

State of Connecticut, Proposed CT State Police Range: Frequently Asked Questions with Answers

Need for a new CSP Firing Range:

1. What weapons do troopers utilize and what kind of training do they receive?

- A. All State troopers are issued a handgun and a number also get a rifle or a shotgun. The handguns are .45 caliber, the shotguns are 12 gauge, and the rifles are .556 or .223. Only about 8 troopers in the tactical unit use larger caliber rifles (.308 or .408).

Every trooper must qualify prior to graduation from the Academy and requalify on every weapon they will carry annually, or twice a year, thereafter depending on the type of firearm. In addition, every three years all troopers requalify under low light conditions (dusk).

All shooting is conducted under the same conditions that troopers perform their duties, so that they learn to effectively handle their weapons in all temperatures and weather and light conditions they may face. For the same reason, the training environment also simulates real life, Shoot-Don't Shoot, scenarios that troopers face every day, so that they master making critical decisions about when, where, and how to use deadly physical force without placing innocent lives at stake.

In order that every trooper maintains all of their certifications, the firing range must be large enough to accommodate sufficient lanes of varying lengths and accessible regardless of the weather, and the instructional space is flexible and has sufficient seat capacity to accommodate the workforce on a continuous basis throughout the year.

2. Can't you modify or expand the facility you have rather than relocate and build a new one?

- A. No, neither is possible. The range is situated at the base of Avon Mountain, well within a flood plain, and abutted by the Farmington River in Simsbury. Even when rainfall is moderate, as has been the case this year, the range floods. Repeated flooding and mold led to condemnation and demolition of our classroom building on the property. The flooding cannot be abated due to federal regulations regarding redirecting the river's path, and a prohibition that precludes replacing the instructional space as well.

Were it possible to control the flooding, the Simsbury property, 12.5 acres, is too small to provide more of the training opportunities that troopers should have to keep pace with the threats that they increasingly face in the field, including eastern Connecticut, varying widely from accidental opioid overdoses and an influx in rural drug trafficking routes to domestic violence situations where the partner is at eminent risk of harm and active shooter scenarios. The limited space in Simsbury resulted in the placement of the lanes in a manner that prevents more than one range to be safely utilized at a time. The lack of buildable space also prevents expanding the classroom facility to meet CSP's evolving training needs.

3. The state owns so much land already; why aren't any of these sites used for the range?

- A. DAS and DESPP considered all of the state's owned parcels including all of the properties under DESPP's control. DESPP does not have a property under its control that is large enough to locate a new range. We wish that we did. DAS and DESPP also considered all of the properties under DAS' control; and more specifically, any state-owned parcel unencumbered by donor or sale stipulation, over 1,300 in number. To our surprise, none of them is large enough and situated far enough away from homes to meet the new range's minimum requirements.

DAS and DESPP also considered state-leased property including the National Guard's Rifle Range in East Haven (EHRR). The training provided at EHRR which prepares its troops for combat, not community policing, is incompatible with the judgmental training that CSP requires of its troopers. An extensive discussion regarding the assessment of this location is provided in Question 4, below.

The only other option, but for eminent domain, is to purchase property from a land owner who is a willing seller; also known as property that is "reasonably available." This is the course of action that the State is currently pursuing. DAS, on behalf of DESPP, accepted a number of offers, also known as "unsolicited sites," by willing land owners, among them the Lee Road location in Griswold, for consideration for this project.

4. Can CSP use the National Guard facilities instead?

- A. No. The CT Army National Guard has two training facilities in Connecticut, the East Haven Rifle Range (EHRR) and the Stones Ranch facility in East Lyme. Neither of them is a suitable alternative.

The CSP evaluated both sites extensively before determining their unsuitability. There is no range at Stone's Ranch and no land to build one. The East Haven Rifle Range was designed to meet the specifications of the National Guard, not the State Police. The differences are significant, and both agencies agree that it cannot be modified to meet the collective training requirements.

