

## Commissioners

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**From:** MACO <MACO@mtcounties.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 20, 2014 9:03 AM  
**To:** MACO  
**Subject:** Powder River Training Complex  
**Attachments:** PRTC2014\_Circular-Distro-Pkg-2014-02-13.pdf; image2014-02-18-145301.pdf; 2014-02-18 AF letter - opposition to PRTC, MT.PDF

Commissioners,

I am forwarding information received from Debbie Alke, Administrator of the Montana Aeronautics Division yesterday advising us that the FAA is considering a request by the US Air Force to expand the Powder River Training Complex Military Operations Area.

This proposal surfaced several years ago but in the face of opposition, it was not approved. Comments are being accepted by the FAA until **April 3, 2014**. The address to submit comments is included at the end of the attached Notice.

Also attached is a letter of opposition from Senators Tester and Walsh, as well as a map of the proposed MOA.

Below is an article that ran in several newspapers today

Thanks,

Harold

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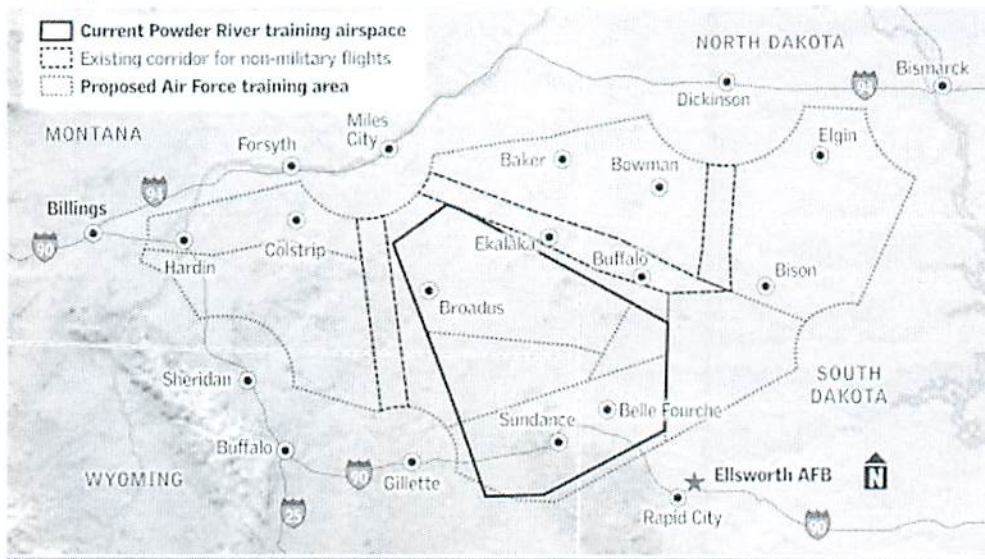
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# Air Force moves ahead with bomber training area over Montana

## Proposed Powder River Training Complex area



Source: Powder River Training Complex, Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, Environmental Impact Statement, Executive Summary.

12 hours ago • By TOM LUTEY Billings Gazette

(0) Comments

The Air Force is pushing ahead with controversial plans for an 18-million-acre bomber training complex that sprawls over much of Eastern Montana.

The Air Force's proposed Powder River Training Complex is a 28,000-square-mile training area — about the size of South Carolina — for B-1B Lancer and B-52 Stratofortress bombers, which fly out of Ellsworth and Minot Air Force bases in South and North Dakota, respectively.

On Tuesday, the Federal Aviation Administration notified Montana that the Air Force was seeking approval for the training area first proposed in 2008. As final step in the matter, the FAA is seeking public comment by April before making its decision.

"The purpose is to invite interested persons, in the general public, to comment. There's a lot of people in the general aviation community who are interested," said Debbie Alke, Montana Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division administrator. "It looks like they're going to allow any person to comment to the FAA by April 3."

The training airspace would stretch roughly 300 miles between Billings and Bismarck, N.D., and include portions of northwest South Dakota, northeast Wyoming and much of southwestern North Dakota. The majority of the space would be over southeastern Montana.

Ranchers and private pilots in Montana have been outspoken in opposing the training complex. On Tuesday, Montana Democratic Sens. Jon Tester and John Walsh sent a letter opposing the bomber training area to Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III.

In the letter, Tester and Walsh said the training center presented a safety risk, given that a B-1B bomber from Ellsworth crashed near Broadus six months ago. Range fires and damage to livestock are also a concern, the senators said. There are also 33 small airports in the flight area, sacred tribal lands and the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

Walsh, former adjutant general of the Montana National Guard, said Air Force pilots need to train, but there was too much at stake beneath the proposed training area.

"This cannot come at the expense of Montana's lands, historic sites or creating an increased risk to public safety," Walsh told The Gazette. "I, like most Montanans, oppose the expansion of the Powder River Training Complex. It would affect about one-fifth of Montana, where we would incur restricted commercial travel, disruption of livestock and unacceptable safety risks."

In South Dakota, where Ellsworth Air Force Base is challenged for nearby bomber flight space, Republican Sen. John Thune has been urging action on the proposed training area. Last month, Thune met with FAA Administrator Michael Huerta to hurry approval of the expanded bomber area.

The Powder River Training Complex would be the largest terrestrial training space over the continental United States and would allow the Air Force to conduct large-force exercises in a simulated combat environment, but without live fire, according to Thune.

That's not the kind of air traffic southeast Montana can accommodate, said Roger Meggers, who manages Baker Municipal Airport in Baker. The number of airplanes crossing this section of Big Sky Country has increased significantly with oil-and-gas development in the Bakken and Wyoming.

"There's been a lot of air traffic that's critical to the development of these oilfields," Meggers said. Private jets from Texas and Oklahoma have become a common site on runways in Eastern Montana and western North Dakota. The oil boom has redefined the economy for many towns in ways a bomber training area won't, Meggers said.

The airport manager said the only community that benefits economically from the bomber flight area is Rapid City, home to Ellsworth.

"What's in it for Montana?" Meggers said. "Nothing. There's no job creation, no fuel taxes. All it is an attempt to save Ellsworth Air Force Base. They should build it over South Dakota."

But rancher Steve Rozencranz, who has lived for years in a much smaller, existing training area for Ellsworth pilots said the flights haven't been all that disruptive. The Air Force has accommodated ranchers in the past and stayed away during calving season and other times when bombers flying low overhead would have been problematic.

"I guess I'm not all that against it. I think they got to practice somewhere," said Rozencranz, who is also a Carter County commissioner. "You can't send these guys overseas and expect them to come home without any practice."