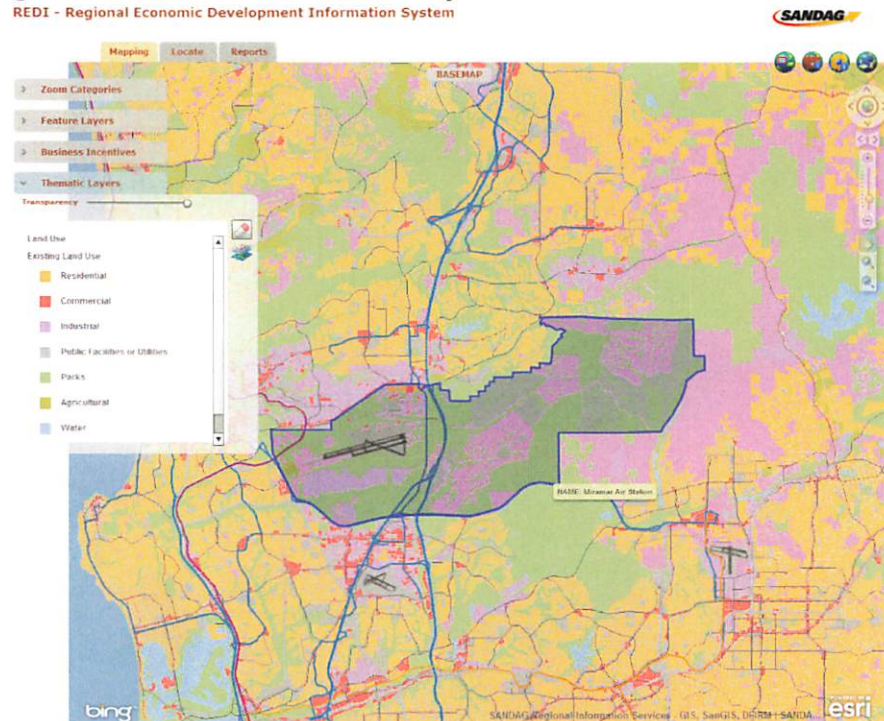
San Diego's City Council is composed of nine individuals representing the nine districts of San Diego. They are all politicians elected by voters of their respective districts, and are obligated to represent the interests of these voters. If any issue is brought before the council, they respond by gathering as much information as possible on the issue and then holding a vote. If the issue is controversial (like an international airport), City Council will pay for professional studies to be conducted and make the results of these studies available to the public. The issue

will then be added to the ballot so citizens can vote on the matter. Under normal circumstances, City Councilmembers will do what the public majority wants them to. While they are not obligated to reflect the public's wants, failure to do so can make them unpopular and result in a Councilmember being voted out of office (Uke, 2013).

The San Diego City Council possesses local land use authority, meaning they are able to re-zone

**Figure 4: MCAS Miramar Land Use Map**

REDI - Regional Economic Development Information System



Source: SANDAG Regional Economic Development Information (REDI) System. (2013). Accessed at <http://redi.sandag.org/>.

regions of the city for various uses. If land within their jurisdiction is not zoned to allow for an airport, then it is illegal to build an airport in that location. Further, the results of Proposition A on the 2006 ballot averted the possibility of an international airport to be built at Miramar. The land in question is shown above in Figure 4. Even if the Federal Government could be convinced to relinquish the land at Miramar to the city, the City Council could refuse to re-zone or issue permits for the project (Bilbray, 2013). According to local regulation, developing an airport in San Diego is not voted on by the county. Instead only each city and its registered voters are allowed to decide whether or not an airport can be placed within their city, but this is not the case with some other developments. For example, local land use authority can be preempted by State and Federal Governments for the development of highways. As long as the City of San Diego remains a "500 pound gorilla" with the power to kill airport projects within its borders, no international airport can be developed within this region unless the public wants it.



Local land use has no state law which supersedes the City of San Diego local land user authority (Bilbray, 2013).