First, the State Police trains its troopers under conditions to which they will respond – natural light, all weather conditions and a flexible layout and adjustable targets to simulate real life scenarios. In contrast, the National Guard's facility uses baffled decks which are a series of walls surrounding the target areas. The baffled structure can affect lighting and ground conditions.

Second, both the pistol lanes, about 25 yards, and the rifle lanes, just 27 yards, are one length each; there is no opportunity to practice at close range and long distances. Instead, the Guard uses small targets on the range deck to simulate shooting at distances 200 to 300 yards away. Simulations do not suffice as training. The CT National Guard uses ranges in other states to satisfy its minimum training requirements before mobilizing its troops for deployment. Unlike the National Guard, the State Police relies upon its state resources to complete its training requirements.

Third, EHRR's targets are fixed, both fully-automated and remotely-operated. Guardsmen train standing or lying prone in a stationary position, shooting in place at a pre-programmed target as soon as it appears. Its automated target system is designed for military use, cannot be manipulated, and does not afford opportunity to acquire critical "shoot/ don't shoot" skills that are essential in routine interactions with the public in civilian settings. In contrast, CSP targets are controlled by the range officer, turning the target at different speeds, training troopers to quickly discern an innocent gesture from a threatening action and to respond appropriately.

Fourth, availability is limited. We use our range throughout the year. We would not be able to use the National Guard's range in East Haven year round. The Guard has set aside a number of days between May and September to conduct its annual training. We don't have enough troopers to schedule more than 30 on the days that are available for our use because most of them are already allocated to the field. The only way to compensate for the loss of days is with overtime, which would appreciably increase the state's on-going operating cost.

Last, the National Guard would charge DESPP a fee of \$885 for each day, or a portion thereof, that the State Police uses its range. The on-going operating cost to qualify troopers would be appreciably less at a facility owned and operated by DESPP.

As noted above, Stones Ranch in East Lyme does not have a range and the National Guard has no plans to build one on site as the facility is fully utilized by the National Guard. For the same reason, the National Guard will not agree to the state building a range for the CSP on its property.

5. Have other facilities been considered, such as DOC or private ranges?

A. Yes, we have considered other facilities:

DOC – DOC trains Correction Officers throughout the year. The DOC has an indoor range in Enfield, an indoor range in Cheshire, and an outdoor range in Cheshire; only a limited number of lanes are operable in each location. And, as is the case with the National Guard range, DOC's ranges are not designed to meet CSP's minimum training requirements. Additionally, the Enfield site has had numerous mechanical failures and is often inoperable. The Cheshire range closes at 4 p.m. per an agreement with the Town of Cheshire precluding any low light training that troopers must complete. To the extent that the lanes are operable, DOC uses its three sites throughout the year.

Groton Sub Base – The Sub Base has an indoor range, and it has limited availability on the weekends only. Neither its capacity nor its characteristics is sufficient to meet our requirements.

National Guard Facilities – The National Guard has two locations in CT, East Haven and East Lyme, in CT and neither is a suitable alternative. After considerable study, CSP determined that the range in East Haven does not meet CSP's minimum requirements and the Guard's facility in East Lyme does not have a range. Please see Question 4 just above for more information.

Privately Owned Ranges – There is a number of privately owned and operated ranges on private property throughout the state however, none of them is sufficient in size or availability and none of them is designed to meet our specific training needs and requirements.

Public and Private Gun Clubs – We also explored a number of the private and public gun clubs that are registered with DEEP. Only a few of them partially met our training needs and none of them was interested in selling their property to the State. The majority was insufficient in size, or was an indoor range, and/or lacked the types of ranges to qualify all of the weapons that troopers utilize.

6. Why can't the zoning board/town residents vote on whether or not this project proceeds?

- A. The state's process is different than the one that is used by some communities when considering development projects at the local level. Since this is a state action, it is governed by state law, and not local regulations or town referendums. State law requires that public comments are solicited at the early stages of the project and again during the Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE) public comment and review stage; see CGS 22a-1-22a-1h. DAS and DESSP are committed to communication throughout the process, from start to finish. A website, an email address (TrainingFacilityInfo@ct.gov) and regular meetings in town with troopers are being added to ensure we answer your questions as quickly and as thoroughly as possible.

