

Peaceful Sky Red Alert - DEIS Released

Looming federal plans that would systemically erode the character of outdoor life, research, and recreation in Southern Arizona and New Mexico are not only worse than first thought; they are a policy fulcrum for imminent arms trade and climate impacts. From August 9 to October 9, 2024, the public has an opportunity to say something about it.

As in many other regions, more than a century after Native nations were dispossessed of their homelands, Native communities throughout AZ and NM have been treated as military-adjacent operating areas; from surveillance, chemical dumping, and deadly mining of ore for nuclear weapons, to habitual practice with combat aircraft, bombs, and other munitions. When military leadership aims to expand this exploitative impact, or to advance such action further into the general public; they will quietly continue to do so with assumed impunity, as shown by the recent release of a long awaited report on Air Force plans for the region.

Back on January 18, 2022, the Air Force announced it would prepare this report (EIS), analyzing potential environmental consequences of modifying existing military operating areas (MOAs) in AZ and NM, to address air “training deficiencies”. They allowed public input on the proposal for less than five months.

Over a year later, the Air Force revealed plans to transform Tucson’s Davis-Monthan base into one of only three Special Operations hubs in the U.S. for projecting power through overseas-linked testing, training, transfer, and deployment; regionally focusing capabilities “to prepare for a faster-paced, unpredictable way of war”. This plan would relocate numerous combat aircraft to the region, from around the country within five years, and is at the core of “training deficiencies” referenced by the 2022 proposal for modifying airspace in AZ and NM. The Air Force did not announce it would prepare an EIS for AFSOC transformation of Tucson’s Davis-Monthan until May 9, 2024, although the second EIS conclusion is timed nearly in unison with the first EIS conclusion.

Meanwhile, in the two years surrounding this period, Air Force programs saw a historic surge; including development for multiple-thousands of autonomous swarming attack-drones, plans to pair at least one thousand un-crewed combat aircraft with crewed combat aircraft for collaborative human-AI air dogfighting in the near future, development for un-crewed nuclear bombers, contracts to remake the land-based intercontinental ballistic missile system of America’s nuclear triad, and passage of the largest defense budget in U.S. history. The Air Force has not detailed the variety of aircraft that may ultimately populate Southwest airspaces they propose to redefine.

August 9, 2024, the Air Force finally released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Special Use Airspace (SUA) Optimization of AZ and NM.

This DEIS avoids hard analysis of risks from proposed action to the region, one of only thirty-six designated Biodiversity Hotspots on Earth; or to the safety, economy, research, and recreation of peoples here since time immemorial, as well as of residents and visitors from around the world. Despite the magnitude of this decision, modern data collection innovations, and almost three years of taxpayer-funded research; the DEIS ignores many concerns collected from the public during scoping, including past attestation of fire danger, and relies on decades-old studies to trivialize impacts.

In the Tombstone MOA (Chiricahua Mountains area) alone, we are told to anticipate at least one sonic boom per week on average, and nearly two dozen daily sorties in battlefield maneuvers which push low-flying combat aircraft to the limit; with an average of 1.5 aircraft dropping as low as five hundred feet or closer to the ground per day, at up to 120dB disturbance for any person, child, or elder who might be engaged in scientific fieldwork, recreation, or spiritual practice amid remote areas where research and peaceful activities are not only a way of life, but an economic anchor.

As evidence that hundreds of pounds of aluminum-coated fibers (chaff) routinely ejected from as low as two thousand feet over wilderness areas, for the foreseeable future, poses no risk to humans or any species of wildlife; the DEIS repeatedly cites a single 1972 experiment in which domestic calves were fed chaff in molasses. It does not address possible respiratory or nervous system risks to aquatic or amphibious wildlife from cumulative exposure to chaff which has degraded to dust over time. Throughout the DEIS, this type of oversight is applied to impacts from socio-economic disturbances to noise and pollution.

