

# Community no problem for military flights

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**By Allison Gatlin**

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A proposed community on Tejon Ranch land near Gorman will not interfere with military flight routes as once thought, military officials have determined.

The determination clears the way for continued planning for the community of Centennial, a city of 23,000 homes, businesses, parks and schools, and two other planned Tejon Ranch development projects.

"I believe we have come to a mutual understanding that the existence of (Department of Defense) military training routes over Tejon Ranch Company development footprints for Centennial, Mountain Village and the Industrial Park should not preclude your planning efforts with regard to these areas," Rear Adm. J.L. Betancourt, representing the state's military services, wrote to project executives.

Tejon Ranch Co., Pardee Homes, Lewis Investment Co. and Standard Pacific Homes formed a partnership called Centennial Founders LLC and filed plans in September 2002 proposing the community 30 miles north of Santa Clarita and 14 miles west of Lancaster's city limits.

The 11,700-acre development falls under flight paths used by several military installations in Southern and Central California, including Edwards Air Force Base and China Lake Naval Weapons Station. Some of these paths include low-level training routes, leading to concern by military officials that the development could hinder their operations in the area.

In October 2003, Betancourt, Navy region southwest commander and Department of Defense regional environmental coordinator, voiced concerns that the proposed development would interfere with the military's low-level flight corridors criss-crossing the skies above it.

The issue also prompted fears that encroachment by the development could make the region's bases vulnerable to closure in this year's Base Realignment and Closure round.

Betancourt wrote then Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger, asking that the development be stopped in order to preserve the military flight paths.

"After they had a chance to sit down and really look at the plans, they discovered it really was compatible," said Barbara Casey, spokeswoman for Centennial Founders.

Discussions with the military over the last year did not hamper the ongoing planning process, officials said.

"We were confident all along that we would have no problem working this out with the military," said Barry Zoeller, vice-president of corporate communications for Tejon Ranch Co.

The flight routes in question are 8 to 10 miles wide. The Centennial project, at its widest, is only 3 miles wide, so there is ample room within the corridors for directing flight traffic to avoid flying directly over the community, he said.

The military also questioned the company's future plans for the more than 270,000 acres of Tejon Ranch lands. The company shared its 25-year plan, which foresees development on only 5% of the ranch, Zoeller said.

In addition to Centennial, the Tejon Ranch Co. has two other projects for the land on the drawing board, both in Kern County.

A mountain resort community called Tejon Mountain Village is planned for the Tejon Lake area east of Lebec. Still in the planning stages - nothing has been filed with the county yet - this community is envisioned as a resort with low-density housing.

The Tejon Industrial Complex, at the intersection of Interstate 5 and Highway 99 north of the Grapevine, already houses an IKEA distribution center and travel plaza and is poised for further expansion.

In issuing his findings, Betancourt cautioned that the analysis "is based on current information and must be reevaluated as the land use process progresses."

The project is compatible with existing aircraft and missions, he wrote; however, "it is impossible to foresee future requirements precisely."

Through discussions on this issue, the project developers have established a good working relationship with the military, Zoeller said.

"It's an example of how the military and private land owners can work together," he said. "It really is a win-win situation for the military and for the ranch."

The Tejon Ranch Co. has long spoken out in support of the nearby bases at Edwards Air Force Base and China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, he said.

The Centennial project is still early in the planning phases, continuing work on the studies for the draft environmental impact reports. Those reports should be ready for the Los Angeles County Planning Commission this fall, Casey said.

If all goes well, the developers hope to start breaking ground in 2007, then taking approximately one year to install the necessary infrastructure.

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