Site Specific Plans

1. How will the site be used? What types of structures will you build and kinds of training activities will you conduct?

- A. The training facility's design as well as its placement on the property will not be finalized before the EIE is completed but the major elements are quite narrow: There will be an enclosed instructional area and outdoors ranges. The facility will consist of a maximum of approximately 55,000 square feet of multi-purpose training space. Its main uses will include classrooms space including an area for firearms simulation training, a computer-based platform linked to laser instruments that is used to prepare troopers for a wide range of active shooter situations; gun cleaning and smithing space; several staff offices and file storage; secure storage vaults for weapons and ammunition; an ammunition reloading area; and a kitchenette/breakroom and lockers for troopers and training staff.

Outdoors, there will be separate pistol, rifle and shotgun ranges. Alongside the ranges will be two range control 'towers,' each about one-story high, from which the range instructor controls the targets, directs activity, and observes movement on the decks. Also on site, will be septic, telecommunication and electrical systems, a well, and a parking lot.

On a typical day, about 30 troopers will report for instruction. The additional classroom and parking capacity would be used one or two times a year to qualify trooper trainees attending the State Police Academy.

2. Will other state or federal agencies be allowed to use the facility?

- A. To a limited extent, yes. The Connecticut State Police is the facility's primary user, training troopers at least 80% of the time. To a lesser extent, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies with which the State Police partners, primarily in inter-agency task forces, may train with the State Police, no more than 20% of the time, to maintain our collective readiness to respond to critical events.

3. Will the range be in use 7 days a week and on holidays, both days and nights?

- A. No. The regular operating hours for the range will be Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Every three years all troopers requalify under low light conditions (dusk). This activity is conducted immediately after sunset and typically is completed within an hour, no later than 9:00 p.m. at the summer solstice and much earlier towards the winter solstice. The range is rarely used on the weekend and never on holidays.

The duration and frequency of actual shooting will be minimal when compared to the regular hours of operations as actual firing of weapons will not be continuous and usually occurs in short blocks of time during the day. When adding up the total seconds of actual firing of most weapons, including the silence in-between rounds, the total time is quite low, typically 1 hour and 40 minutes to 2 hours, spread out over the 8 hours.

4. Does the state plan to use the selected site for any purpose other than a firing range?

- A. No. The selected site will not be used for any purpose other than the proposed training facility.

5. How many acres does the state need to build a firing range and what does the state plan to do with the rest of the land it doesn't use for this purpose?

- A. About 30 acres are needed for the facility itself. Additional acreage is used to create sight and sound buffers between the facility and neighboring properties. The property on Lee Road is 113.5 acres, so roughly 26% will be used for the training facility. The rest will of the property will be preserved and used as a buffer between the facility and its neighbors.

6. Will the state add additional facilities to the property after the range is completed?

- A. No. There are no plans to add additional facilities to the property.

7. Will CSP be training with automatic firearms?

- A. Most troopers train with and use semi-automatic firearms. Fewer than 30 troopers in highly specialized tactical units use automatic firearms. There is no plan to expand that number.

8. Will there be a Helipad at the facility and how often will helicopters be landing at the site?

A. No. There will not be a helipad at the facility and no helicopters will be landing at the site.

9. Are there plans to place a driving/training pursuit track on the property now or in the future?

A. No. Initial plans contemplated a driving/training pursuit track; this is no longer the case.

10. Will CSP train using bombs or other explosive material?

A. No. The training will be for firearms only.

11. Are any amenities planned for the facility including as examples, pool tables, televisions, cafeterias, dorms, and fireplaces?

A. No, the facility has no amenities.

Cost

1. How can you justify to taxpayers the expense of acquiring land and building a new facility, particularly during this difficult economic time?

A. The safety of the public is one of the core functions of our government and one of the main ways this is accomplished is by providing competent, continuous training of its workforce. The purpose of this facility is to provide a reliable training environment, one that would be readily available and suitably sized to afford the variety of training opportunities of sufficient duration and under realistic conditions to all of the sworn members of the Connecticut State Police.