Proponents of developing an international airport in San Diego believe that land use authority for airports should be consolidated at the county level. Supporters of this idea also believe that because an international airport would service and benefit the entirety of San Diego County it should be up to the county as a whole whether or not it gets implemented. By allowing the issue to be voted on by a much larger demographic, it is more likely the ballot will show a favorable result. Implementing this change would require legislation at a state level (Bilbray, 2013).

In 1994 an attempt was made to conduct a public vote in favor of a new international airport in San Diego County. Shortly after the Navy left Miramar Military Base, voters passed Ballot Measure 52-48 to allow the region's international airport to move to this new site should it become available (Jenkins, 2006). San Diego Mayor Susan Golding and Rep. Randy 'Duke' Cunningham opposed this initiative and helped the Marine Corps move into Miramar instead. The measure did not pass within the City of San Diego, but at this time it drew majorities of 60% or more in six North County cities (Ristine, 2006).

### **iii. Federal Government/Congress**

The United States Congress is made up of two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate. There are 435 Representatives and 100 Senators, respectively. The members of Congress form committees to intensely study specialized subjects and then advise the entirety of Congress on the pros and cons of each action before a decision is made. Committees write legislation, and it is rare for the House to generate or pass bills without action from the relevant committee. If Congress is asked to relinquish Federal land to the State for a new international airport, it will rely on the advice of two committees to do so. The first of these is the House Subcommittee on Aviation, which falls under the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. The second is the Senate Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security, which falls under the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

The House Subcommittee on Aviation has jurisdiction over civil aviation as it relates to safety, infrastructure, labor, and international issues. This jurisdiction covers all FAA programs except research. If a request to build an airport on Federal land appeared before Congress, this Subcommittee would convene to discuss commercial aviation, international aviation, aviation safety, and other relevant issues relating to the project (United States House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure, 2013). The California representative in this subcommittee is Congressman Jeff Denham. Jeff Denham is a strong critic of the high speed rail, and he leads a congressional effort to stop federal dollars from being spent on these projects (Denham, 2013).

The Senate Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security has jurisdiction over civil aviation, with specific oversight responsibility for the FAA. The Senate Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security "monitors the FAA's grant making efforts in funding airport infrastructure projects and air traffic control facilities" (US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation, 2013). This Subcommittee also has jurisdiction over domestic aviation security and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) workforce (US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation, 2013). This Subcommittee is currently led by Democratic Chairwoman Senator Maria Cantwell and her stance on developing new aviation facilities is unknown. The California Representative in this Subcommittee is Barbara Boxer. Senator Boxer is currently an outspoken advocate of reauthorizing Federal highway and transportation spending programs to create new jobs in this industry (Boxer, 2013).



In 1990, the Department of Defense created a commission called BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure). BRAC was developed to save the United States Government money by assessing and closing military bases where they are not necessary. There have been five 'round' of BRAC – in 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995, and 2005. Since its inception, BRAC has closed down over 350 military installations. In relation to MCAS Miramar, BRAC determined in 2005 that the fighter pilot training program at the Miramar Base would be completely phased out by 2015 (BRAC, 2005). It is possible that in the future, a new round of BRAC will be implemented to further reduce the military presence in San Diego.

