

## **My Turn**

### **Letter to our federal legislators**

**SUZIE SCHWARTZ**

**The Taos News 1/17/2011**

I want to thank you for responding to your constituents' concerns in 2010 re: Cannon Air Force Base low-altitude training area. We greatly appreciated the extension of the public comment period at that time and were hopeful that the Air Force would also honor our request that a complete environmental impact statement be conducted.

Instead, they are trying to move forward with their plan providing only a cursory and inadequate environmental assessment.

Therefore, I am writing again to express my concern about the proposed Cannon Air Force Base low-altitude training area flights over a large part of the mountains, grasslands, and deserts of Northern New Mexico and Colorado.

As you know, 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, such as:

- American Indian 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 pristine wilderness and wildlife that are associated with all of these.

(The headwaters of three major river systems are encompassed in the proposed low-altitude training area.) 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. Simply avoiding small areas of the proposed low-altitude training area due to local outcry will be ineffective in ensuring the health of our tourism based economy as people come to experience the entire area.

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.

Any crash of the crashprone Osprey, a plane, which was canceled twice by the Department of Defense, could cause poisonous jet fuel pollution and/or forest fire in a severely drought-afflicted area. Inevitable fuel spillage from refueling exercises will poison water tables and river systems essential to the whole Southwest.

Finally, I am very concerned that once the Air Force establishes this area as a training area for C130s and the outdated, dangerous, and unbelievably expensive Osprey, that they will simply add Drone flyover practice to their repertoire. I do not want the Air Force to have the use of my hardearned tax dollars to fund the low-altitude training area over 60,000 square miles of beautiful Northern New Mexico and Colorado.

But before they even consider going ahead, they must first use my tax money to fund a 60-day extension of the public comment period prior to which time they conduct "demonstration flyovers" at an altitude of 200 feet and speeds of 300 mph over all proposed "training areas" in order for affected populations to experience in real life, the immediate "insignificance" of the impact.

Further, the only way the Air Force can determine the long-range and ongoing affects of their plan is to conduct a complete environmental impact study. The findings of the current draft environmental assessment are woefully inadequate.

Therefore, I also request once again that if the outcome of the draft environmental assessment results in any alternative other than the no action alternative, that the Air Force use my tax money to fund and conduct a complete environmental impact statement as described by NEPA and that funding for the program be frozen until the environmental impact statement has been completed.

Your influence in ensuring that the Air Force follows the proper protocol before enacting it's plans for war practice over peaceful civilian populations and pristine wilderness is absolutely essential and will be much appreciated by your constituents.

*Suzanne Schwartz, of Taos, sent this statement to U.S. Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall and Rep. Ben Ray Lujan.*