The Simsbury facility cannot accommodate all of the training that troopers must be provided and the frequently occurring cancellations due to flooding impede the state's responsibility to maintain a continuously credentialed workforce. Even without flooding, the range is too small to meet the CSP's evolving training needs. The State Police is the local police in 80 of the state's 169 towns including the 41 of the 50 towns in the Eastern District. The State Police is also the primary responder statewide to significant public safety threats. It is critical that every trooper receives all of the training needed, in training environments simulating the situations they will likely face in the field to ensure that they are always at the ready to respond to your calls, and always able to protect themselves from harm each time that they do.

As we adjust to the new economic reality in our state, continually spending state funds on our facility in Simsbury is not an effective or efficient way to maximize our resources. We all recognize the tough economic times we currently face but during these times, all state agencies have been called upon to identify and affirm their top priorities and allocate their resources accordingly. Ensuring Connecticut has a sufficient number of troopers, all of them well trained, on patrol and at the ready to respond to the public safety threats we encounter, continues to be at the top of our list.

It should also be noted that this project will be funded through state bond funds, not state general fund dollars. Bond funds are often used to finance major capital projects that provide benefit to the state over many years, so as not to burden a single generation of taxpayers.

2. Would the town that houses the range be eligible to receive State PILOT Funds?

- A. Yes, PILOT funding is required by statute. The amount that the town would receive would be determined based on the assessed value of the property and mill rate. The current assessed value of the Simsbury site is \$384,140; reimbursement at 45% is \$172,863 annually; the total with the applied mill rate is \$6,626.

3. Will Griswold be eligible for any other consideration in addition to PILOT?

- A. DAS and DESPP are open to discussion with Griswold to explore all options, including increased PILOT funding, resident use of the facility, and potentially providing Resident Troopers at a reduced fee for a period of time. PILOT funding and Resident Trooper reimbursement require legislative approval.

The Environment Impact Evaluation/Mitigating Impact to the Surrounding Community:

1. If roads on the property need to be widened, repaired, or cleared of snow, will the town be responsible for those costs?

- A. No. The state will assume responsibility for any road upgrades or maintenance that may be needed on Lee Road.

2. Will the extra troopers in town make the community safer and improve response times?

- A. Yes. Additional police presence contributes to crime reduction and having 30 additional troopers in Griswold each day will have a positive impact on public safety. In the event of an emergency in Griswold, troopers who are already in town will be able to respond quickly to calls. For non-emergency calls, troopers won't be called out of training and you may get a response from a trooper on regular patrol.

3. Are residents at risk of stray bullets? Which safety precautions are being taken to protect residents from stray bullets who live nearby?

- A. The risk of a stray bullet to persons who live nearby or use the State Park is minimal. The size of the parcel, the design, construction materials and placement of the facility on the parcel of land, and the dense vegetated buffer surrounding the facility are instrumental to your safety. Information from the Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE) will inform the design, placement and construction of the proposed range to ensure that all areas where shooting takes place will be secure from any individuals who reside or are in the area.

The troopers using the range are trained and instructed to shoot at designated targets only. They receive clear direction, are expressly prohibited from randomly shooting at anything other than designated targets, and are closely supervised by Range instructors. Likewise,

the federal, state and local partners with whom we will train occasionally, have the same expectations and operate under the same conditions.

Additionally, CSP plans to use frangible ammunition on the pistol deck whenever possible. Frangible ammunition contains no lead and breaks apart into small, less harmful pieces upon contact with any surface harder than the bullet, which limits the risk of ricochet or hitting anything beyond the intended target.

4. What, if any is the environmental impact on the air, soil, and groundwater in the land used for the firing range and surrounding properties?

