

## **Wrestling With a Pig**

I have a longstanding belief that responding to rumors is a lot like wrestling with a pig. According to George Bernard Shaw's proverb, "You get dirty, and besides, the pig likes it." In this instance though, I am keenly aware of how much time has passed since we stopped shooting and how memories tend to fade, so maybe a little pig wrestling isn't such a bad idea.

There was a recent email from one of our members that was circulated around the shooting community in San Diego regarding the status of our club and his impressions of a board meeting. To be charitable, I believe the email was only intended as a private expression of his opinion to another member. Unfortunately, the email went "viral," spreading to many of the shooters in San Diego and beyond. To make matters worse, the email contained a lot of misinformation that has since become fodder for those that enjoy a good rumor, and has created a venue on message boards for those that like to express their "armchair" opinions.

One of the really unfortunate side effects these rumors and unfounded opinions is that they tend to point fingers at individuals and agencies and, in some misguided quixotic twist, identify them as the real villains in this saga. I'm reminded of one recent post, written in a seemingly knowledgeable and authoritative tone, identifying the EPA as one of the villains currently holding the Marine Corps back from reopening this club. While this rumor certainly fits conveniently with widely held preconceptions about the EPA, the truth is quite different. The EPA actually wrote an unqualified letter of support for SDSSA's position back in November of 2008, and has no current role in the study being conducted by the Marine Corps. In fact, it may surprise many shooters to know that the EPA has been very proactive for years in helping shooting ranges stay open and develop their lead management plans. In this case, the real villain behind our closure is not one of the usual suspects!

### **So how did we get to this point?**

The answer is not quite as simple as pointing your finger at the Marine Corps, SDSSA, EPA or outside agencies like the California Department of Fish and Game and saying, "they did it." In my view, it's a culmination of events and decisions beginning 34 years ago when the club first moved to its current location.

First, you have to recognize that this club has always existed on a series of five to six year leases with no provisions for extensions or renewals. That wasn't a decision made by club management, but rather a circumstance dictated by the military's guidelines for real estate leases on military bases.

Let's take a trip back to 1975 when this club first opened in its current location. In those days, health concerns over lead shot were pretty much limited to being hit with it at high velocities or biting down on a game bird with #4's. That tick-infested brush you see growing outside the fence line today was not widely regarded as "environmentally sensitive" Coastal Sage Scrub. It was mainly regarded as a fire hazard. Who could ever have imagined that Fairy Shrimp, those mail order oddities that kids found in the back of comic books, would someday rise to the status of a protected species? Even if you were somehow blessed with a gift for predicting the future of endangered crustaceans, who would have thought they would take up residence in those muddy tire ruts outside our fence. Yet today, those are exactly the issues that have silently and relentlessly surrounded our range over the past 34 years. These same issues are not just affecting SDSSA, but have thrown a wrench in the works of several Marine Corps projects over the last few years.

There are a lot of misconceptions out there regarding the issue of lead going over the fence. First, we can dispel the notion that lead is going off the base, as suggested by some. It is not leaving Marine Corps property and never has. However, there is no question that lead has been falling beyond our lease boundary. It has been ever since the first shot was fired out there over 34 years ago. The

range was never designed or intended to limit the shot fall area to the lease boundaries. This was a fact well known to our previous landlord, the Navy, and everyone connected to the range. For decades, the gun club would periodically go through a lengthy process to request access beyond our lease to mine lead. Throughout that period, the Navy's concern had little to do with environmental issues and was more directed towards maintaining base security. This ultimately prompted two separate expansions of the range boundaries. In retrospect, those expansions were unfortunately focused on the accessible or convenient areas for lead mining to the exclusion of the overall shot fall zone.

There was a lot of attention paid to the revelation by Lt. Col. Christopher Manis, Miramar's Installation and Logistics officer, that his environmental consultants were showered with lead while working in the canyon. There wasn't much attention focused on why those environmental consultants were down there. The fact is that previous studies, prepared years earlier under the Navy's direction, identified lead deposits in the canyon from several potential sources. These sources included an abandoned World War I era pistol range, fuel contamination from an adjacent runway, an abandoned military dumpsite and the shotgun range. Those previous Navy studies were not only available, but were ultimately used by the consultants under Lt. Col. Manis' direction to prepare their first study. Moreover, our current lease boundaries extend well into the bottom of the canyon. In retrospect, it really shouldn't have come as much of a surprise to the Marines that we had lead shot falling in the canyon. More to the point, this study, that had begun many months before our lease negotiations started, provided the first notice we had that the Marine Corps was conducting an environmental survey that would affect the range and our lease negotiations. Our immediate response was to close Fields 11 and 12, adjacent to the canyon, as sign of good faith. Shortly thereafter, we were ordered to cease all shooting until we could prepare a plan that would ensure no lead shot would leave the lease boundaries. Given the history of the range, that was a pretty tall order to say the least.

