

October 24, 2017

Col. Houston R. Cantwell,
49th Wing Commander
490 First Street
Holloman Air Force Base
Alamogordo, NM 88330

Dear Colonel Cantwell,

I am writing to express concern about the proposed plan to create a new fly-over zone for F-16 training missions that would encompass all of the Gila National Forest and most of its wilderness areas. The proposed zone comes within several miles of the Town of Silver City. I am currently the Mayor of the Town of Silver City and this letter is transmitted with the unanimous support of the Town Council. This letter also represents my personal concern about the possible negative impact that these sorties may have on our community.

My first concern is that Silver City was not included in the cities where public meetings took place. Furthermore, we only just received notice of the proposed fly-over plank, and for most of us it was not until after meetings had taken place in Truth or Consequences and Las Cruces. I am therefore requesting a public meeting in Silver City where we can discuss the many impacts that this activity could have on Silver City and the surrounding areas.

Silver City is a community with a rich history and an economy that is strongly dependent upon tourism with visitors to the Gila Cliff Dwellings and to other National sites, and upon the numerous people who utilize the Gila National Forest for hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, scientific studies, their livelihood, and other outdoor activities. Some people who visit actually end up moving back here to live permanently. They fall in love with the people, the peace, the tranquility, the solitude and the generally-quiet lifestyle we all enjoy here.

Further, we are concerned about the negative effects of dramatic noise upon Native American ruins, including the Gila Cliff Dwelling monument north of Silver City. The Town is aware that Native American ruins in other parts of the State of New Mexico have suffered accelerated deterioration due to sound vibrations caused by low-latitude training. Recall that some years ago in Mountainair, New Mexico, it was determined that low altitude fly-overs were responsible for damage to ancient Native American ruins.

Scientists at Western New Mexico University also carry out numerous scientific studies in the Gila National Forest. This vast scientific laboratory is unique because it contains the Gila River which begins high in the pristine mountains of the Gila National Forest and continues until it connects with the Colorado River. The Gila River is the last free flowing river in New Mexico.

Silver City is also officially recognized as a Gateway to the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) system. The CDT is a United States National Scenic Trail running 3,100 miles between Mexico and Canada. It follows the Continental Divide of the Americas along the Rocky Mountains and traverses five U.S. states — Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. The CDT passes just several miles north of Silver City, and hikers from all over the world come here to start their CDT journey.

As you may know, specially designated “wilderness” areas are supposed to remain free of technology and motorized travel, and support solitude and communing with the land and its wildlife. Two sections of the 1964 Wilderness Act states that as “.....an area of undeveloped Federal Land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so to preserve its natural condition....”, and “.....for providing outstanding opportunities for solitude....”.

If you have never been to Silver City, or experienced the Gila National Forest, I personally invite you to visit us and see it all for yourself. I would be happy to be your personal guide. My contact information is listed on the enclosed card.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ken Ladner
Mayor
Town of Silver City

cc: Senator Tom Udall
Senator Martin Heinrich
Congressman Steve Pearce