

Proposed Cheyenne military operations area modification

Environmental assessment

The Air National Guard has prepared an environmental assessment in conjunction with the Federal Aviation Administration to make an informed decision to support the proposed expansion of the Cheyenne Low and High military operations areas and the associated Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace used by the 140th Wing of the Colorado Air National Guard, based at Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora, Colo., in the fulfillment of its readiness training requirements in eastern Colorado and western Kansas. The draft environmental assessment yielded a draft finding of no significant impact.

The draft environmental assessment and draft finding of no significant impact will be available for public review beginning May 1, 2012: in libraries in eastern Colorado and western Kansas within the affected areas; on the Colorado National Guard website: <http://co.ng.mil>; via a link on the Colorado Air National Guard 140th Wing website: <http://www.140Wing.ang.af.mil>; via a link on the Kansas National Guard website: http://www.kansastag.gov/ng_default.asp. Citizens can provide public comment during the 30-day public comment period by contacting the Joint Force Headquarters-Colorado/Public Affairs Office by email to ngcopao@ng.army.mil, by mail to 6848 South Revere Parkway, Centennial, Colo., 80112, or by fax to (720) 250-1059.

History of military operations areas in Colorado and Kansas

Military operations areas have existed in Colorado and Kansas since the 1950s.

Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the Cheyenne Low and High military operations areas shrank and changed in shape to accommodate aircraft arrival and departure corridors for Denver International Airport, Colo.

The old Kit Carson military operations area extended into Kansas more than the proposed Cougar military operations area.

The Federal Aviation Administration, which controls the airspace, doesn't consider state lines in managing airspace.

Current use of Cheyenne military operations areas

The current Cheyenne military operations areas overlie portions of seven counties: three in Colorado (Kit Carson, Cheyenne and Kiowa) and four in Kansas (Sherman, Wallace, Greeley and Logan). Several existing military training routes traverse the existing Cheyenne military operations areas.

When the 140th Wing does not need to utilize the military operations areas for training, it notifies the Federal Aviation Administration to release the regional airspace to other non-military users.

The 140th Wing exercises good stewardship of this airspace and returns it when not in use.

The times of use of the military operations areas are from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. The Federal Aviation Administration communicates use of the military operations areas on Saturdays and Sundays by Notice to Airmen four hours in advance.

The 140th Wing generally trains during the week and on one weekend a month during two to three time periods per operating day. Operational necessity for pre-deployment training may require additional sorties during other times of the day or week. A typical training mission in the military operations areas employs as few as two jets or as many as 16 jets.

Why Cheyenne military operations area modification is needed

The 140th Wing flies the F-16C+ Fighting Falcon, recently modified with new avionics software which drastically increases its combat capability. The aircraft's long-range detection and shoot down capability truly make it today's "multi-role" U.S. Air Force fighter.

Beginning in Fiscal Year 10, the Intermediate Base Realignment and Closure Commission submitted its recommendation to the President to realign current fighter inventory. In accordance with that decision, the 140th Wing was one of the Air National Guard units selected to plus-up from 15 to 18 aircraft.

Advances in fighter aircraft technology coupled with the multitude of threats to our nation justify the requirement to increase the current size of the wing's training airspace.

With longer range air-to-surface as well as air-to-air weapons developed for the F-16, training airspace larger than the current Cheyenne military operations areas in eastern Colorado and western Kansas is critical to be able to train to the full capability of the aircraft's new technology.

No current airspace around Buckley Air Force Base provides the necessary boundaries and altitudes to permit the current F-16 to operate all missions and to conduct realistic mission-oriented training to meet military readiness requirements.

This proposal would modify the current airspace and permit those operations and training in a cost-effective manner.

Reduction in noise levels within the airspace training areas

The proposed action will result in a reduction in noise levels within the training airspace so noise and vibration levels (from military aircraft over flights) experienced by people and animals on the ground are expected to be lower than current conditions.

The current flight floor of 300 feet above ground level in the Cheyenne Low military operations area will increase to 500 feet above ground level in the Cougar Low military operations area so aircraft will fly higher in the new military operations area.

Military aircraft will be more spread out within the airspace, so average noise levels will decrease in the military operations areas.

When the military operations areas are in use by military aircraft, they cannot be used by commercial or civilian aircraft which will decrease the noise level from such air traffic in the area.

Also, the expansion of the military operations area will decrease the probability of a military aircraft on a point. Any given location beneath the military operations area would be expected to be over flown relatively infrequently as aircraft are precluded from flying over the same point more than once per day.

Low altitude over flights occur approximately 10 percent of the total utilization time in the military operations area.

Aircraft flight restrictions prevent any operations from occurring at night below 1,000 feet above ground level.

The proposed action would not change the number of sorties or aircraft operations within the training airspace.

Summary of proposed airspace modification

Under this proposal, the Cheyenne Low and High military operations area would be modified as shown on the attached map of the area.

The proposed Cheyenne military operations area modification would create the Cougar Low and High and Bobcat High military operations areas in the Colorado counties of Cheyenne, Kiowa and Kit Carson, and in the Kansas counties of Greeley, Logan, Scott, Sherman, Thomas, Wallace and Wichita.

The Cheyenne Low military operations area flight floor is currently at 300 feet above ground level, but the airspace between the 300-foot and 500-foot levels is no longer needed. This airspace, for which there is no longer a requirement, will be given up as part of the proposed action.

The Cougar Low military operations area will extend from 500 feet above ground level, up to but not including 11,000 feet above mean sea level.

The Cheyenne High military operations area, which currently extends from 9,000 feet above mean sea level up to, but not including, 18,000 feet above mean sea level, would be extended west, southwest, south, southeast and east and be subdivided into the Cougar High military operations area in the east and the Bobcat High military operations area in the west.

The 140th Wing, through consultation with Native American tribes, agreed to maintain a 5-nautical mile radius buffer around the center of the Sand Creek Massacre National Historical Site in Colorado with a flight floor of 5,000 feet above ground level. The current 1,500-foot above ground level flight exclusion bubble within five nautical miles of the Cheyenne Wells airfield, Colo., will be maintained.

140th Wing mission

The 140th Wing of the Colorado Air National Guard, based at Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora, Colo., provides homeland security and vital support to the United States' war on terrorism by flying Air Sovereignty Alert and Air Expeditionary Force missions.

140th Wing personnel deployed four times to Iraq (to the war in 2003, then to Balad in 2004, 2007, and 2009). They also deployed in the theater security package to Korea. The next deployment is scheduled for late 2012.

The 140th Wing is the only centrally-located alert fighter location in the U.S. – protecting our homeland 24/7/365 at a quarter of the cost of a similar active duty unit. Citizen-Airmen guard our communities, state and nation by responding rapidly to potential air threats over U.S. cities in support of Operation Noble Eagle, the military response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The Colorado Air National Guard's economic impact is \$91.9 million. The unit employs nearly 1,500 Citizen-Airmen living and serving in Colorado communities.

Reason for military operations area expansion into Kansas

The Air National Guard seeks to regain a volume of airspace taken away many years ago to support a regional airline which no longer exists.

The Federal Aviation Administration suggested space to the east that would work best for all concerned as well as air traffic to and from Denver International Airport, Colo. The proposed action thus includes more airspace over Kansas.

Joint training with Kansas Air National Guard

The 140th Wing conducts joint tactical training in the military operations areas with the 190th Air Refueling Wing, Kansas Air National Guard, Topeka, Kan., to meet annual training requirements.

The 140th Wing makes on-the-spot schedule changes to accommodate Kansas's air refueling mission training requirements.

Kansas aircrews will experience shorter travel times to conduct training in the airspace.