

The Air National Guard (ANG) has plans to modify the air corridors through which it flies practice missions, training their pilots to fly fighter jets (F-15's, F-16's and soon F-18's) in mountainous terrain. These corridors, known as Condor I & II, comprise better than 2.5 million acres in Western Maine in Oxford, Franklin, Somerset and Piscataquis Counties and a small portion of Coos County, NH. The ANG is based in Westfield MA, at Barnes ANG Base; the area would also be used by ANG from VT, and by the US Air Force. There are seven training exercises currently conducted in the Condor I & II military operations area: air combat maneuvering, advanced handling characteristics, air combat training, basic fighter maneuvering, intercepts, low altitude awareness training, and navigation. The low altitude flights (500 ft. above ground level up to 7,000 ft. above sea level) are currently restricted to a discreet linear area; the modification extends the low altitude flights throughout all of Condor I & II, based on the ANG's contention that real-life conditions can't be simulated in such a narrowly defined space, and that the pilots are required to train in real-life conditions.

The ANG states, in their Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared for this modification, that this Proposed Action (extending low level training exercises throughout the entire Condor I & II areas) "would have no effect on biological resources." It goes on to say "the only potential effect would be limited to noise, bird strikes and the use of chaff and flares associated with military aircraft sorties." Their contention is that it would not affect a "major avian migratory corridor" and that there are existing techniques to reduce risks of bird strikes. As far as the noise factor is concerned, although the ANG agrees that increased noise levels and low-level overflights *could* disturb wildlife, they state the wildlife would ultimately get used to it.

'Western Maine Matters,' a group of concerned citizens in Western Maine formed in 2007 in response to this proposal of the ANG, disagrees vehemently with the dismissive statements in the DEIS that these sorties wouldn't "significantly affect" the lives of the 80,000 residents in the area, the wildlife, the already-fragile economy or the ecosystem. We seek to enlist the support of our Maine Congressional Delegation in not allowing this Proposed Action to be consummated, and are preparing appropriate responses to the ANG Proposed Action, based on the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). For more information, visit the website: www.westernmaine.org.

A formal Public Hearing (scheduled by the Air Force/ANG) will be held on Saturday, November 14, from 2 – 6 p.m. at UMaine/Farmington's Lincoln Auditorium. In addition to oral comments at the Hearing, public input in the form of emails and letters will be accepted for the record until January 1, 2010, and should be sent to: Major Stephen R. Lippert, ANG (E-mail: stephen.lippert@ang.af.mil), or to Lt. Col. Mike Milord, NGB Public Affairs, Jefferson Plaza One, Suite 11200, 1411 Jefferson Davis Hwy., Arlington, VA 22202 (E-mail: <Mike.milord1@us.army.mil>).

Ann K. Williams, for 'Western Maine Matters'

