

## US Air Force Releases Plan for Low Elevation Supersonic Flights and Increased Low Altitude Air Combat Training Over Tohono O’odham Lands in Arizona

The United States Air Force is proposing to modify ten existing Military Operations Areas (MOAs) that stretch across southern Arizona into southwest New Mexico as part of their Special Use Optimization Strategy to expand low altitude combat training across southwest New Mexico and Arizona. Three of these MOAs occur above or adjacent to Tohono O’odham tribal lands. The proposal will dramatically lower the flight floor in multiple MOAs, expand training times and significantly increase the number of combat training sorties, including supersonic flights over millions of acres of Tribal lands. These MOAs are managed by Luke and Davis-Monthan Air Force Bases and Morris Air National Guard Base, who released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the proposal on August 9, 2024. **No Public Hearings are being held within Tohono O’odham tribal lands nor any tribal lands, despite the disproportionate impact to the tribes. The closest hearing is in Ajo, AZ on August 26.**

### TRIBAL COMMUNITIES HAVE UNTIL OCTOBER 9th TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

[Online Comment Form](#)



### Proposed changes to Military Training in the Sells, Ruby, Fuzzy MOAs and Comments on the Significant Issues with Air Force Plan Affecting Tribal Communities

**Proposed:** In the Sells MOA, the number of annual combat training flights, including supersonic, increases by up to 20% for a potential total of 17,810, including over 1,000 transient aircraft from other bases. In the Ruby/Fuzzy MOA up to 38.6% additional sorties annually will be permitted to fly over Arivaipa Canyon.

**Comment:** *The proposed changes cover the majority of Tohono O’odham lands including sites of cultural importance. Increased noise and disturbances will disturb communities and undermine sacred places. Areas of significance to the Tohono O’odham people must be excluded and avoidance zones created to protect cultural and environmental resources.*

**Comment:** *Supersonic flights will cause periods of extreme noise and sonic booms above tribal communities and some of the Southwest’s beloved wilderness areas and national monuments, impacting the tourism and outdoor economies in the region.*

**Comment:** *While the pressure wave generated by supersonic flights at 5,000 – 10,000 feet AGL can break glass, crack plaster, and collapse free standing walls. Based on unreliable data, the DEIS claims no negative will occur to existing structures beneath these events.*

**Proposed:** The permitted annual quantities of chaff bundles and dropped flares rises up to 36% in the Ruby/Fuzzy MOA and up to 20% in the Sells MOA.

**Comment:** *The release of chaff on Tohono O’odham lands pollutes the environment with aluminum-coated silica fibers and the proposal increasing the number of flares dropped increases the risk of wildfire in areas already vulnerable to wildfire and with limited resources for firefighting. The DEIS fails to acknowledge any increased risk of fire and uses 30-year-old data to analyze the likelihood of fires from flares or crashes and places the burden for the initial emergency response on local resources.*

**Proposed:** Increases the hours of authorized use from the current times of 7am through 6pm (M-F), to the expanded hours of 6:00am to 12pm midnight. (M-F).

**Comment:** *The times for the use of airspace would be extended into the evening hours disturbing families and communities.*

**Comment:** *Allowing this significant increase in combat training maneuvers proposed for Tohono O’odham lands will impact wildlife, domestic animals, and create conflicts with existing land use such as traditional ranching and farming, degrading the quality of life. These social, cultural and economic impacts have not been properly measured or analyzed by the existing DEIS, thereby minimizing the risks.*

#### **Additional Comments**

*Lack of meetings within tribal communities delegitimizes the DEIS process, disenfranchising the people who are impacted most by the proposed changes. Offering virtual meetings as an alternative has been shown to be considerably less effective at engaging rural communities.*

*The DEIS fails to offer a compelling reason why expanding low altitude combat training and lowering supersonic flight levels is warranted. Using the Barry M Goldwater Range (BMGR) is a safer choice given they are better prepared for accidents and emergencies than rural and tribal communities.*

**To make a comment in person, The nearest Community Hearing is in Ajo, AZ, August 26<sup>th</sup>  
Ajo High School 5-8 pm**

To **submit comments** on the Draft Environmental Plan online: [Online Comment Form](#)

**Details on Air Force plans for all 10 MOAs including over Tribal Lands:** [DEIS HOMEPAGE](#)

Paper copies of Draft Environmental Impact Statement available at local libraries-find out where: [Here](#)

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