Birds are particularly sensitive to even small doses of airborne emissions, quickly poisoned by proximity to fumes from an overheated non-stick cooking pan. Proposed actions would permit nearly fifty pounds of combined Teflon (PTFE)/magnesium flare material to be routinely burned as low as sixteen-hundred feet, in this region which shelters what may be the most biodiverse raptor breeding grounds on the planet. The DEIS does not evaluate air quality in avian flyways during dissipation of fumes from incinerated PTFE flare material or jet fuel, or the avian impact risks of exposure for years to come.

Because the proposed action claims humans will not be chronically exposed to noise averaging more than 80dB annually, the DEIS does not evaluate hearing impacts even to wildlife. Although the hearing of some wildlife species is far more sensitive than that of humans, the DEIS does not analyze cumulative risks to research, species-specific communication, predation, or escape, from hearing and startle effects of longterm wildlife exposure to repeated incidents of up to 120dB disturbance during low flyovers.

The DEIS does not analyze the risk of decimation for species normally prompted to emerge from hibernation by thunder, potentially triggered to untimely emergence by repeated sonic booms.

The DEIS fails to take a serious look at human psychological impacts of compounding existing militarization of outdoor life in the borderlands, at potential stress to recreation, learning, and health for children, or at species-specific impacts for predators (or species which they rely on, such as protected rodents, toads, and fish). It notes no significant potential impacts to geology, soils, water, aquatic habitats, domestic animals, wildlife, property values, land-use, cultural resources, economy, quality of life, or safety.

Additionally, by advancing a vision of Davis-Monthan as the third U.S. hub for AFSOC Power Projection across the globe, this proposal to deepen militarization of airspace in AZ and NM is inextricably connected to the arming of internationally contentious crises into the future - a point of distress for many people in the region.

Furthermore, these two jointly proposed actions will directly increase impacts connected to the migration and trafficking of persons displaced by growing climate extremes. Federal leaders address the “underlying drivers of migration”, of which climate change is critical, in their priorities for assistance to countries south of our border. The Pentagon officially acknowledges that rising temperatures are reshaping the world with “more frequent, intense, and unpredictable extreme weather conditions caused by climate change”. Yet, the Department of Defense is the single largest institutional producer of greenhouse gases in the world. The DEIS for SUA Optimization of AZ and NM does not mention that emissions fueled by the proposed action will compound existing Air Force impact to the region in the form of underlying drivers of migration, such as extreme weather and food scarcity, for populations south of our border.

Our military service members honor the United States with their dedication. We insist that military leaders, in turn, respect that dedication by honestly analyzing how duties assigned to service members impact the country they honor.

Simply put, current Air Force use of AZ and NM airspace does not satisfy federal ambition in the colossal push toward a new cold arms race, rather than assiduous diplomacy toward new direct arms talks; ignoring grave costs to the only designated Biodiversity Hotspot in the continental US, and to the many peoples who enjoy it, study it, and inhabit it. The SUA optimization and AFSOC transformation proposals are part and parcel of contentious global-economic foreign policy aims. Public comments on negligent analysis in this DEIS report are a citizens’ referendum on the future character of outdoor life, research, and recreation in Southern AZ and NM, and on the regional record of unethical military impacts; as well as on imminent policy effecting arms trade and military greenhouse emissions.

Please participate in this referendum by alerting lawmakers, and by sending comments on the DEIS to the Air Force. Please share this alert with others who appreciate the character and communities of Southern AZ and NM, no matter from where they hail.

Urgently,
Peaceful Sky Volunteers

Info

[Regional Airspace DEIS](#)

[Regional Airspace DEIS Public Comment](#)

[Contact Congressman Raúl Grijalva](#)

[9/4/2024 - Virtual Public Hearing with the Air Force](#)

5-8P MST, 6-9P MDT, 5-8P PDT, 7-10P CDT, 8-11P EDT

[9/5/2024 - Virtual Public Hearing with the Air Force](#)

5-8P MDT, 4-7P MST, 4-7P PDT, 6-9P CDT, 7-10P EDT

[9/21/2024 - Virtual Public Workshop with Peaceful Chiricahua Skies](#) on the DEIS, and how to submit effective comments, 10A MST, 11A MDT, 10A PDT, 12P CDT, 1P EDT

[10/9/2024 - Last Day for Regional Airspace DEIS Public Comment](#)