

# Air Force training could disrupt Owyhee's 'Big Quiet'

By **JORDAN RANE**

Columbia Insight

ONTARIO — One of the country's most sparsely populated and persistently defended high desert wild lands may soon be subject to frequent sonic booms and shrieking fighter jets.

The Mountain Home Air Force Base in southwestern Idaho is proposing to expand military training allowances across large portions of the Owyhee Desert — a 9-million-acre landscape of shrub steppe and remote canyons spanning three states cherished by tribes, ranchers, sportsmen, paddlers, hikers, conservationists, scientists and stargazers.

The air base's Proposal for Airspace Optimization for Readiness would increase both the frequency and low-flight intensity of jet fighter exercises across giant sections of southwestern Idaho, northern Nevada and southeastern Oregon.

Current airspace restrictions in the latter two states within the established USAF training range are set above at least 10,000 feet — or 30,000 feet when breaking the sound barrier.

"In many cases that's barely noticeable — you might see those planes before you hear them —

but it's nothing like what's being proposed in the current plan," says Mark Salvo, conservation director at Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA). "We're deeply concerned about fighter jet noise and disturbance to wild lands, wild waters, sensitive wildlife and local communities, the risk of wildfire from the increased use of flammable flares — and the fact that the Air Force hasn't explained why it needs to conduct more and more intense training across this huge tri-state area."

## 'Gunfighters' legacy

Mountain Home Air Force Base is home to the 366th Fighter Wing (nicknamed the "Gunfighters") and the F-15E Strike Eagle, a dual-role fighter designed to perform air-to-air and air-to-ground missions. An array of avionics and electronics systems gives the F-15E the capability to fight at low altitude, day or night, in all weather.

The 366th Fighter Wing's primary mission is to provide combat airpower and support, as well as quick response to the military's worldwide contingency operations.

The base is also used for training by the Singapore Air Force, which

has a detachment of F-15SG fighters on long-term assignment there.

This isn't the first time the USAF has proposed expanding training in the Owyhee Desert from its Mountain Home Air Force Base.

Seeking live bombing, missile shooting and low-flying exercises in the area in 1989, the Air Force expected minimal opposition in one of the country's most remote and lightly populated areas.

This turned out to be a miscalculation.

Opposition from Idaho-based groups led to nearly a decade of litigation and a compromise that ultimately allowed restricted low-altitude jet fighter training in Idaho's Owyhee County.

## Environmental impact statement pending

In Oregon, the USAF's proposal could increase the frequency of sonic boom-producing training flights to nearly 19 per day — shattering the area's famed Canyonlands, nicknamed "The Big Quiet," and distressing indigenous wildlife.

ONDA has launched a new online story map of the area.

Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley have proposed protect-

ing more than a million acres of wilderness in the Owyhee Canyonlands, and designating 33 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers precisely where the military has proposed more intensive training.

The military's plan would also impact more than 500,000 combined acres of Wilderness Study Areas and Bureau of Land Management lands, according to ONDA.

Much of the Owyhee Desert's sprawling shrub steppe and canyons are on public land.

"The Air Force needs to hear that there is strong, broad support for conservation in the Owyhee Canyonlands and southeastern Oregon, and that their proposal threatens to undermine the qualities that make this region so exceptional," according to an ONDA web posting.

The deadline for public comment on the Air Force's proposal was Oct. 25.

The Air Force is required to provide a final environmental impact statement by a date that remains pending.

"Given the breadth and depth of public comment provided on the draft plan, we suspect it will take many months just to incorporate that (public) input," says Salvo.



Jim Davis/Contributed Photo

The Mountain Home Air Force Base in southwestern Idaho is proposing expanded military training allowances across large portions of the Owyhee Desert — a 9-million-acre landscape of shrub steppe and remote canyons spanning three states cherished by tribes, ranchers, sportsmen, paddlers, hikers, conservationists, scientists and stargazers.



Joanna Priestley/Contributed image

Paul Harrod was the co-production designer on the film "Isle of Dogs."

## ARTISTS

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Brian and Corrine Vegter, who own Churchill, are offering two- and four-week residencies that overlap with the First Friday art walks.

"It's to bring artists from outside the area, and they have a way to show their work," Brian said.

The residencies, Corrine said, help "expose new creativity from the outside to our community."

Brian said the length of these residencies also give the artists time to explore the local area, and visit shops in town.

### Long careers in film

Both Harrod and Priestley have spent three decades in the film business.

They met at California Institute of the Arts, where Harrod earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees, and Priestley earned her master's degree.

"That school had a major impact on both of us," she said.

