

## US Air Force Plans Low Altitude Supersonic Flights and Air Combat Training over Apache-Sitgreaves (Blue Range Primitive Area) & Gila National Forest (Gila Wilderness)

The United States Air Force has released its proposal to modify ten existing Military Operations Areas (MOAs) that stretch across southern Arizona into southwest New Mexico as part of a plan to expand their Special Use Airspace across the southwest. The MOAs serve Luke and Davis-Monthan Air Force Bases in Tucson and Morris Air National Guard Base in Phoenix. Two of these existing MOAs are over the Gila and Apache National Forests-the Reserve and Morenci MOAs. The overall plan 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 public land. In the Gila region, the proposal creates a new 5,000' supersonic pathway for AZ Air Force bases from Globe AZ to Reserve, NM, across multiple tribal lands, hundreds of rural communities, and directly into America's first Wilderness.

**OCTOBER 9<sup>TH</sup> DEADLINE TO SUBMIT COMMENTS on the DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

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**\*Tell the Air Force that expanding military combat training over rural communities and tribal and public lands is not acceptable.**

**\*The Air Force should restrict its lower elevation and supersonic flights, and other combat training, such as dropping chaff and flares, to the Barry M Goldwater Range where it's already happening.**

**\*The Air Force must not shift the burden of risk to rural and tribal communities in southern AZ and southwest NM.**

### Proposed changes to Military Training in the Reserve & Morenci MOAs & Comments on the Significant Issues affecting the Gila Region

**Proposed:** Supersonic flights of fighter jet aircraft will be lowered within both MOAs from 30,000 ft. down to 5,000 feet above ground level (AGL). These flight paths cross over the majority of the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest, and a significant portion of the Gila National Forest. Notable areas include the Blue Primitive Area, almost half of the Gila Wilderness, the Catwalk National Scenic Trail in Glenwood, The Cosmic Campground, portions of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, and multiple river sections included in the proposed Wild and Scenic designation for the Gila River and the San Francisco River.

**Comment:** *The DEIS acknowledges that lowering the flight floor of supersonic jet flight to 5,000 ft (AGL) from 30,000 feet (AGL) will increase the sonic boom pressure five-fold. But the flawed analysis concludes there will be no increase in negative impacts, despite the increasing evidence nationwide of broken car windshields, cracked foundations and dozens of recorded evidence of damaged houses. The Air Force should restrict low level supersonic flight to existing training grounds such as the Barry M Goldwater range, and the existing MOA's where supersonic flight is already authorized, both of which are more suited for that level of risk.*

**Proposed:** The number of combat training flights (sorties) permitted in the two MOAs is increased up to 20% for a total of 4,000 sorties annually and the hours that low altitude training is permitted has expanded.

**Comment:** *Increasing military training activity above these communities will negatively impact wildlife, domestic animals, real estate values 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 and negative consequences.*

**Proposed:** The number of bundles of chaff-aluminum coated silica fibers, used in evasive maneuvers, will be increased up to 21% to 16,920. The average annual use of flare cartridges is also increased up to 21% resulting in over 16,000 dropped flares annually, targeted over millions of acres of highly flammable forest lands.

**Comment:** *The increase in the dispersal of chaff fibers in an environment heavily used recreationally and prized for its pristine forests and waters is irresponsible. The substantial rise in the number of flares 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.*

### **Additional Comments**

*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.*

*The DEIS analysis of noise is based on outdated research and needs to consider additional and more recent studies.*

*The DEIS minimizes the effect on regional airspace needs within the developing civil aviation community within the Gila region.*

*The Air Force has not responded to requests for information on the need for the optimization and has been unresponsive to existing noise and disturbance complaints from communities below their airspace.*

Make your voices heard - submit public comments today

[www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com/comments/](http://www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com/comments/)

Get more details about the full Air Force proposal at: [www.peacefulgilaskies.com](http://www.peacefulgilaskies.com)

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