

Welcome to the Public Hearing for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Special Use Airspace Optimization to Support Air Force Missions in Arizona.

The National Environmental Policy Act requires that federal agencies evaluate the environmental effects of their proposed activities before making decisions. An Environmental Impact Statement – commonly referred to as an EIS - is a public document that describes the details of a proposed action as well as the potential social and environmental impacts that could result from that proposed action. The Air Force, along with its cooperating agencies - the Federal Aviation Administration or FAA, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Arizona Game and Fish Department - has prepared a Draft EIS for this proposed action. We encourage you to review the full EIS available online at the project website at www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com

The aircrews at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Luke Air Force Base and Morris Air National Guard Base share a primary mission to train and deploy combat-ready aircrews. Military flight training occurs in designated special use airspace, which has defined boundaries, floors, and ceilings. The type of special use airspace considered in this EIS is known as Military Operations Areas or MOAs. Throughout southern Arizona and a small portion of western New Mexico, a number of MOAs are available to Arizona-based aircrews for non-hazardous training. Since these MOAs were established there have been changes in aircraft inventory, missions, national threats, and advancements in technology of potential adversaries. These changes require the Air Force to conduct more low-level flight training, including supersonic flight training. Currently there is not enough airspace that provides the low altitudes, terrain variety, or ability to fly supersonic at lower altitude that are necessary for effective aircrew training. The Barry M. Goldwater Range has the capability to support low-level training and supersonic flights; however, it is heavily utilized for hazardous training which means the non-hazardous training has to occur in other airspace. The Air Force is proposing to alleviate these training shortfalls and address evolving training needs by modifying several MOAs. Effective training ensures readiness and increases aircrew survival.

The EIS describes and evaluates several alternatives. Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative. The National Environmental Policy Act requires that the No Action Alternative is assessed to provide a baseline for comparing impacts of the Proposed Action. This means that none of the MOAs would be modified. Training would continue in the existing MOAs. Aircrew readiness would continue to degrade.

The Proposed Action is Alternative 2. The proposed action would alleviate training shortfalls and address evolving training needs by modifying the MOAs so they fully support required training. Specifically, the Proposed Action includes:

- Expanding the Tombstone MOA approximately 10 nautical miles to the north and combining the existing A, B, and C components into one space.
- The floor of the Tombstone MOA would be lowered to 100 feet above ground level. However, an exclusion zone below 13,000 feet above mean sea level would be established in the southwest corner to avoid Bisbee-Douglas International airport.
- No other MOAs would be expanded laterally.
- To provide additional space for needed low-altitude training, the floors of Jackal, Outlaw, Bagdad, and Gladden would be lowered to 500 feet above ground level.
- There would be no change to the dimensions of Sells, Ruby, Fuzzy, Morenci, or Reserve MOAs.

- The use of chaff would be authorized in the Tombstone MOA. Chaff is already authorized in all the other MOAs.
- Use of flares is also authorized in all the MOAs. To align with proposed lower floors, the minimum release altitude for flares would be lowered to the accepted standard of 2,000 feet above ground level in Tombstone, Outlaw, Jackal, Bagdad, and Gladden. The use of flares would continue to be restricted based on local fire conditions.
- Supersonic flight is authorized in all MOAs except for Ruby and Fuzzy. The proposed action would lower the authorization down to 5,000 feet above ground level in the Tombstone, Outlaw, Jackal, Morenci, and Reserve MOAs. Supersonic speed only occurs for brief periods of approximately 30 to 60 seconds.
- Lastly, the proposed action would adjust the published times of use to align with how the MOAs are currently used. This would be an administrative change as the MOAs are routinely used outside of the current published times through a special notice called a Notice to Air Missions. Changing the published times would allow MOAs to be used as they are currently without the administrative burden of publishing notices.

Alternatives 3 and 4 are variations of the Proposed Action. With Alternative 3, the same modifications described for Alternative 2 would occur without the northern expansion of the Tombstone MOA. To increase the volume of airspace available for low-altitude training, the Jackal MOA would be lowered to 100 feet above ground level as opposed to 500 feet under Alternative 2. Under Alternative 4, the same modifications described for Alternative 2 would occur except that supersonic flight would be authorized down to 10,000 feet above ground level in Tombstone, Outlaw, Jackal, Morenci, and Reserve MOAs.

Making the proposed modifications to the MOAs in the region would allow low-altitude flights and supersonic flight at lower altitudes, to occur in the MOAs. This would improve the availability of Barry M. Goldwater Range to support hazardous training, as is its purpose. The proposed modifications would not change the total operations from any of the bases but would shift these operations to other training airspace in the region. The use of each individual MOA would fluctuate year to year. Since these MOAs are used as a collective regional asset, higher use of one MOA would result in reduced use of another at any given time. Because of this, for analysis purposes, the projected use of each MOA includes a modest increase to account for these fluctuations and variations as a way to accurately analyze the highest use of any one MOA. This “highest use” would not occur in all the MOAs at the same time

A number of best practices are in place to prevent or minimize impacts from the proposed activities:

- MOAs can be recalled by the FAA at any time when needed for other purposes.
- Life flights and medivac flights are always given priority in the airspace.
- Civilian aircraft can transit an active MOA using “see and avoid” rules.
- Aircraft are required to avoid congested areas including cities, towns, and settlements, or any open-air assembly of people by an altitude of 1,000 feet.
- Chaff and flares would not be released below 2,000 feet under any condition and flare use is restricted based on local fire conditions and National Fire Danger Ratings.
- Bird activity in all Special Use Airspace is monitored prior to all flights and avoided.

