



THE TAOS NEWS

Named Best U.S. Weekly Newspaper by the Nat'l. Newspaper Assoc. 2007, 2008
Inland Press Foundation Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

Air Force proposal: Support of officials key

SUZIE SCHWARTZ

As almost all of us know by now, the United States Air Force would like to establish a Low Altitude Tactical Navigation (LATN) training area in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado for Cannon Air Force Base aircraft training flights.

Thanks to Congressman Ben Ray Luján's and the public's pressure, the very short public comment period for an environmental assessment of the proposed 2010 LATN training area was extended from Oct. 4 to Nov. 15. This will certainly allow more of the population to have an opportunity to submit their comments and concerns addressing the potential environmental consequences of establishing such a training area for consideration for the environmental assessment.

Further, the town of Taos Town Council and Mayor Córdova have adopted a resolution opposing the Air Force's proposal and Taos County is also in the process of preparing a resolution opposing the plan.

In the late 1990s, similar proposals were made by the USAF for B-52 bomber training flights for this same area and were subsequently abandoned upon the completion of an Environmental Impact Study (EIS). Those trainings, I believe, ended up taking place over West Texas.

Our economy in Northern New Mexico is almost entirely dependent on tourism dollars.

All sectors of the local economies are intrinsically linked and could be impacted negatively :

- Native American sovereignty, their ancient historic architecture and spiritual practices;
- Historic Hispanic adobe architecture;
- Ranchers, farmers, and their livestock;
- Outdoor recreation: hunting, fishing, skiing, rafting, hiking, biking, camping, sightseeing and the wildlife that are associated with all of these;
- The artistic community, healing community, and retirees all come to "The Land of Enchantment" for the tranquility and peace of the landscape and the unique beauty of the skies, day and night.

The area I am referring to includes much more than the town of Taos or even Taos County.

Additionally, we have many veterans returning from the wars who have sustained life changing injuries and PTSD. Low-flying warplanes at home could trigger their symptoms and slow or stop their chances for recovery.

I have heard that the Osprey Aircraft are somewhat unreliable and that they tend to crash. Such crashes could cause wildfires or wipe out a small village. Events such as these would amount to unacceptable 'collateral damage' and must be considered as well as many other possible scenarios.

The combination of huge size, low altitude, and high speed of these war aircraft could bring enormous noise, vibration and terror to human and animal populations thus impacting quality of life on many levels.

I have also heard recently that almost all pilot training can effectively be done in simulators.

In light of the potential and probable environmental consequences of the Air Force's proposal to establish a Low Altitude Tactical Navigation training area in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado for various types of C-130 and CV-22 Osprey aircrews, I feel strongly, at the very least, that a full environmental impact statement be prepared accompanied by public hearings to preclude the initiation of any such training program.

In the event that a full environmental impact statement is not conducted, then I would request that the "no action alternative" be taken. The support of our highly influential elected representatives is essential and greatly appreciated!

Suzanne M. Schwartz is a resident of El Prado. She says she sent a version of this letter to the U.S. Air Force, Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, and Congressman Ben Ray Lujan who has been tremendously responsive to his constituents on this matter.