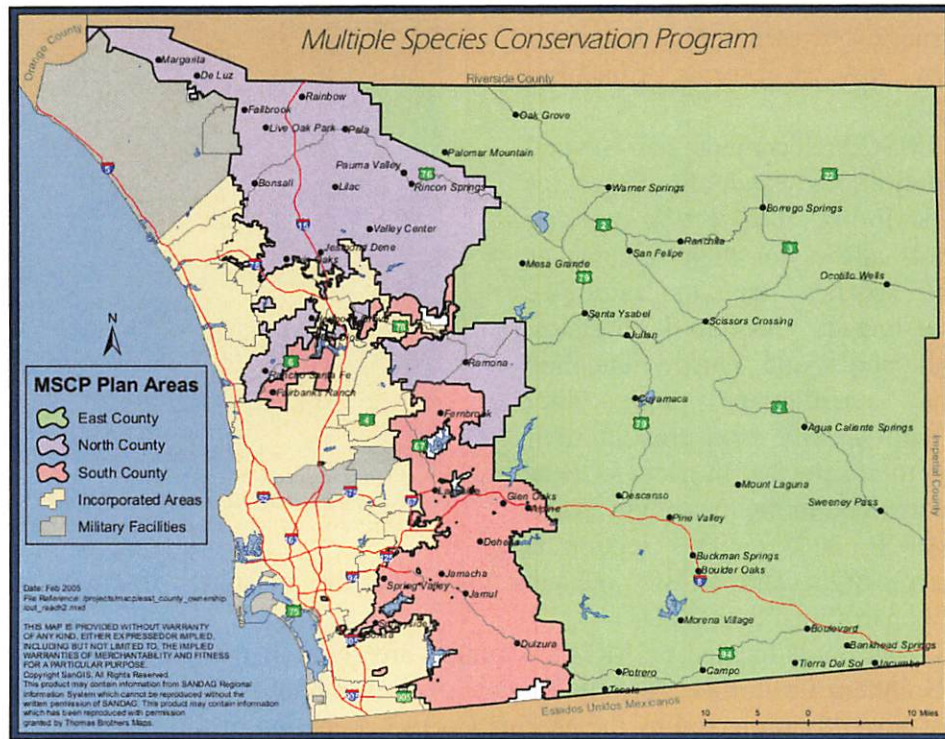
The Marines at MCAS Miramar are currently stationed on land owned by the Federal Government. This land is currently under the jurisdiction of the House of Representatives Armed Forces Committee, which has authority over the Department of Defense (DoD). The DoD holds authority over all branches of the military, including the Marine Corps, which is an organization within the Department of the Navy.

To build an airport on MCAS Miramar, the Airport Authority will need to convince the Federal Government to give the property to San Diego for re-zoning. The Federal Government will not relinquish MCAS Miramar without good cause, and several arguments have already been made against this decision by the Marine Corps, which will be covered in later sections. Successfully transferring ownership of MCAS Miramar to San Diego would require an act of Congress (Bilbray, 2013).

#### **iv. Environmental Restrictions**

All of the development scenarios discussed in this document attempt to make use of undeveloped land. Most of this land remains undeveloped because it is protected by laws and programs which preserve local flora and fauna. Within San Diego County there are several such programs. The largest and most important of these is the Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) for Southwest San Diego County (MSCP, 2010). The MSCP is designed to provide a rubric for balancing development with the preservation of local wild habitats. Put more simply, it exists to protect the native plants, animals, and water resources of San Diego County from the sort of environmental devastation a new international airport would cause. The MSCP is a 278 page document covering a region of approximately 900 square miles (MSCP, 2010). A map of the regions covered by the MSCP is shown in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5: Multiple Species Conservation Program Plan Areas**



Source: Multiple Species Conservation Program (2005). *MSCP Plan Areas*. Retrieved from [http://www.sdcountry.ca.gov/pds/mscp/docs/mscp\\_areas.pdf](http://www.sdcountry.ca.gov/pds/mscp/docs/mscp_areas.pdf).

On MCAS Miramar, one of the most important endangered habitats protected by the MSCP Plan is the vernal pools (MSCP, 2005). Vernal pools are small landlocked ponds scattered throughout the region which host a variety of endangered plant and animal species.

These pools are fed by rainfall and dry out at certain times of the year, giving rise to species which can survive prolonged periods of flooding or drought. The two most important species within the vernal pools' habitat are the San Diego fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*) and San Diego mesa mint (*Pogogyne abramsii*) (Figure 6 and 7, respectively).

**Figure 6: San Diego Fairy Shrimp (*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*)**



Source: Vandergast, A.G.. (2010). Rapid genetic identification of Southern California Fairy Shrimp Species from Cyst. *United States Geological Survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.werc.usgs.gov/Project.aspx?ProjectID=173>.



Both plant and animal species are classified as protected endangered species and the destruction of their native habitat is prohibited by law (California Chaparral Institute, 2004).

The MSCP document has several open-ended definitions which allow agencies tremendous flexibility. The section applying to vernal pools allows for their removal as long as all parties try to minimize environmental impact. Section 3.3.3 states, "...for vernal pools and narrow endemic species, the jurisdictions and other participants will specify measures in their subarea plans to ensure that impacts to these resources are avoided to the maximum extent possible" (MSCP, 2005). This section is open to interpretation and allows agencies to define the meaning of "maximum extent" (California Chaparral Institute, 2004).