A wide range of training occurs within MOAs. From developing individual pilot skills to complex scenarios involving multiple aircraft. Training operations are randomly dispersed throughout the entire MOA. Lowering the floor of the MOAs would mean some of these operations would be more noticeable

than they are currently and would produce a higher level of noise since they would be operating closer to the ground. While the floor of some MOAs would be as low as 100 or 500 feet, operations rarely occur at this height and the likelihood of experiencing such an overflight would be very remote.

To assess the community impact from noise, modeling software is used to predict the noise exposure and compare it to defined thresholds. If the projected noise is below the threshold value that indicates the noise level is compatible with all land uses, such as residential, recreational, and entertainment areas. Both subsonic and supersonic noise have impacts thresholds. The standard metrics for assessing community impacts measure noise based on annual average daily aircraft operations. The metrics also weight operations that occur during the night to appropriately account for the higher level of annoyance from noise during these hours.

Subsonic noise currently occurs in all MOAs and would increase in all MOAs under all of the action alternatives. However, the anticipated subsonic noise levels in all MOAs would not exceed the threshold established for land use restrictions – meaning the noise would be compatible with all land uses to include recreational, residential, and entertainment areas. Noise would also not exceed levels that would cause classroom speech interference or affect property values. With Alternatives 2 and 4, the boundary of Tombstone would be expanded which would introduce military training to an area where it currently does not exist. Low-level flights in this particular area would be more noticeable than the rest of the MOA where low-level flights already occur. Outdoor recreationists beneath the newly lowered floor of Tombstone, Outlaw, Jackal, Bagdad or Gladden MOA could hear or see aircraft more than they do currently. Depending on the situation or recreational activity, the visual or noise intrusion may be annoying or disruptive, particularly in quiet settings such as parks, forests, or wilderness areas.

Supersonic noise currently occurs in almost all MOAs. Lowering the authorized altitude for supersonic flight would result in an increase in the supersonic noise in the Jackal, Outlaw, Morenci, Reserve, Gladden and Bagdad MOAs. Like with subsonic noise, the anticipated supersonic noise does not exceed the threshold for land use restrictions. When an aircraft flies at supersonic speed, shock waves are generated resulting in a sonic boom. The altitude at which the shock wave is generated affects the intensity of the boom. Under the proposed action supersonic speed could occur at lower altitudes than it does currently in some MOAs, thus the intensity of some sonic booms would increase. In rare cases, a very intense sonic boom could damage fragile structures and startle humans and animals.

Military overflights could disturb wildlife, domestic animals, and threatened and endangered species. Temporary behavioral changes have been observed in field studies of birds and mammals. Less pronounced responses have been observed in domestic animals. Military overflight noise, including sonic booms, have not been shown to affect reproductive success. The projected noise would not be at a level that would damage hearing. Chaff causes no toxicological effects and does not cause harm to animals. Animals have not been observed ingesting residual chaff materials. Flares pose only a remote chance of fire given release altitudes and restrictions based on local fire conditions.

The Endangered Species Act requires Federal Agencies to make a determination of the effect of their proposed activities on threatened and endangered species, those proposed for listing as threatened and endangered, and their designated critical habitats. The Air Force is consulting with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on these impacts. The proposed activities are not likely to adversely affect or jeopardize the continued existence of any of these protected species

The National Historic Preservation Act requires Federal Agencies to consider the effects on historic properties and seek to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects. This requires consultation with states as well as Tribal Nations that attach religious and cultural significance to historic properties that may be affected. Consultation with Arizona and New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officers and 30 Tribes and Pueblos was initiated in January of 2022 and is ongoing. These consultations will identify any additional impacts as well as measures required to mitigate any significant effects to these resources.

Potential effects to historic properties include:

- Noise and vibration from sonic booms could damage fragile structures
- these would be rare, dispersed, and of short duration
- Changes to visual setting could also affect historic properties
- Traditional cultural properties could be affected by noise and visual intrusion.

The MOAs proposed for modification overlie a number of small civilian airports. As is currently the case, civilian air traffic could continue to transit active MOAs using visual flight rules. When MOAs are active, air traffic using instrument flight rules would be required to reroute. The additional time to reroute around an active MOA varies from less than 1 minute up to 7 minutes depending on the location. Emergency and other priority aircraft always have priority in any airspace

Thank you for your participation in this EIS. We encourage you to review the full EIS and provide your comments on the project website at www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com