

El Mirage seeks environmental impact study which includes test-flying F-35

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Staff Report
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El Mirage officials sent a letter to the Department of Defense and Arizona's congressional delegation urging the department to complete a full environmental impact study that includes test-flying the F-35, the new aircraft at Luke, to assess its true volume.

Stacy Pearson, an El Mirage spokeswoman, said the military has used simulated aircraft to test the noise of the new jet, which, by the military's own estimates, is between 2 and 12 times as loud. Cities and residents from Tucson to Virginia Beach are asking questions about the jet's noise, and the impact it will have on neighboring homes and businesses.

"Looking toward the future of that relationship, the city is simply trying to assess the impact of the new F35. It would be irresponsible to ignore the potential noise impact as El Mirage is home to more fly-overs than any other community in the West Valley," Pearson said in a statement.

"We're not alone in the quest to find out what the noise impact is of these jets," said Pearson. "And in order from us to go from a neutral position to a supportive position we will need to know these answers."

The letter precedes a Wednesday morning announcement by Gov. Jan Brewer regarding the future of the Luke Air Force Base.

Brewer will be joined by Glendale Mayor Elaine Scruggs and Fighter Country Partnership Chairman Charley Freericks along with community and business leaders.

Below is a copy of the letter sent today.

Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Gates:

As you are aware, the **National Environmental Policy Act** of 1969 (NEPA) requires an environmental assessment of major projects. Locating the F-35 at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona qualifies as a major project under NEPA. Therefore, we request an environmental assessment of the impact of the F-35 being based at Luke Air Force Base be conducted before a decision is made to select Luke AFB as a candidate for an F-35 training mission.

The Air Force uses the Air Force Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP) for its projects. There are a number of activities for which the Air Force grants exclusion from the EIAP, meaning that the project or activity can be implemented with no environmental analysis whatsoever. We understand the exclusion is generally granted for smaller activities and projects. The potential placement at Luke Air Force Base of the F-35, which the Air Force has already determined is louder than any other aircraft currently flown by the military, where it will fly over not only our community but also the communities of Goodyear, Sun City, Surprise, Glendale, Peoria and unincorporated areas in Arizona, merits a full and comprehensive environmental study under the EIAP.

In addition to a full and comprehensive EIAP analysis, we respectfully request the Department of Defense and the Department of the Air Force bring at least two of the of the F-35 prototypes to Luke Air Force Base and fly them in full training mission for a week so that all residents living in the vicinity of Luke AFB can evaluate for themselves the full environmental impact the F-35 will have on them should Luke AFB be selected for the F-35.

We are aware a full EIAP Analysis was conducted of the F-35 for Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, and our community deserves no less.

We appreciate your consideration and assistance in helping us evaluate potential impacts to our community.

Sincerely,

Mayor Michele Kern
City of El Mirage, Arizona