

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 8, 2022

### Contacts:

Allyson Siwik, Gila Conservation Coalition, [allysonsiwik@gmail.com](mailto:allysonsiwik@gmail.com), 575-590-7619

Todd Schulke, Center for Biological Diversity, [tschulke@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:tschulke@biologicaldiversity.org), 575-574-5962

Kim Vacariu, Peaceful Chiricahua Skies, 520-390-3969

Sandy Bahr, Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter, [sandy.bahr@sierraclub.org](mailto:sandy.bahr@sierraclub.org), 602-999-5790

### **Conservation Groups Oppose Air Force Proposal for Low-level Supersonic Airspace Over Southern Arizona and Southwest New Mexico**

Thirty-four organizations in New Mexico and Arizona submitted comments to the Air Force on Friday expressing their serious concerns with its proposal to authorize low-level fighter jet maneuvers as low as 100 feet above ground level (AGL) and supersonic flights as low as 5,000 feet AGL in southern Arizona and southwest New Mexico.

Federal public lands in Arizona and New Mexico that could be affected by the Air Force proposal include four National Forests (Gila, Apache-Sitgreaves, Tonto, Coronado), 12 US Forest Service Wilderness Areas; 3 US Forest Service Wilderness Study Areas; 18 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Wilderness Areas, 9 BLM Wilderness Study Areas, 22 BLM Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), 4 BLM Research Natural Areas (RNA); 1 BLM Riparian National Conservation Area (Gila Box); 4 National Wildlife Refuges (Buenos Aires, Leslie Canyon, San Bernardino, and Bill Williams River) and 2 National Monuments (Chiricahua National Monument and Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument). Additionally, 83 miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and the Catwalk National Recreation Trail could be impacted.

The conservation groups argue that the Air Force has not made the case for the need for these severe airspace modifications. Given the serious harms the proposal will cause to communities, local economies, the environment and wildlife, the groups support the no action alternative.

“The Air Force’s proposal will cause extreme noise and sonic booms above rural and tribal communities, some of the Southwest’s most fragile sky-island ecosystems, and beloved wilderness areas and national monuments. The Air Force has not provided the public with enough information to evaluate its proposal, nor has it justified why it’s needed,” said **Allyson Siwik, Executive Director of the Gila Conservation Coalition and partner in Peaceful Gila Skies.**

“The Air Force plan to lower flight levels to as low as 100 feet above the ground and as little as 5,000 feet for supersonic over wilderness areas, tribal lands, and sacred sites is just plain abusive,” said **Todd Schulke, co-founder of the Center for Biological Diversity and partner in Peaceful Gila Skies.** “There are plenty of places around the country to train pilots, so there’s no need to defile some of the special places our country loves the most,” added Schulke.

“The role the Air Force plays in our national security cannot be understated. The men and women stationed at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base are some of the nation's most courageous, and they are deserving of our respect. However, the Air Force’s proposal would unnecessarily threaten some of New Mexico's most cherished public lands, wildlife and wild places along with local outdoor recreation economies. There are millions of acres of DOD land where this type of training can be conducted without threat to local outdoor recreation economies, but the Gila National Forest and New Mexico Bootheel are not the right places for such low-level supersonic flights,” said Mark Allison, **executive director of New Mexico Wild and partner in Peaceful Gila Skies.**

“This fast-track effort by the Air Force to find dangerous low-level airspace over a landscape that includes dozens of protected areas, numerous endangered species, and vast stretches of private, populated lands is already discredited by the thousands of people speaking up in opposition,” said **Kim Vacariu, co-leader of Peaceful Chiricahua Skies.**

“There is no demonstrated need for these lower flight levels that will disturb people and wildlife alike and harm wilderness, national monuments, and Tribal lands,” said **Sandy Bahr, chapter director for Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon Chapter.** “We are appalled that the Air Force is even considering this and urge it to dump this ill-conceived proposal now.”

“This damaging and unnecessary proposal utterly ignores the natural, cultural, experiential, and health values of the treasured wild lands it wantonly threatens,” said **Kelly Burke, executive director, Wild Arizona.** “Ironically, it would also harm the very solace and healing that nature provides to our veterans, as we’ve heard time and again from Wild Arizona’s veteran volunteers, members, and staff.”

The groups’ scoping comments can be accessed [HERE](#).

###