

Franklin

Low flight public hearing set for November

By [Ann Bryant, Staff Writer](#)

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FARMINGTON — The Air National Guard has moved back a public hearing on their proposed low-altitude flight training over Western Maine to Nov. 14 at the University of Maine at Farmington.

The hearing, originally scheduled for Sept. 2, was delayed in response to a request from Gov. John E. Baldacci, who asked the National Guard Bureau to postpone the public hearing on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for six to nine months to review concerns raised by Western Maine residents, the Maine Department of Transportation and the Attorney General's Office.

The governor did receive a letter in response from the National Guard Bureau in mid-September "ensuring his points are addressed in the current draft EIS for the modification of the Condor MOA."

The letter included some basic summaries stated by the National Guard at previous public meetings but did not address the concerns raised by the governor or people of Western Maine, said David Farmer, spokesperson for the governor.

"They're prepared to move forward. We're disappointed and are evaluating our next step," Farmer said. "We are glad that they did delay and change the timeline giving a longer amount of time for everyone to participate."

The public comment deadline has been extended to Jan. 1, 2010.

One concern that delayed the previous meeting was that the public wasn't made aware of the planned September public hearing in a timely fashion, Lt. Col. Mike Milford said Friday. Announcement of the September meeting was made only two to three weeks prior to the date. The ANG wanted to make the hearing available for both seasonal and non-seasonal residents. For the November meeting, the ANG wanted to provide more lead-time prior to the meeting so that people can be aware, he said.

They also wanted to hold the public hearing prior to the start of winter and planned the new hearing from 2 to 6 p.m. on a Saturday in Lincoln Auditorium at UMF to provide a better opportunity for the public to attend, he said.

The hearing provides an opportunity for the public to state their views on a proposed change to Condor flight space that would drop flight levels from 7,000 to 500 feet in military operation areas used for training by the 104th Fighter Wing of the Massachusetts Air National Guard in Westfield, Mass. The Condor spaces cover portions of Franklin, Oxford, Piscataquis and Somerset counties in Maine and part of Coos County in New Hampshire.

The process, Milford said, is to provide an opportunity for the public to review the draft EIS on the project and either respond at the public hearing or in writing to the ANG. These documents are reviewed and included in the final statement put together for the Federal Aviation Agency's review of the flight change.

"Every comment is taken into consideration, but obviously we want to achieve a balance here. The National Guard works hard to be a good neighbor while training to be ready to respond to national and overseas contingencies," he said.

Residents have voiced concerns that the draft EIS does not adequately respond to the social and economical impact on an area increasingly dependent on local tourism.

The governor raised concerns over safety issues for aircraft not seen by radar and requested an independent study on the impact of noise from training flights.

The draft EIS can be viewed on the Maine Department of Transportation's Web site at www.maine.gov/mdot/angcondor/index.htm or at the libraries in Rangeley, Rumford, Monson, Bingham and Pittsburg, N.H.

Written comments can be e-mailed to Major Stephen R. Lippert at stephen.lippert@ang.af.mil or sent to Lt. Col. Mike Milord, NGB Public Affairs, Jefferson Plaza One, Suite 11200, 1411 Jefferson Davis Hwy., Arlington, VA 22202.

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