The vernal pools located on MCAS Miramar are some of the last remaining habitats of this kind in Southern California. A sample image of such a pool is included in Figure 8 above. The pools are currently protected by the Marine Corps occupation of the site, but if the Marines

are relocated by an act of Congress, Section 3.3.3 of the MSCP would allow the City of San Diego to circumvent this prohibition and build over the vernal pools fairly easily. Destruction of the few remaining vernal pools in San Diego County is a hotly debated ethical issue anticipated to elicit a severe reaction from local environmental groups. According to the Ricondo & Associates 2006 Decision Document, construction of the MCAS Miramar footprint will permanently impact seven

sensitive wetlands totaling 95 acres (San Diego County Regional Airport Authority, 2006).

According to former Congressman Brian Bilbray, the largest challenge to building an airport at Miramar is the environmental regulations by mitigating the vernal pools where the Mesa Mint grows. He states that the area is "a seasonal wetland in a low depression which fills up with water in the winter time". He continues, "...the Fairy Shrimp and the Mesa Mint are on the endangered species list. Anything [done] would require a mitigation plan for that area before

**Figure 7: San Diego Mesa Mint**  
(*Pogogyne abramsii*)



Source: California Chaparral Institute. (2004). *Vernal Pools: Liquid Sapphires of the Chaparral*. Retrieved from <http://www.californiachaparral.com/vernalpools.html>.

**Figure 8: Miramar Vernal Pool**



Source: California Chaparral Institute. (2004). *Vernal Pools: Liquid Sapphires of the Chaparral*. Retrieved from <http://www.californiachaparral.com/vernalpools.html>.



you can put in a runway. You also need to raise the issue that development to the east does not encroach. The approach pattern has to be protected." The details of such a mitigation plan would require extensive research to resolve (Bilbray, 2013).

Environmental protection laws exist on a State and local level. In many cases they overlap, but all must be satisfied before a construction project with the potential to threaten endangered species and habitats can begin. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife manages resources for the State. The San Diego Department of Fish and Game manages the same resources for San Diego County. Normally these two organizations agree on policy, but this is not always the case. It is possible for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to forbid the development of a new airport at MCAS Miramar even if the local Department of Fish and Game allows it (Bilbray, 2013).

For over twenty years, the Department of Fish and Wildlife held up development of the Jonas Salk Elementary School in Mira Mesa because vernal pools were discovered at the construction site. The Fish and Wildlife Service required the district to perform mitigation for fairy shrimp and other species that thrive in the vernal pools before the project could proceed. Historically, the Fish and Wildlife Service has argued that vernal pools cannot be artificially constructed, but a vernal pool habitat re-introduced itself into the graded pad for the school while the contractors waited for funding. It is possible for vernal pool habitats to be recreated, considering it occurred at Jonas Salk Elementary School without planning. Experts suspect the fairy shrimp eggs blew in from an adjacent region and took root there, or tracked into the region on the boots and tires of the construction workers. Development of the school was finally sanctioned in September of 2013 (sandiego6.com, 2013).

**Figure 9: Land Acquisition Summary**

	Acres
Total Airport Site Boundary	2,794
Land Acquisition by Property Type	
Residential	-
Commercial	17
Industrial	76
Agricultural	-
Mining	76
Religious Facility	-
Military	2,215
Transportation/Other	492
Undeveloped	61
Total Land Acquired	2,861

Source: San Diego County Regional Airport Authority, 2006

## **C. Additional/Unique Issues**

### **i. Relocation of Existing Establishments**

The footprint for the MCAS Miramar airport requires acquisition of 2,215 acres of military land plus an additional 700 acres of other lands. As of 2006, these additional sites bring total airport footprint to 2,861 acres. Figure 9 shows a land acquisition summary for the project.

