

I am writing to express in the strongest terms possible my staunch opposition to the USAF proposal to increase military overflights and lower permitted altitudes in the vicinity of the Chiricahua and Peloncillo Mountains of Cochise County in the so-called Tombstone MOA. Even the “No Action” alternative is unacceptable now as low-level flights are far more common recently than in past decades, and existing regulations are regularly violated. It is already intolerable!

My wife and I live in Cave Creek Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains and we are already unacceptably impacted by extremely loud and often illegally low-flying F-16 fighter jets tearing up and down Cave Creek Canyon—a world-famous conservation area of the Coronado National Forest. We bought this property in 1989 and rarely had this problem until the last 5 years or so. In the 1990s and early 2000s we had fighter jets disturb the peace here only a few times a year. Now it’s almost weekly. Three days in a row last week fighter jets annihilated the serenity of the canyon, and just this morning two fighter jets roared overhead while I was having my morning coffee. And the USAF is planning to make it worse!?!?

About a month ago I was hiking in the South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon in the congressionally designated *Chiricahua Wilderness* with my wife and two friends who live across the valley in the Peloncillo Mountains. We had climbed up a side trail toward Burro Ridge when all of a sudden an F-16 fighter jet came roaring up the South Fork canyon essentially at eye level. The noise was excruciating and we all had to cover our ears. The ground literally shook with the vibrations. I reached for my phone camera to record the second jet as it came through, but the noise was so disturbing that I failed to tap the record button properly. It is my understanding that FAA regulations require a minimum elevation of 5,000 above designated wilderness areas. These jets were inside the canyon a few hundred feet above the canyon floor and below the canyon rims. With a pair of binoculars I probably could have seen the pilot. This is both illegal and outrageous.

The Chiricahua Mountains should **not** be a military training ground or a playground for Young Gun pilots. This mountain range is the most scenic and biologically rich mountain range in the entire bi-national sky island region. Conservation International included the Chiricahuas in its [Madrean Pine-Oak Woodland Global Biodiversity Hotspot](#) several decades ago. I am sure hundreds of scientists and conservationists have emphasized this point to you so I won’t go on about it. Suffice it to say, this is the last place in southern Arizona that should be subjected to extensive low-level military training flights.

We have been outraged at the violations of existing flight rules and the USAF proposal will only make things immeasurably worse. Not only should the proposed action be rejected, but the “No Action” alternative should actually be enforced, and even strengthened to prohibit all low level flights over the Chiricahua and Peloncillo Mountains. You did not need these military training flights in Cave Creek Canyon 20 years ago and you do not need them today. Do your training in other more appropriate locations.

Paul Hirt, Portal, AZ