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Arizona Regional Airspace EIS
c/o Stantec
501 Butler Farm Rd., Suite H
Hampton, VA 23666

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a resident of the Tombstone MOA and a concerned citizen writing with comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Regional Special Use Airspace Optimization to Support Air Force Missions in Arizona.

I have read the entire 800 plus pages of the DEIS and accompanying appendices. This document and the process that surrounds it is an embarrassment.

It is dishonest, deceptive, and dismissive to the spirit of NEPA and to the residents of our country. I am frankly shocked and disappointed -- I thought our government was better than this.

To begin with, the 6,667 scoping comments submitted to the USAF in 2022 were largely dismissed and ignored. The USAF has chosen not to disclose either the comments or who submitted them, despite FOIA requests. What is being hidden? Citizens spent thousands of hours making substantive and well-researched comments, none of which were addressed in the DEIS. Appendix D, which purported to summarize and respond to these, was a disappointment to those of us who worked hard and thoughtfully on comments.

Then when the DEIS came out, public hearings were announced. These were scheduled for remote, difficult to reach places. One meeting was held in such an inaccessible location that no citizens showed up, while 25 plus Air Force and government contractors wasted their time and our taxpayer money to be there. Citizens requested both in scoping and subsequently, to have these hearings in more populated and impacted areas, such as Cochise County, tribal lands, and Tucson and Phoenix. Those requests were denied.

Virtual meetings were suggested as a substitute for adequate in-person meetings, but the well-documented realities of broadband availability in rural and underserved locations such as those in the MOAs make this a poor and inequitable solution. When citizens asked to have recordings of the public hearings made available, the USAF declined. At one hearing, USAF staff tried to prevent citizens from even recording the hearing, which

is permitted under open meeting laws in both Arizona and New Mexico. Again, what is the USAF trying to hide?

Throughout this process, the USAF has been opaque, violating the letter and spirit of NEPA.

Comments from other government agencies, both official cooperating agencies like the USFS and the NPS, as well as other consulting agencies like the BLM, are missing from the DEIS. When I personally reached out to those agencies to ask their viewpoints on the proposal, I was very quickly told "Get a FOIA." This was appalling to me. Why would the USAF say they were consulting with agencies and then fail to share what they had to say? Nonetheless, I did file FOIAs. After initially being told I would be able to get the information I requested quickly and easily, time went by, and the stories changed. I was told there would be no disclosure of this information, due to USAF intervention.

In another example of lack of transparency and accountability, citizens in the Tombstone MOA have reported hundreds of nuisance flight reports. After receiving little or no response to these, information about USAF and ANG flights violating current FAA rules was requested, both informally and through FOIA. Those have all been denied.

These are not the actions of a free and transparent government.

Finally, the supposed facts and research cited throughout the DEIS are an insult to the intelligence of its readers. Old and irrelevant studies are cited. Concerns are hinted at and then broadly dismissed with the statement that the noise, dropping of flares, dropping of chaff, sonic booms, etc. are "generally compatible with all land uses." Over and over again, the DEIS claims there are no impacts from any of the proposed actions. The DEIS says negative consequences "would not occur with any sort of regularity or be a repetitive situation in any location." Even with current flights, this is not the case. One can only imagine how much worse this might get with the proposed expansion.

All of this defies not only research, but common sense. Who could put out a purported study that is so absurd? At what expense to taxpayers was this work done?

I am a citizen who feels that protecting our unique wilderness lands here is important. Having combat jets fly 100 ft. AGL dropping chaff and flares is abhorrent. It endangers wildlife, the land and water, and our homes. It is a violation of the Wilderness Act.

Our community has asked to have conversations with the decision makers in this process to try to work out these issues. Again, we have been denied.

I oppose the USAF proposal and request that the USAF abandon this DEIS or substantially rework it to cure the many breaches of NEPA. Beyond this, I request that the USAF and ANG do an investigation and analysis into current violations of FAA rules and MOA boundaries. The current situation is unsafe and is likely to result in a serious accident.

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 Arizona and New Mexico.

I also request that the comment period on this DEIS be extended and that public hearings be held in Cochise County, on tribal lands, and in Phoenix and Tucson.

Finally, I request that an investigation be done into the lack of adherence to NEPA and the lack of transparency and accountability in this process.

We must be better than this.

Sincerely,

Karen Fasimpaur

cc:

Senator Mark Kelly

Senator Kyrsten Sinema

Representative Juan Ciscomani

Representative Raul Grijalva