The footprint for the MCAS Miramar airport also requires relocation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing is made up of squadrons who pilot a collection of transport planes, bomber planes, and fighter jets (MCAS Miramar, 2013). Successfully dispersing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Air Wing will require decommissioning or relocating these aircrafts. Potential sites for relocation include NAS Lemoore, MCAS Iwakuni, NAS Atsugi, MCAS Beaufort, or MCAS Yuma (Meyer, 2003).

## **ii. Public Opposition**

There are several reasons why the proposition to build an airport at Miramar was voted down in the 2006 ballot. Those who lived close to Miramar were afraid that the airport would create high levels of noise, traffic, and congestion near their homes. Residents whose family income stems from the Marine Corps were concerned that moving the Marines offsite would force them to leave San Diego or deprive them of their livelihood. Other environmentally concerned citizens objected to the airport because the footprint for the proposed runway encroached on land protected by the MSCP Plan developed by SANDAG, Wildlife Agencies, and the San Diego Board of Supervisors in 1998. Finally, the citizens of the City of San Diego are resistant to change because they are uninformed and fear the unknown. To most citizens, Lindberg Field is adequate for their personal travel needs because it is close and convenient. They do not consider the long term implications of a larger airport on things like ticket cost, freight cost, economic growth, and so forth because these things do not directly and visibly influence them (Bilbray, 2013).

In a perfect scenario, all citizens want to be close enough to the airport for convenience but far enough away that noise, environmental changes, and traffic do not inconvenience them. This is why the voting populace of San Diego rejected the 2006 Proposition A to develop an airport at MCAS Miramar. Proposition A lost in all eighteen cities and the remaining unincorporated area, gaining just 38% of the overall vote, but it received the lowest percentages in regions closest to the airport footprint (Ristine, 2006). The communities bordering MCAS Miramar in the 1<sup>st</sup> District drew less than 28% support, while the 5<sup>th</sup> District gained less than 22% of the vote. The City of Santee, which lies beneath the approach path to MCAS Miramar, also rejected the vote with only 25% in favor of the measure (Ristine, 2006).

Meanwhile regions that were outside the flight path of the new airport but close enough to benefit from reduced travel time viewed the proposition more favorably. North County cities such as Carlsbad and Encinitas were 49% in support, San Marcos was 46% supportive, Oceanside was 45% in favor, and Vista showed 44% support. Interestingly, Districts 2 and 8 showed 46% and 47% support for the proposition despite the fact that many neighborhoods in these districts are adjacent to Lindberg Field. This implies that for many of these citizens the benefit of not being next to an airport trumps the convenience of having one close by.

## **iii. SANDAG**

Since its inception the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority (SDRAA) has held jurisdiction over airports in the region. Before the SDCRAA, this authority was held by the San Diego Regional Planning Agency (SANDAG). Bilbray believes that SANDAG has "no authority on this matter from a state point of view, but they still possess federal land use oversight authority." This means SANDAG has regional land use oversight but no longer possesses airport jurisdiction. If it wished to do so SANDAG could oppose development of an airport at MCAS Miramar based on regional impact, despite the fact that they lack the authority to determine what gets built and what doesn't (Bilbray, 2013).

#### **iv. Miramar Landfill**

The Miramar Landfill was opened in 1957 and is currently the City of San Diego's only active landfill. It is lined, environmentally secured, spans over 1500 acres, and nearly 910,000 tons of waste are disposed of at this location annually (City of San Diego, 2013). According to former Congressman Brian Bilbray, there are FAA regulations prohibiting landfills next to airports and the Miramar landfill may need close in order to run a commercial airport at that location. After the Hudson River Crash, the FAA worries about seagulls getting caught in the jet intake engines of passenger planes. The Hudson River Crash happened because geese got caught in the engines. This is a standard that has been around a long time. Separation between landfills and commercial airports is vital. Even if the FAA could be satisfied it is likely the airlines would refuse to utilize the site for safety and insurance reasons until the landfill issue is resolved (Bilbray, 2013).

#### **v. Political Synergy**

Building an international airport at MCAS Miramar is like building an electronic circuit. All the political connections must be made or the whole thing will not work. For this site, that means the Department of Defense, San Diego City Council, the Department of Fish & Wildlife, the FAA, and the cities impacted by the project must all be brought into alignment. Following that, a source of funding must be obtained. Getting all these things done requires an action plan, but it begs the question whether this project is worth the effort in light of all the obstacles present. Other sites have considerably fewer political obstacles. Below is a brief overview of what the MCAS Miramar footprint entails.

