

**GRANT COUNTY
RESOLUTION NO. R-18-28**

**GRANT COUNTY RESPONSE TO AIR FORCE AIRSPACE EXPANSION
OVER THE GILA FOR HOLLOMAN AFB F-16 TRAINING**

WHEREAS, Grant County supports US military forces and understands that the US Air Force is currently experiencing a severe pilot shortage, necessitating increased pilot training at Holloman Air Force Base (AFB), NM; and

WHEREAS, the US Air Force has stationed F-16 fighter aircraft at Holloman Air Force Base, NM, for the purpose of initial qualification training of F-16 pilots; and

WHEREAS, Grant County understands there will be a substantial economic impact for the State of New Mexico from the expansion of training F-16 pilots at Holloman Air Force Base; and

WHEREAS, Grant County acknowledges the support this expansion of training has received from New Mexico's federal delegation and Governor; and

WHEREAS, Holloman AFB F-16 training involves approximately 10,000 sorties to train 300 pilots annually, and these training sorties may involve supersonic and low-level flights, as well as dropping defensive countermeasures (chaff and flares); and

WHEREAS, the Air Force is now seeking to optimize special use airspace (SUA) for Holloman's F-16 training as part of an ongoing regional airspace optimization program for bases across the country; and

WHEREAS, one of the three alternatives currently being considered involves expanding existing SUA and creating a new military operations area (MOA) over the Gila National Forest in Grant and Catron counties; and

WHEREAS, Senator Clinton P. Anderson of New Mexico, in sponsoring the 1964 Wilderness Act, said "There is a spiritual value to conservation, and wilderness typifies this. Wilderness is a demonstration by our people that we can put aside a portion of this which we have as a tribute to the Maker and say — this we will leave as we found it."; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which established a national policy promoting the enhancement of the environment, the federal government is required to use all practicable means to create and maintain conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony; and

WHEREAS, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is explicitly required when a proposed action has the potential to:

- Significantly impact environmental quality or public health or safety
- Significantly impact historic (listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places), cultural, archaeological, or scientific resources; public parks or recreation areas; wildlife refuge or wilderness areas; wild and scenic rivers; or aquifers

- Result in significant or uncertain environmental effects or unique or unknown environmental risks
- Significantly impact a plant or animal species that is federally listed as Threatened or Endangered; a species that is a candidate for federal listing; a species proposed for federal listing; or a critical habitat
- Create substantial controversy concerning the significance or nature of the environmental impact of a proposed action; and

WHEREAS, the Air Force is now evaluating Holloman airspace optimization through its Environmental Impact Analysis Process to develop an EIS that will identify environmental concerns and the best ways to minimize and mitigate them; and

WHEREAS, the Air Force did not hold a scoping meeting in Grant County during the fall of 2017, yet Grant County residents provided over 2,300 scoping comments.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Grant County Board of Commissioners requests the Air Force to give full consideration to the following in selecting an alternative for SUA optimization for F-16 pilot training in New Mexico:

1. We ask that you take all possible actions to maximize utilization of existing SUA before expanding current MOAs or creating any new MOAs, which would include flights over the Gila Wilderness, remote areas of the Gila National Forest, or populated rural areas in Grant County.
2. We request that you ensure that environmental factors are weighted equally when compared to other factors in the decision making process for this action.
3. We are extremely concerned about potentially significant impacts to public safety, public health, and environmental quality, and request careful consideration of these factors in making this decision, including:
 - a. Wildfire - Potentially disastrous wildfires from flares and aircraft crashes - flares have been known to cause fires, and our concern is not only for forest areas, but also the risk to ranchlands and residences. Consider the history of wildfires in the area over at least the last 20 – 30 years, which have been significant.
 - b. Public safety - negative impacts on activities, such as horseback riding, cycling, mountain biking and hiking and the potential danger to people and animals of aircraft training and overflights.
 - c. Noise – potential harmful effects on people’s health in our communities and residential dwellings in affected areas.
 - d. Livestock - We have concerns about F-16s using corridors and airspace over high density rural areas. By using these corridors and airspace, there is the potential of frightening livestock penned in small areas, which raises the possibility of livestock being driven through fences or out of their pens and, therefore, injured or killed.
 - e. Contamination – negative impacts of dropping chaff and flares over the forest, which are considerable and long-lasting.
 - f. Air quality degradation – potential impacts caused by 10,000 F-16 sorties.