- A. Such potential environmental impacts will be evaluated in great detail in the EIE and then used to inform placement of the facility on the site and its layout, design materials and construction, to mitigate any of the identified issues. Other options include, as examples, placing a plastic barrier between the sand layer and the soil of the backstop berms; using concrete lined backstop berms; covering of the berm to limit water infiltration and providing for engineered runoff controls; and locating the berms far away from the brook that flows into Welch Pond. The new site would incorporate other of the industry's standards and guidelines, including reclaiming spent lead bullets, to further reduce, minimize or eliminate potential lead concerns. And, as noted in Question 3 just above, CSP will use frangible ammunition on the pistol deck whenever possible. Frangible bullets are made of non-toxic metals, reducing the need for lead removal. Per the regulations of the Department of Public Health, all owners or operators of public water supply systems in this state periodically test for water quality. If any issue with water contamination had been attributable to the current range in Simsbury, we would have heard about it. We are unaware of any such issue there.

5. What considerations will be taken to protect residential areas from excessive noise, both at night and during the day?

- A. The preliminary review indicates there should be little to no noise impact to residents near the Lee Road property. During the EIE process, a comprehensive study of possible noise impacts on the surrounding areas will be conducted, by using a combination of noise modeling of the expected noise levels and actual live fire on site with noise monitors located in key areas to confirm or adjust the modeling in order to assess true potential impacts. We plan on working with the DEEP, the Town, and range development experts to identify sensitive noise areas in order to set up those monitors. Based on the assessment of potential impacts, we would explore mitigating factors which may include as examples, site specific design and layout, use of existing topography, berms and other sound barriers, specifically locating vegetation around the ranges and also planting or allowing the open fields to revert back to forested land and taking advantage of the existing dense woodland buffers, in addition to potential operational changes.

The duration and frequency of actual shooting will be minimal when compared to the regular hours of operations (Monday – Friday, 8 AM to 4:00 PM) as actual firing of weapons will not be continuous and usually occurs in short blocks of time during the day. When adding up the total seconds of actual firing of most weapons, including the silence in-between rounds, the total time is quite low, typically 1 hour and 40 minutes to 2 hours, spread out over the 8 hours. The tactical teams, no more than 30 troopers, with no more

than 8 members using .308 rifles, train every 4 months and their actual “shoot time” averages around 15 minutes. That’s 15 minutes on a single day, every four months.

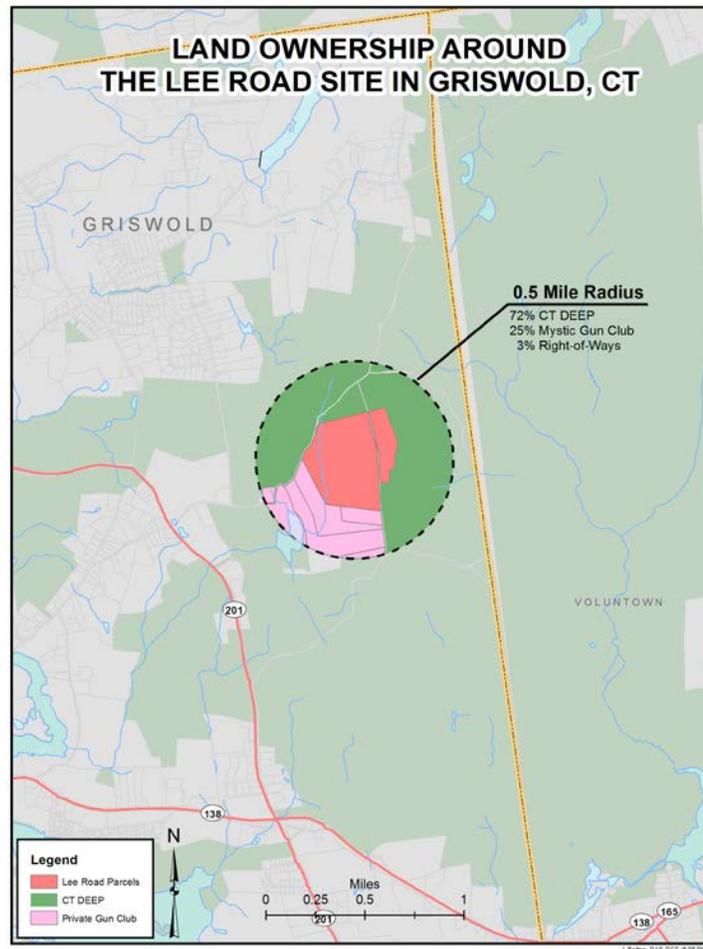
Preliminary noise assessments of the project on the Griswold property show minor noise impact, and that residents are protected from excessive noise. What neighbors may hear would be no louder than existing ambient neighborhood noise, due to benefits of the topography on and surrounding the site and the site’s distance to residential areas.

