



NEWS RELEASE

TEXAS AIR NATIONAL GUARD

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TXANG seeks to maximize fighter pilot training with airspace proposal

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas – Air National Guard leaders from the 149th Fighter Wing are seeking to lower altitude boundaries of the current Crystal military operation area in an effort to maximize airspace and improve student pilot training requirements.

The proposal would change altitude limits of the Crystal MOA to 500 feet above ground level over parts of Dimmit and Webb counties.

“Expanding the airspace would allow our student pilots to realistically train against emerging threats,” said Lt. Col. Greg Pohoski, an F-16 instructor pilot assigned to the 149th FW headquartered at JBSA-Lackland.

“Maximizing our airspace will meet the ever-developing requirements of air-to-air combat, air-to-ground combat and platform technology.”

“The importance of low-level training cannot be overstated,” he added. “A lack of lower altitudes creates safety concerns, is insufficient to meet the increasing demands of fighter pilot production and limits the execution of fighter tactics against modern-day threats.”

As one of three F-16 formal training units in the Air Force, the 149th FW plays a major role in fighter pilot production. For these instructor pilots, safety considerations and modernized fighter tactics necessitate these modifications.

Col. Matthew Jensen, commander of the 149th Operations Group, said student training at the wing has increased 40% over the past several years, a trend expected to continue as more aircraft arrive in the coming years.

“We have been using the current airspace for as long as I can remember,” Jensen said. “As technology has progressed and military aircraft are becoming more sophisticated, it’s important we meet these advances. We have to train for evolving threats to our nation by conducting realistic training in line with modern tactics and procedures. Changing the airspace provides us with increased flexibility and better, more realistic training.”

Pohoski said leadership also considered the fiscal disadvantages involved with refusing to modernize.

“Without modifying the current airspace, our existing units, as well as future ones, will be forced to deploy to more costly and limited locations to meet training requirements,” he said.

Another advantage of this proposal is that it creates a low Crystal MOA that would extend from 500 feet AGL to 5,999 feet mean sea level, Pohoski said. These altitudes would allow fighter pilots to perform tactical combat maneuvers involving abrupt, unpredictable changes in altitude and direction of flight, much like combat.

The airspace proposal is part of the ANG’s plans to provide a more lethal and effective force to meet the challenges of developing threats to global security and ensure the readiness of its military personnel as training requirements increase.

“As the premier F-16 training unit in the country we are constantly improving the way we train,” said Col. Raul Rosario, the 149th FW commander. “With Crystal Low MOA, our F-16 instructors will be able to leverage the full breadth and depth of their experience to continue training the best fighter pilots in the world.”

The Federal Aviation Administration oversees an extensive approval process before any changes take place. Part of this process involves a 45-day public comment period where affected stakeholders and citizens can review and comment on the proposal.

An environmental assessment is in progress to address potential impacts to the community at large and its corresponding aviation flight patterns.

“We would only go low-level intermittently and then would let anyone else using the airspace know hours in advance,” said Pohoski. “We conduct low altitude operations in the Brady MOA under similar conditions with no known impact.”

The 149th FW’s leadership understands that residents in these counties may have concerns about the proposal and encourage them to seek answers to their questions.

“Our priority as warfighters is maintaining lethal readiness for combat, but we also live in and love this community,” said Rosario. “We want to be good neighbors, and we are concerned citizens too. Fostering community partnerships is important to us, which is why we have established incredible relationships with our first responders, local authorities and community members. We want to hear feedback from the local populace about any concerns they may have, so we can address and try to accommodate them.”

Civic leaders of these impacted counties who would like to arrange a meeting should contact the 149th FW Public Affairs office at 210-925-7772 or send us a message via the “contact us” tab via the 149th FW website at <https://www.149fw.ang.af.mil/>. The website will post details and updates of the current airspace initiative as they become available.

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Please direct questions to Ms. Mindy Bloem, 149th FW PA, at (210) 925-7222 or via email at usaf.tx.149-fw.mbx.fw-pa@mail.mil.