### **Where are we today?**

We are currently in a holding pattern awaiting the results of a second environmental study initiated by the Marine Corps. This study, referred to as a PA/SI (Preliminary Assessment /Site Inspection), is typically conducted under EPA guidelines for the purposes determining whether a site poses a threat to human health or the environment. According to the Marine Corps, this study is a follow-up to the initial site investigation that was ongoing in 2008. We have been told that this study will essentially determine the suitability of the site for a shotgun range and make recommendations for any remedial measures required to protect human health or the environment. Our best information is that the study will be completed in the November/December 2009 time frame.

A meeting was held in Washington in August that included Congressman Duncan D. Hunter, Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Eugene G. Payne Jr. (Assistant Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics), Robert Keefe, Dick Peddicord, and staff representing Congressman Brian Bilbray. All of those attending, including Maj. Gen. Payne, expressed their desire to see SDSSA reopened as soon as possible. Additionally, Congressman Hunter introduced an amendment into the 2010 Defense Authorization Act directing the Marine Corps to expedite the PA/SI and submit a report to congress that includes a plan and timeline to reopen the range. The Senate passed that bill with the amendment intact in August.

In an effort to meet the initial demands by the Marine Corps, we retained Dick Peddicord, who is widely regarded by the EPA, NRA, and NSSF, as the foremost expert on lead management, to prepare a Lead Management Plan. That plan is nearly complete, lacking only those specific recommendations anticipated to be included the PA/SI.

One of the topics discussed in Washington was a request by Robert Keefe to Maj. Gen. Payne that SDSSA be allowed to reopen a limited number of fields during the interim period while the PA/SI was

in process. The request included the provision that SDSSA would ensure that no lead left the leased property. Maj. Gen. Payne agreed that if we prepared a formal proposal, he would give it serious consideration. After some investigation into ballistics and a lot of help from members Dick Cross and Kurt Sachau, we determined that only four fields would qualify and then only if we limited the shot sizes. The Interim Range Proposal was completed in July and forwarded by Duncan Hunter's staff. In August, Maj. Gen. Payne responded with a letter indicating that the proposal had apparently been held up in the Pentagon mail and had arrived with the Lead Management Plan missing from the exhibits. Further, he stated that the proposal would require review by other local agencies that are currently involved in the PA/SI. The missing exhibit has since been re-sent and we are now awaiting a response.

We are currently occupying the property rent-free on a temporary license issued by the Marine Corps. Although that license expires at the end of the year, Maj. Gen. Payne has offered an additional year starting on January 1, 2010 pending the resolution of our lease.

Thanks to our members and the recent lead sales, we have over \$50,000 in our general checking account. We have cut our costs to a bare minimum, just short of closing the gates. We would all like to see a healthier balance sheet, but for a club that's been closed for over a year, we're not in bad shape. In addition to the \$4,000 a month it takes to keep the gates open and the property maintained, we anticipate that we will require several thousand dollars to complete our Lead Management Plan on the completion of the PA/SI. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing what additional requirements we may be facing or funds required until the PA/SI is completed.

### **So, what are the odds of getting this range reopened?**

First, I would be remiss if I didn't issue a few disclosures. I never visit the Del Mar Race Track. I've never been to an Indian casino. The only reason I've gone to Las Vegas in the past 10 years was to shoot a little trap and watch the junior SCTP shooters. I'm probably not the best odds maker on the board. With that said, when I see two congressmen, a few very high ranking Marines, and a congressional directive all heading in the same direction towards reopening the club, I have to think the odds are pretty good.

I'm under no illusion that the PA/SI will be completed, and suddenly the clouds over the club will open up and things will suddenly go back to business as usual. I believe we will have some hard work and tough decisions ahead of us. There is one thing I can predict with absolute certainty, though. This is a member club and without the continued support of the members and others in the shooting community, our odds of getting this club reopened are virtually zero. That support needs to go beyond just renewing memberships. It involves dedication and resolve by the shooting community to a sport that risks a slow quiet descent into obscurity.

Thanks to all of you who have supported the club this past year and particularly those who have donated their time and resources to keep us moving in the right direction. We all owe our gratitude to Duncan Hunter, Brian Bilbray, and Maj. Gen. Payne for their continued support in Washington. Keep your thoughts and conversations positive and by all means keep those suggestions coming.

Oh, about that villain we've been looking for, it's complacency. It's the feeling that people sometimes get when they sit back in their favorite chair, comforted by the belief that there are always others out there that will protect them, their way of life, and the things they hold dear.

*Steve Marsch*