



NEWS RELEASE

Arizona House of Representatives

Representative David Cook (R-7)

1700 West Washington • Phoenix, Arizona • 85007

Monday, September 23, 2024
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Representative David Cook Urges U.S. Air Force to Strengthen Fire Safety Measures in Arizona

STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – Arizona State Representative David Cook has submitted comments in response to the U.S. Air Force’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which outlines plans to release flares at lower altitudes across wildfire-prone areas in Arizona. Citing the state’s long-term drought and previous wildfire incidents, including the 2021 Telegraph Fire, Representative Cook is calling on the Air Force to modify its proposed action to implement stronger measures to prevent wildfires.

“While Arizona is an important state for conducting strategic military training operations, the Air Force needs to take every precaution to protect people and land from preventable disasters, including wildland fires,” Representative Cook said. **“Releasing flares during times when fire restrictions are in place poses an unnecessary risk to residents. The military must recognize the danger these flares pose to Arizona communities and ensure that no flares are deployed on days when state or local fire restrictions are active.”**

In his comments, attached below, Representative Cook asks the Air Force to update its final EIS to prohibit the release of flares on any day where federal, state, or local fire restrictions are in effect, emphasizing that both minimum altitude restrictions and coordinated fire prevention measures are essential to mitigating fire risks.

Arizonans are encouraged to submit their own public comments on the issue through the Air Force’s official webpage at the following link: <https://www.arizonaregionalairspaceeis.com/comments>.

David Cook is a Republican member of the Arizona House of Representatives serving Legislative District 7, which includes Pinal, Gila, Coconino, and Navajo Counties. He is Chairman of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee and the House International Trade Committee. Follow him on X/Twitter at @RepDavidCook.

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Arizona House of Representatives

Phoenix, Arizona 85007

September 23, 2024

Arizona Regional Airspace EIS
c/o Stantec
501 Butler Farm Rd., Suite H
Hampton, VA 23666

RE: Public Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Regional Special Use Airspace Optimization to Mitigate Risk of Wildland Fires in Arizona Associated with the Lower Altitude Use of Flares

Dear U.S. Department of the Air Force:

As a member of the Arizona Legislature who has witnessed first-hand the devastation that wildland fires cause in Arizona, I appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments on the Department of the Air Force's (DAF's) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the use of flares at lower altitudes in its Military Operations Areas (MOAs) in Arizona. Specifically, I am asking the DAF to modify its Proposed Action and Final EIS to ensure the use of flares is prohibited on days where local, state, and federal agencies have put fire restrictions in place.

The Draft EIS recognizes that Arizona is in a long-term drought, which "raises the risk of wildfires." It also recognizes that the use of flares poses a wildfire risk, stating that "If a flare struck the ground while still burning, it could ignite surface material and cause a fire."

Although the Draft EIS states that the possibility of wildfires "would be remote considering the release altitude under the Proposed Action," history has shown that flares have been tied to wildfire occurrences, including the 2021 Telegraph fire, which burned over 180,000 acres and for nearly a month. While "the DAF believes it is unlikely that the fire was caused by flares," the cause of the Telegraph fire has not been fully resolved, and the Draft EIS does not rule out the possibility that flares were responsible for the fire.

The Draft EIS accurately notes that "fire suppression of wildland fires on Federal lands is the responsibility of the entity that owns/manages that land"; however, fire *prevention* is the responsibility of all parties that engage in activities that could result in wildland fire, including the DAF. The special use airspace being addressed in this case is "located throughout Arizona," including the Outlaw/Jackal, Morenci/Reserve, and Tombstone MOAs, where the risk of wildfire is greatest.

The Draft EIS posits that "the best way to reduce the risk of fires caused by flares is to establish and enforce minimum altitudes for flare release." However, ensuring that no flares can be

released on days where local, state, or federal agencies have issued fire restrictions would help to mitigate the probability further, especially on days when local conditions beneath the MOA are at greatest risk.

The Draft EIS acknowledges that "implementing restrictions on the use of flares based on local fire conditions is a best management practice that is currently implemented for each MOA," but the Proposed Action does not seek to codify this operational constraint across all MOAs and simply leaves the decision whether to implement such constraints to the discretion of each unit's Wing Commander.

I believe the best way to reduce the risk of fire caused by flares is to implement a dual approach that includes both minimum altitude restrictions and operational constraints that correlate with local, state, and federal fire restrictions. Accordingly, I respectfully request the DAF update in the Final EIS and Proposed Action to prohibit the use of flares on days where local, state, or federal agencies have put fire restrictions in place.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments and thank you for taking them into consideration.

Respectfully,



The Honorable David Cook
Arizona House of Representatives, LD 7
House Transportation Committee Chair
House International Trade Chair