4. One of our greatest concerns is the “substantial controversy” that has been created in Grant County by this proposed action, including the following:
 - a. Some leaders and residents are very concerned about potential negative impacts on the local economy if Alternative #2 is chosen for Holloman AFB. The appeal of Grant County is due largely to its amenities-based quality of life, including its the rural setting, natural surroundings, weather, quiet, dark skies, friendly people, and sense of community. Some people, including veterans, come to Grant County to get away from the noise and stress of other places. Many retirees and others move here because Grant County’s cost of living is relatively low. Some realtors are now expressing concern that people may not relocate to Grant County if F-16 training is conducted here, and property values may decline, leading to a possible drop in tax revenues.
 - b. Tourism is a large part of the economic development in Grant County. According to the 2017 Grant County Comprehensive Plan, “tourism contributes tens of millions of dollars each year to the economy.” This revenue has increased 16 percent in the last four years. In addition to the outdoor recreation and sporting activities mentioned above in the Gila National Forest, many festivals and other events, as well as more than 30 artists’ galleries draw tourists each year. Lodging and other businesses benefit from this. Drops in tourism and outdoor recreation would negatively impact Grant County. We feel it is imperative that you consider all potential impacts on tourism.
5. We are very concerned about wilderness areas, cultural and archaeological resources, and recreation areas and want the potential impacts on them to be explicitly addressed, including:
 - a. The Gila Wilderness, the largest wilderness in New Mexico, was designated the world’s first wilderness area on June 3, 1924. The Gila Wilderness is where the idea and practice of wilderness area designation and protection began, and it has long been recognized by the U.S. Forest Service as the best horse packing wilderness in the system. The importance of the Gila Wilderness is amplified by the adjacent Aldo Leopold Wilderness and Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument. Together, these three federally designated areas are of significant national historic and cultural value and should be protected.
 - b. Recreation areas in Grant County that are of national and local importance include the Gila National Forest and the Continental Divide Trail. These areas are frequented each year for many activities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, birding, astronomy, and horseback riding.
6. We are also concerned about potentially significant impacts to eco-systems and biodiversity, and we request that you study these risks and seriously consider them in your decision. The Gila Wilderness is one of the most ecologically diverse wilderness complexes in North America, and it harbors some of the greatest non-coastal breeding bird diversity and density in the US.
7. We further express our concerns and request that the Air Force consider potentially significant impacts on plant and animal species that are federally listed as Endangered or Threatened; species that are candidates for federal listing; species proposed for federal listing; and critical habitats in Grant County.

- a. Currently, the Gila National Forest is responsible for managing four federally-listed endangered species and seven threatened species.
 - b. New Mexico state conservation status includes twenty-eight species that are designated by the New Mexico Game and Fish Department as threatened or endangered which occur in the Gila National Forest.
8. We request that you ensure this resolution and all Grant County scoping comments are seriously considered in the EIS and record of decision.
 9. We request that you ensure that Grant County leaders and residents have an opportunity to meet with Air Force officials after the release of the draft EIS.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that unless the Air Force determines that no other alternative can fulfill this training mission, the Grant County Commission respectfully requests that the Air Force use the other proposed and existing areas for Holloman's F-16 training.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED this 16th day of August 2018, in Silver City, Grant County, New Mexico.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS GRANT COUNTY, NEW MEXICO:

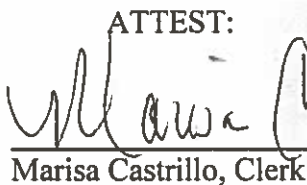

 Gerald W. Billings Jr., Chairman


 Alicia Edwards, Vice Chair


 Gabriel Ramos, Member


 Brett Kasten, Member


 Harry Browne, Member

ATTEST:

 Marisa Castrillo, Clerk

