

NEWS RELEASE from Peaceful Chiricahua Skies

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Thousands send strong words to Air Force over combat training plan *Politicians join in expressing concern about major training expansion in Arizona, New Mexico*

Portal, AZ — Overwhelming comment responses to its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a vast expansion of combat training over southern Arizona and New Mexico have led the Air Force (USAF) to add a last-second four-week extension to the original comment period. The comment extension, which now has a deadline of November 12, was urged by congressional politicians, county commissions, and thousands of citizens frustrated by the failure of the DEIS to provide accurate data.

The short comment extension did not slow the flood of public comments being received by the Air Force pointing to obviously incorrect claims about effects of the expansion plan on protected areas, rural communities, and local economies.

Peaceful Chiricahua Skies (PCS), a local grass-roots group opposing the expansion, submitted [310 pages of comments](#) which were signed onto by 21 organizations and businesses. Those comments requested the Air Force to “abandon the DEIS or substantially rework it” to correct false data and include input and analysis that was omitted. In addition, PCS submitted petition [signatures and comments of over 3,600 individuals](#) who oppose the plan.

The Air Force’s plan to double flight numbers, drastically lower training elevations to 100 feet, permit sonic-boom producing supersonic flights at only 5,000 feet, and expand training boundaries over rural communities will greatly affect both residents in the area and wildlife areas. In addition, the Air Force is being cited for multiple process deficiencies that PCS says must be corrected to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

“Regardless of whether this DEIS survives in its present form, people living in the impacted Military Operations Area (MOA) are already sick and tired of existing combat missions violating all sorts of current regulations without any repercussions,” said Kim Vacariu, an organizer with PCS. “You can just imagine the violations that will occur if the proposed relaxation of restrictions takes effect.”

The flurry of opposition to the plan comes amidst a barrage of Nuisance Noise Complaints by residents living beneath training flights in the Tombstone MOA, including much of Cochise County, AZ and Hidalgo County, NM. The Tombstone MOA is one of nine combat training zones in the proposal. As documented in the PCS comments, more than 200 such complaints have been filed with USAF and Air National Guard over the past year and a half.

The PCS comments urged the USAF to keep all combat training flights at the Barry M. Goldwater Range, where they’re already occurring, instead of moving them to the Tombstone MOA. Those comments also request new and factual proof of DEIS claims that the expansion will have no effect on wild lands or residents.

According to PCS’s Karen Fasimpaur, “Not only are there major substantive problems with the DEIS, but the process itself was a sham. Public hearings were inadequate. The input of key agencies was omitted. Substantive comments from scoping were ignored. Requests for further information have been refused. There will be much more to come in this fight to safeguard our communities.” Fasimpaur reminds people to continue commenting to USAF through the extended deadline of November 12, and to continue filing nuisance flight reports, and sign the petition on the group’s website: peacefulchiricahuaskies.com, where resources and sample comments are also available.

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