

GAO Reports on DoD's Sustainable Range Program

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The Government Accountability Office (GAO) released an updated report on DoD's Operational Range Sustainment Program, "Military Training: Improvement Continues in DoD's Reporting on Sustainable Ranges but Additional Time is Needed to Fully Implement Key Initiatives". The GAO report was prepared in response to the requirements listed in the FY2003 Defense Authorization Act (Section 366). Section 366 required the DoD Services to conduct an inventory of their operational ranges and to develop and report on a plan for the sustainment of those ranges. Section 366 required DoD to submit status reports on those plans on an annual basis between FY 2005 through 2008. DoD submitted the first plan in February 2004, its second annual report in July 2005, and a third and current annual report in February 2006. Section 366 also tasked the GAO to conduct an evaluation of those reports on an annual basis and report their findings to Congress.

GAO's evaluation of the 2006 annual report concluded that DoD has improved over the two previous reports by better describing the challenges of encroachment and the effects they have on training and in identifying tools to improve the management of ranges and training assets. The GAO complimented DoD for their efforts in reporting on compatible land use initiatives and buffer zone programs that the Services have implemented at numerous installations.

Although the GAO did identify several areas where DoD is doing well or has improved, they also provided a list of areas or challenges that continue to face DoD. For example, the evaluation concluded that the range inventory still did not identify specific capacities, capabilities, and constraints of each operational range. The GAO also noted that the 2006 DoD report does not address or identify funding requirements for implementing the range sustainment plan, future training requirements for their ranges, or legislative and regulatory changes needed to ease the constraints as requested for in the Defense Authorization Act.

The GAO report provides a summary status update of the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force range sustainment programs. Overall the report indicated that DoD has improved in the reporting of their range sustainment programs but they still faced some challenges to meet all of the requirements established in the Defense Authorization Act.

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