6. Will the State Police use Silencers to limit noise?

- A. No. Silencers have an impact on distance and trajectory of the bullets and do not mirror real life conditions. State Police only train in conditions that they may face while on duty, and CSP personnel do not use silencers. Silencers will not be needed in Griswold, as a preliminary noise assessment on the property show minor noise impacts due to the topography of the site and the and natural forested area that surrounds the property and provides a buffer between the range and any properties nearby.

7. Will building a firing range in our town cause our home values to depreciate? Will homeowners be compensated for loss of value?

- A. Part of the EIE process includes an evaluation of the economic impact on the surrounding area, which would include potential impacts to home value. The CSP has used the range in Simsbury since 1962 and neither home values nor new construction within the vicinity of the facility has been negatively impacted over its tenure. A number of new homes have been constructed near the property, and according to the Washington Post, homes in Simsbury gained value in the last 10 years, whereas neighboring towns of West Simsbury, Avon and Bloomfield have all declined in value. Furthermore, 72% of the land within half a mile radius of the Lee Road location is owned by the State, while the remainder is a private gun club and right of-ways. There are no homes within .66 miles of the property (see figure).



8. Will local businesses near the range be impacted?

- A. The EIE process is designed to minimize any negative impact. The degree to which businesses near the site could be negatively or positively impacted and opportunities to mitigate those factors will be explored in the EIE. We anticipate some positive impact. Troopers receive a meal allowance and most troopers attending the Simsbury facility eat in town. There are no plans for any amenities such as a cafeteria, staff lounge or workout area at the new facility, therefore it is unlikely that there would a change in their use of free time.

9. How close will the proposed range be to schools, residences, and places of worship?

- A. Part of the EIE process will further evaluate the proximity to residences, places of worship, cemeteries, hospitals, schools, daycare centers, recreational areas and historic districts, and the degree to which they may be impacted and mitigated. In Griswold, the nearest school is 2.7 miles from the Lee Road property, and the nearest place of worship is 2.6 miles away. The only neighboring properties are state forest and an existing gun club. There are no abutting residences.

10. Will the influx of troopers using the firing range cause traffic problems?

- A. On average, about 30 troopers, arriving between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m., train at the facility per day, and usually depart around 4:00 p.m. However, as part of the EIE process, a traffic study would be conducted which would look into such things as existing road level of services, the physical conditions of roads, the potential trips generated by the use of the facility by troopers and staff during peak traffic hours, and entrance sightlines.

11. Is the site located in Pachaug State Forest and will hiking trails in Pachaug State Forest be impacted?

- A. The site is not located in the Pachaug State Forest and is not part of the CT DEEP forest. The property is privately owned. It is adjacent to the State Forest and a private gun club. The site does contain several trails: the Nehantic Trail (a blue-blaze maintained by CT Forest and Park Association [CFPA]) and portions of Lee Road.

Both DESPP and DEEP support relocation of those trails to provide continued access through the property to the other trail systems and will work with DEEP's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and CFPA to relocate the Nehantic Trail and provide an easement for it where there currently is not one. Hiking trails in Pachaug State Forest would not be directly impacted by the proposed project in terms of closing or relocation.

In terms of noise impacts, many of the trails in Pachaug allow snowmobiles and registered off highway motorcycles. In addition, hunting is permitted within Pachaug. These recreational uses already produce higher noise levels without negatively impacting the recreational use of the Forest.