Satisfying the military and government will require negotiation with the Marines themselves, the Department of Navy, and the Department of Defense. It is likely these groups will need to be compensated for the land and the hassle of relocating. Then the issue must be brought before Congress and added to a bill. As long as national security is not compromised and a strong argument can be made for relocating the marines it is possible that MCAS Miramar could be targeted by a future round of BRAC closures. If this happened, it is likely Congress would put MCAS Miramar up for auction and sell the land to generate much needed revenue.

Because military spending represents a large portion of San Diego's economy, an alternative plan to increase San Diego business would also need to be presented to Congress to make up for lost revenue. If a good argument can be made showing that the international airport will generate sufficient tax revenue it is also likely the FAA would supply some of the money to build the airport itself. The FAA would NOT pay for infrastructure changes to the city outside the footprint of the airport however.

San Diego City Council will do whatever the voting public wants them to do. Their job is to gather large amounts of information, assess it, and then make decisions concurrent with the public good. Getting City Council to re-zone the land will require campaigning to the public to gather support. MCAS Miramar is already seeing major cuts to funding and their fighter pilot training program will be phased out by 2015. If the base is targeted by BRAC and a compelling plan to galvanize the San Diego economy is offered up to supplement the loss of military income it is likely that public opinion would shift in favor of the project.

The vernal pool habitat at MCAS Miramar would likely be destroyed by development of a new local airport. Fortunately it has recently been proven at the Salk Elementary School construction site that vernal pool habitats actually can spontaneously regenerate and be artificially replicated. With funding and a strong mitigation plan to recreate vernal pool wetlands



elsewhere, it is possible to satisfy the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Given that this is a long term multi-billion dollar project, putting up the money to create a good mitigation plan and build some wetlands elsewhere is likely to be trivial. Whether artificial wetlands can actually be replicated is another story, but the Salk Elementary School incident is worth looking into.

The Miramar Landfill may need to be moved before the airlines will agree to fly to Miramar. Even if they do agree it is likely the FAA will demand action to mitigate the threat of having seagulls sucked into passenger jet turbines. Creating a plan to develop another landfill elsewhere may resolve this problem. Alternately there may be technologies or waste disposal techniques which make this a non-issue. If no such techniques exist it may benefit San Diego to invest in some.

## Section IV: FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Building a new international airport in San Diego is hard because the city is so over developed that the only remaining places suitable for such an addition are either very remote or owned by the Federal Government. Most of the remote sites considered in the Ricondo document can be ruled out because their locations do not service a large enough demographic to justify the expense of the project. San Diego County has a population of roughly 3 million, while greater Los Angeles County has a population of roughly 13 million. The residents of San Diego only need a new airport if it serves their best interests. Thus, when building a new international airport the project must be positioned to serve the largest demographic possible. For this reason, in addition to the added convenience of pre-existing transportation infrastructure, this study favors the Camp Pendleton site.

### A. MCAS Miramar

MCAS Miramar is an excellent location to build an international airport, but the political and financial barriers to development are currently too great to warrant the effort. Developing an international airport at this site mainly benefits the San Diego business community by allowing manufacturers to ship products cheaply and efficiently in the bellies of passenger jets. While San Diego would presumably benefit from this increased revenue, a well-entrenched portion of the populace is currently dependent on military spending for their livelihood, and these people would be disenfranchised by such a development. In future years it is possible that MCAS Miramar will be increasingly targeted by BRAC in an effort to curtail unnecessary military spending. If budget cuts continue to impact MCAS Miramar it is possible the Federal Government may eventually decide to dissolve the base and sell the land. If this happens it will be considerably easier to build an airport there.

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Established May 1, 2013

**OFFICIAL RECORD**  
**Clerk of the Board of Supervisors**  
**County of San Diego**

Exhibit No. B

Meeting Date: 09/10/2025 Agenda No. 09

Presented by: Dorothea Flanigan





