



OFFICE OF SENATOR SABINA FLORES PEREZ

I MINA'TRENTAI SINGKO NA LIHESLATURAN GUÁHAN
35TH GUAM LEGISLATURE

October 21, 2019

The Honorable Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski,

I am writing as a Senator of the 35th Guam Legislature to request oversight on management of endangered species, historic preservation, and expenditure of government funds regarding federal projects on Guam. This is a matter of urgency due to the recent passage of Guam Legislative Resolution 164-35 seeking a pause on the construction of the five live-fire training ranges at Northwest Field because of the impacts to our sacred sites and irreplaceable natural and cultural resources. Clearing of forests has already begun for four of the five firing ranges. Funding for the fifth and largest of the ranges is pending appropriations from the current Congressional budget under the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Thus, it is critical that the appropriations are put on hold to protect our sacred sites and natural and cultural resources.

The site of the live-fire training ranges is on a sacred site known as *Tailôlo'*, which is adjacent to other sacred, ancestral sites of *Litekyan*, *Uruano*, *Inapsan*, and *Pahung*. As indigenous people of Guam, connection to our ancestral lands is a key part of our identity. We are deeply disturbed by the destruction of our sacred, cultural and historic sites occurring before our eyes.

The damage to our cultural and historic sites is significant. More than seventy-nine (79) ancestral and historic sites will be adversely impacted at or near *Litekyan*. Fourteen historic (14) sites have already been destroyed. Eighteen (18) inadvertent discoveries of human remains have been found since 2018 in the course of the military buildup on Guam. Earlier this month in the span of a week, two discoveries of human bone parts, an ileum and fibula, were found in push piles from bulldozing activity. These rushed and insensitive unearthing of ancestral burials and other artifacts constitute a desecration of our ancestors and disruption of our cultural connections. Oversight of the preservation of historic sites and inadvertent discoveries is critical to protecting our cultural heritage.

The Guam National Wildlife Refuge, which contains the ancient village of *Litekyan*, is adjacent to the firing ranges and designated as critical habitat for three protected species. The Surface Danger Zone for the firing ranges extends through approximately 68% of this refuge. When the ranges are fully operational, access will be limited or prohibited to the Guam National Wildlife Refuge for up to 39 weeks of the year, adversely impacting management of endangered and threatened species. Oversight is needed regarding the mandates of the wildlife refuge as critical habitat and to ensure sufficient measures are in place to protect listed species.



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The construction of a fifth firing range requires the clearing of primary limestone forest that is habitat for at least eleven (11) endangered or threatened species, some of which are found nowhere else in the world. The Department of Defense's proposed mitigations are insufficient and problematic. Their proposal consists of translocating a portion of our endangered and threatened species, as well as host plants, to new areas outside the firing range. Yet, research is lacking as to the viability of such experimental measures. Survival rates from such translocation and other mitigation projects need to be determined and questioned, or else we jeopardize the survival of these species.

Additionally, this forest is widely recognized for its high biodiversity. As a result, it was set aside as a conservation recovery area for re-introduction of endangered native birds and the threatened Mariana fruit bat. One million dollars of federal funds were used to construct a fence to protect the area from ungulate damage. Yet, the current mitigation plan involves removal of this fence, undermining the previous federally funded mitigation program. Oversight is needed on this wasteful destruction of a critical environmental protection project, which was federally funded, as well as a transparent discussion on the implications for protecting endangered and threatened species.

In my view, the proposed firing range is wasteful, expensive, and harmful to the environment. To date, the Department of Defense's piecemeal approach has limited transparency, community engagement, and proper research into the cumulative impacts of their actions. As a result, we need comprehensive oversight to include four key areas: excessive federal spending, cumulative impacts to the environment, threats to endangered species, and insufficient historic preservation.

In line with Guam Legislative Resolution 164-35, I respectfully urge your Subcommittee to expeditiously hold an Oversight hearing regarding irreversible impacts to our sacred sites, cultural and natural resources due to the construction of five firing ranges at *Tailálo'* or Northwest Field, the wasteful use of funds to undermine existing federal environmental protection projects, and to put a hold on appropriations for the fifth firing range earmarked in the 2020 NDAA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sabina Flores Perez". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Sabina Flores Perez
Senator, 35th Guam Legislature



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Enclosures (3) are attached by email, and may also be downloaded at tiny.cc/SP-Enclosures

1. Guam Legislative Resolution 164-35
2. 2018 Conservation and Management of the Mariana Eight-Spot Butterfly
3. 2018 Threatened and Endangered Plant Surveys at Northwest Field

cc: Governor Lourdes Leon Guerrero

Michael San Nicolas, Guam Congressional Delegate

Speaker Tina Muña Barnes, 35th Guam Legislature

Vice Speaker Telen Cruz Nelson, 35th Guam Legislature

Ana Won Pat-Borja, Legislative Counsel, 35th Guam Legislature

Leevin Camacho, Attorney General of Guam