

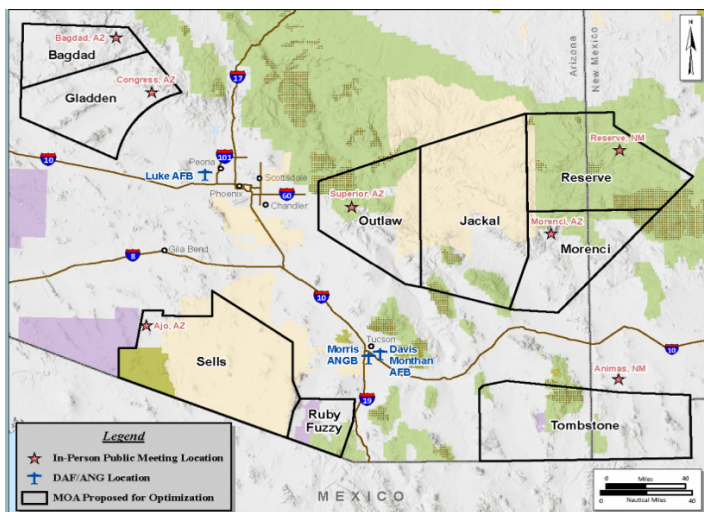
# Air Force Proposes to Create Low-Level Supersonic Airspace Across Southeast Arizona/Southwest New Mexico

## *Speak up to Protect Rural and Tribal Communities and Wilderness Areas from Dangerous Air Force Training!*

The U.S. Air Force wants to modify 10 existing Military Operations Areas (MOAs) that stretch across southern Arizona into southwest New Mexico as part of a plan for expansion of Special Use Airspace in the southwest region of the country. The proposal will authorize low-level fighter jet maneuvers and supersonic flights that cause sonic booms above rural and tribal communities, some of the Southwest's most fragile sky-island ecosystems, and beloved wilderness areas and national monuments. The Air Force also wants to allow release of chaff in southeast Arizona and the New Mexico Bootheel, polluting the environment with aluminum-coated silica fibers used in evasive maneuvers. Additionally, the proposal would permit dropping of flares at lower altitudes, increasing the risk of wildfire in areas already vulnerable to catastrophic wildfire and with limited resources for firefighting. The proposed Air Force training creates risk from military aircraft crashes, affects veterans seeking refuge to heal PTSD, and startles horses, livestock and wildlife affecting ranching, hunting, and backcountry recreation.

The plan will impact dozens of rural communities, four tribes (Tohono O'odham Nation, White Mountain Apache Tribe, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Pascua Yaqui Tribe) and millions of acres of federal public lands that sustain ecosystems and wildlife and are used for recreation and tourism.

Federal public lands that could be affected by the Air Force proposal include four National Forests (Gila, Apache-Sitgreaves, Tonto, Coronado), 12 US Forest Service Wilderness Areas; 19 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Wilderness Areas, 8 BLM Wilderness Study Areas, 28 BLM Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), 4 BLM Research Natural Areas (RNA); 1 BLM Riparian National Conservation Area (Gila Box); 4 National Wildlife Refuges (Buenos Aires, Leslie Canyon, San Bernardino, and Bill Williams River) and 2 National Monuments (Chiricahua National Monument and Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument). Additionally, 70 miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail could be affected.



There are 10 MOAs in this region, occupying airspace over more than 32,000 square miles of desert, grasslands, forests, farms, ranches, towns and cities. These MOAs serve Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix, Morris Air National Guard Base in Tucson, and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base also in Tucson.

In five MOAs, fighter jets would be authorized to fly as low as 500 feet above ground level (AGL) at speeds exceeding 600 miles per hour. In some cases, the flight floor would be lowered to 100 feet AGL. In seven MOAs, the flight floor for supersonic speeds (747.9+ mph) that cause sonic booms may be lowered from 30,000 feet

mean sea level (MSL) to 5,000 feet AGL. In six MOAs, pilots would be authorized to drop burning flares at lower elevation as low as 2,000 feet AGL. In the remaining MOAs, the drop elevation will range from 3,000 feet AGL to 5,000 feet AGL. In all MOAs, the times of regular use would be extended.

**More information on the Arizona SUA Optimization Proposal can be found at:**

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

## SCOPING COMMENTS

The scoping process is an opportunity for citizens to provide input on the range of issues to be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act and to help identify significant environmental issues to be analyzed in depth. Do you have site-specific data or information that should be considered in the EIS to provide a complete picture of the impacts of the proposed action? Are there gaps in data or informational needs that must be addressed in order to adequately assess the proposed action? This list will help you get started in submitting your scoping comments to the Air Force.

- No data is provided to support the Air Force's purpose and need for the proposed action.
- No information has yet been presented by the Air Force about the type and number of aircraft that will train in the 10 MOAs, nor the frequency of aircraft sorties, nor any specifics about mission activities that will be executed. This information is needed to evaluate impacts.
- Analyze the impacts of extreme noise from low-level & supersonic training on communities & wildlife, including damage to structures. The pressure wave generated by supersonic flights at 5,000 – 10,000 feet above ground level (AGL) can break glass, crack plaster, and collapse free standing walls.
- The Air Force must thoroughly assess the wildfire risk from the use of flares at lower elevation and military aircraft crashes, develop potential mitigation measures to reduce the risk, and also develop realistic plans for fighting a flare-induced or crash-induced fire. How will public safety be ensured?
- Disclose the timing (day vs. night) and locations of supersonic flights and evaluate the noise impacts of aircraft operations on wildlife (including threatened and endangered species), outdoor recreation, communities, quality of life, veterans with PTSD, ranching, and local economies.
- Fully assess contamination of air, land and water from aircraft emissions and release of chaff and flares.
- Analyze the potential impacts of the proposal on U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National Monuments, Research Natural Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, National Wildlife Refuges, and Special Management Areas including impacts to both economic and social benefits. Have Federal agencies been consulted regarding this proposal?
- Evaluate the Environmental Justice impacts of this proposal on minority and low-income communities, including tribal communities of the San Carlos and White Mountain Apache tribes, Tohono O'odham Nation, and Pascual Yaqui Tribe.
- Assess the impacts to air traffic at local airports from airspace changes. The wake turbulence of low flying combat aircraft is also a danger to small private aircraft that fly at the same altitudes.
- The cumulative impacts of these airspace modifications must be addressed.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Air Force has scheduled in-person public meetings. You can also access a virtual presentation at: <https://www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com/virtual-presentation/>. **Meetings take place 5pm–7pm.**

February 22, 2022 – **Reserve Public Meeting**, Village Hall, 15 Jake Scott Street, Reserve, NM

February 23, 2022 – **Morenci Public Meeting**, Clifton Comm Center, 100 N. Coronado Blvd, Clifton, AZ

February 24, 2022 – **Animas Public Meeting**, Animas High School, 1 Panther Blvd, Animas, NM

### Submit Your Scoping Comments on Arizona Military Training Airspace Proposal

The Air Force has asked for scoping comments on proposed alternatives to optimize Special Use Airspace in southern Arizona and southwest New Mexico. We need you to submit your comments to ensure the Air Force clearly determines the scope of issues to be addressed and identifies significant environmental issues to be analyzed in depth in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS, so decision makers are informed of the environmental consequences of their decisions.

Submit your public comments to the Air Force by March 4, 2022: [www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com/comments/](http://www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com/comments/)

For more information, contact Peaceful Gila Skies

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