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*Promoting
healthy communities
by protecting
our environment
since 1998*

The Newsletter of Gila Resources Information Project



Photo: Jamie Newton

Communities Say No to F-16 Training over the Gila

At hearings held in Socorro, Truth or Consequences, Silver City and Las Cruces in early December, communities voiced overwhelming opposition to expanding military training airspace over the Gila. Hundreds of people attended the meetings held by the Air Force to accept public comment on its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), an analysis of alternatives to expand airspace across southern New Mexico for Holloman Air Force Base F-16 pilot training.

Because the DEIS states that the current airspace is adequate for Holloman's F-16 training mission, the public questioned the need for the expansion in the first place. Commenters strongly opposed Alternatives 2 and 3 that would add 4.5 million acres of military training airspace, including the new Lobos Military Operations Area over the Gila Region, largely in places the Air Force has not used before. These alternatives would impact 700,000 acres of Wilderness Areas, including the Gila, Aldo Leopold, Robledo Mountains and Sierra de las Uvas Wilderness Areas, as well as local economic engines, such as the Gila Cliff Dwellings and Bosque del Apache Wildlife Refuge. These are places that are quiet and distinguished by a wealth of unique natural assets.

Commenters also called attention to the DEIS's lack of serious evaluation of the impacts of the proposed F-16 training. Many voiced

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Legislature 2020

The Legislature convenes on January 21 at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe. The 30-day session will cover budget issues and priorities on the Governor's call. We expect several environmental and conservation-related bills to be introduced that will need citizen support.

Want to learn how to be an effective citizen lobbyist in the 2020 legislative session?

Join GRIP and the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club for

Grassroots Lobby Training

January 14, 6 pm - 8 pm

Church of Harmony

609 N. Arizona St. , Silver City

RSVP at

<https://tinyurl.com/Lobby2020>

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concerns with the potential for extreme noise, pollution from chaff and flares, catastrophic wildfire, and severe impacts to tourism and outdoor-based economies and that these impacts were not adequately assessed.

Because Alternatives 2 and 3 would create a continuous block of military training airspace from Phoenix to Eastern New Mexico, there is significant worry that the Gila would become a magnet for more training use in the future from other bases, including F-35s. This would be a radical increase in military training in southern New Mexico.

Thank you for coming out to the hearings and demonstrating your opposition to this serious threat to our home and livelihoods!

What's next? The Air Force will accept comments on the DEIS until January 31, 2020. GRIP and its partners in Peaceful Gila Skies will be developing and submitting extensive comments on the DEIS. It's time for you to submit your comments too if you haven't already!

For more information, visit PeacefulGilaSkies.com

Submit Your Comments TODAY!

Thank you for standing up in opposition to Holloman's proposal for F-16 training over the Gila!

Don't forget to submit your public comments by January 31, 2020 at:

<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/f-16>

Responsible Mining Update: Chino/Cobre Reclamation Permits and Financial Assurance Still Not Final

As 2019 draws to a close, reclamation plan permitting and financial assurance renewals for Freeport-McMoRan's **Chino and Cobre mines** are still not complete. Since its 2018 Memorandum of Agreement with Freeport, GRIP has worked with the company, the NM Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) and the NM Environment Department (NMED) to resolve issues with reclamation cost estimation that have stymied progress on permit renewals for years. GRIP's mining engineering consultant, Jim Kuipers, was able to assist with resolution of several of these issues and move the process forward.

GRIP remains concerned about the form of **financial assurance** to guarantee that the cost of cleanup is covered should the company go bankrupt. We have advocated for limiting the percentage of the Third Party Guarantee in order to minimize the risk to the public and maximize the amount of liquid assets available to the state in the event of a default. Given the permits and financial assurance are more than a decade out of date, we hope that MMD and NMED can finalize them as quickly as possible.

GRIP is currently reviewing the **Tyrone Reclamation Plan** and associated cost estimates. We are

working with Freeport and the agencies to address our concerns so that the updated plan and revised permits can be approved in 2020.

GRIP and others have appealed to the NM Court of Appeals the water quality discharge permit for re-opening the **Copper Flat mine** outside of Hillsboro. Represented by the NM Environmental Law Center, the appellants disagree with the Water Quality Control Commission's decision that the mine does not pose an undue risk to property and that the pit lake that will form at the mine is not a "surface water of the state" and therefore exempt from surface water quality standards.

Gila Resources Information Project

305A North Cooper St.
Silver City, NM 88061
575.538.8078 office/fax
www.gilaresources.info
grip@gilaresources.info



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GRIP and Lotus Center Partner on Waste Reduction Campaign



In the wake of the end of Silver City's curbside recycling program, GRIP and the Lotus Center launched a public education campaign this year to provide our community with information and resources for reducing waste, preempting the need for recycling and saving expensive landfill space.

Our latest campaign, Buy Nothing New Challenge 2020, encourages area residents to make fewer or no discretionary purchases of new products in 2020 and, in the process, to generate less waste. Let's reduce our daily consumption and create less impact on our land, water, and air quality!

Check out the website at cutyourwaste.org for more information on the Buy Nothing New Challenge and other waste reduction resources. Stay tuned for tips from community members via email, Facebook and Instagram. Have a tip to share? Send it to cutyourwastegrantcounty@gmail.com.

Watershed Keepers Reach Out to Mining District

GRIP's Silver City Watershed Keepers (SCWK) expanded its efforts in 2019 to the Mining District, providing a variety of programming that engaged participants in real world citizen science, creating long-term stewards of our local water resources and environment. At World Water Day and Earth Day events held at the Bayard Public Library, both kids and adults learned about water quality and water conservation. World Water Day volunteers in Silver City cleaned up trash in the Big Ditch, tested the water quality of San Vicente Creek, and planted native plants and trees to address stream bank erosion. Quarterly water quality monitoring of San Vicente Creek continues with the Aldo Leopold Charter School Eco-monitors.

New SCWK coordinator Leigh Jenkins looks forward to working with volunteers and students as the project kicks off its 10th year.

For more information, visit silvercitywatershedkeepers.org and follow us on Facebook and Instagram.



Former SCWK Coordinator Indi Blake demonstrates how to use a pH meter at World Water Day 2019 at Bayard Public Library.

Gila Diversion Draft EIS Release Delayed

Although expected to be released on December 13, publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Gila diversion project has been delayed, with no new release date publicly available. At press time, the Secretary of Interior had not made a decision on approval of an extension for a Record of Decision requested by the NM CAP Entity. If granted, the Entity could retain access to approximately \$50M in construction funding for the diversion. **Visit the Gila Conservation Coalition at www.gilaconservation.org for more information.**



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305A North Cooper St.
Silver City, NM 88061

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2020 Calendar of Events

JANUARY 14 - Grassroots Lobby Training

6pm- 8pm; Church of Harmony,
609 N. Arizona St. Silver City.
RSVP at <https://tinyurl.com/Lobby2020>

JANUARY 21 – FEBRUARY 20 NM Legislative Session

State Capitol, Santa Fe
January 28 - Environment Day
January 29 - Grant County Day

MARCH 22 - World Water Day

More info at silvercitywatershedkeepers.com

APRIL 18 - 50th Anniversary Earth Day Celebration in Gough Park

JUNE 2019 - Wild & Scenic Film Festival

SEPTEMBER 17 – 20 16th Annual Gila River Festival

For more information or to volunteer, visit
www.gilariverfestival.org



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YOUR GRIP
MEMBERSHIP
TODAY**

www.gilaresources.info

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS
AND BEST WISHES
FOR 2020!**