

US Air Force Releases Plan for Low Elevation Supersonic Flights and Increased Low Altitude Air Combat Training Over Apache Tribal 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. Two of these MOAs occur above Apache tribal lands and will have impacts for the San Carlos Apache Tribe and the White Mountain Apache Tribe. 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 2 million 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 Apache Tribal land despite the tribes holding almost 2 million of the just over 3 million acres below the Outlaw and Jackal MOA's.** The closest hearing is near Phoenix in Gold Canyon on August 27th.

TRIBAL COMMUNITIES HAVE UNTIL OCTOBER 9th TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

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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 Jackal and Outlaw MOAs and Comments on the Significant Issues with Air Force Plan Affecting Tribal Communities

Proposed: In both the Jackal and Outlaw MOA's the proposal lowers the floor for supersonic jet flight from the current 30,000 to as low as 5,000 feet AGL (above ground level) with measurable increases in noise and sonic booms-a 5-fold increase in wave pressure from the sonic booms.

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: Lowers the floor for low-altitude, fighter jet combat training, from the current 3000 AGL to as low as 500 feet AGL in the Outlaw MOA and maintains a low of 100 feet AGL across parts of the Jackal MOA.

Comment: *Allowing combat training maneuvers as low as 100 feet AGL proposed for San Carlos Apache and White Mountain Apache 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.*

Proposed: In the combined MOAs of Outlaw and Jackal, the number of combat training sorties will increase up to 27% for a total of 6610 possible yearly missions.

Comment: *The proposed changes cover the majority of San Carlos and White Mountain Reservation lands, including the airspace over Mount Graham, Oak Flat, and other sites of cultural importance to the Apache people. Increased noise and disturbances will undermine sacred places. Areas of significance to the Apache people must be excluded and avoidance zones created to protect cultural and environmental resources.*

Proposed: The permitted release altitude of chaff (microscopic fibers) and flares is lowered from 3,000 AGL to 2,000 feet AGL and the annual quantities of chaff bundles permitted has risen to 24,560 - a 38% increase, while the number of flares allowed is 26,460 - a 39% increase.

Comment: *The release of chaff on San Carlos Apache lands pollutes the environment with aluminum-coated silica fibers and the proposal lowering the dropping of flares above Apache lands increases the risk of wildfire in areas already vulnerable to catastrophic wildfire and with limited resources for firefighting. The DEIS fails to acknowledge any increased risk of fire and uses thirty 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 10:00pm (M-F).

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

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.

To **submit comments** on the Draft Environmental Plan:

<https://www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com/comments/>

Details on Air Force plans for all 10 MOAs including over Tribal Lands:

<https://www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com>

Paper copies of Draft Plan available at libraries listed here: www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com/documents/