Her path to animation came when she was in her 20s and living in Sisters. She was an artist — a painter

and printmaker — and she'd helped start a local film festival. One of the first guests did animation.

"It snapped in my head — I have to do this," she said.

She bought a pack of index cards and started drawing. Then she rigged a setup to animate the drawings.

Her film was her admission to Cal Arts, where she toured studios and heard from people in the film business.

"There were a lot of early pioneers who came to the school and talked," she said.

Harrod's interest in film came much earlier in his life, when he was around the age of 5.

"I think it was all written for me when I saw Godzilla and King Kong," he said.

Then he saw "2001: A Space Odyssey" and "Planet of the Apes" at age 10.

"Nothing else was even an option after that," he said.

His family encouraged his interest.

"From a very early age, my mother said find something you like doing and make a career out of it," he said.

He made his first mask when he was 12.

"I just kept on doing that sort of thing," he said.

Remember the California Raisins? Harrod was involved with the final production, a project of Will Vinton Studios in Portland where he was the senior art director.

He also, in 1999, was production designer for "The PJs," which he said was the first stop-motion animation on prime time television. He designed the show, and directed five episodes.

More recently, he worked on Wes Anderson's stop-motion feature "Isle of Dogs," which earned the Art Directors Guild award in 2019 for Excellence in Production Design for an Animated Feature.

Stop-motion animation has changed over the decades Harrod has worked in the business. For instance, a production today may use a 3D printer to create multiple facial expressions, which can be easily swapped during filming — and quicker than molding faces by hand.

Harrod and Priestley both discovered that their business is "pandemic proof" thanks to the use of computers and the Internet.

"You can do feature films with artists working in different countries," Harrod said.



Joanna Priestley/Contributed image

Filmmakers Joanna Priestley and Paul Harrod are spending two weeks as the resident artists at Churchill School in Baker City. Here they are shown at the premiere of the stop-motion film "Isle of Dogs."

He is currently working for Bix Pix Entertainment, a studio based in Burbank, California (the studio that created "Tumble Leaf" for Amazon).

Priestley has her own company, Priestley Motion Pictures. She works solo, but does have an internship program. She also works with a

composer, sound designer and compositor to finish her films.

This film process is not quick — she said it took six years to finish a one-hour feature film.

To learn more about these artists, visit their websites: [www.joannapriestley.com](http://www.joannapriestley.com) and [www.paulharrod.com](http://www.paulharrod.com).

## CRISIS

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Loennig said in a previous interview with the Herald that the Bi-Mart pharmacy has been processing about 1,500 prescriptions per week.

In addition to the transferring of prescriptions from the Bi-Mart pharmacy, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's vaccination mandate, which took effect Oct. 18, could also have an effect on staffing, Loennig said.

The mandate applies to pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Loennig said two of the seven employees at the Bi-Mart pharmacy in Baker City had left their jobs due to the mandate.

According to the OHA, as of Oct. 4, 87% of pharmacists in Oregon were vaccinated, and 82% of pharmacy technicians.

On Monday morning, Nov. 1, several customers waited in line at the Baker City Rite Aid store, where the pharmacy opens at 10 a.m.

One of the waiting customers, Roberta Vanderwall, said "It's sad."

"I feel bad for the employees because they're being cut back and then they can't get help and then people get grouchy with the employees and it's not fair," Vanderwall said. "It's not fair what's going on."

Another customer, Sherrie Richardson, said a pharmacy employee told her last week that they were "14 days behind on their prescriptions. I think they are doing the best they can."

Customer Shelly Thoms said: "Literally every place in this town is doing this; they don't have enough people."

## VACCINE

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### Weekly cases reach 3-month low

Baker County reported 24 COVID-19 cases for the week Oct. 24-30. That's the fewest in any week since July 18-24, when there were six cases in the county.

The following week, July 25-31, with the much more contagious delta variant spreading rapidly in

much of the country, Baker County reported 68 cases.

Weekly case totals reached records in two straight weeks — 128 from Sept. 5-11, and 139 from Sept. 12-18 — but then declined in four straight weeks, to a low of 37 cases from Oct. 10-16.

Cases rose to 51 from Oct. 17-23 but then dropped again the next week.

Cases dropped by almost 64% in the county during October, from September's record total of 465 to 168 during October.

### Booster doses

Staten said last week that residents have been expressing interest in getting a booster dose of a vaccine.

Residents 80 and older have the highest vaccination rate in the county at 71.2% — 787 of the 1,106 residents in that age group. As of Friday, Oct. 29, 5.7% of those people have received a booster dose, according to the OHA.

Rates for other age groups in the county:

- Ages 70 to 79 — 69.9%

vaccination rate (1,533 of 2,192 residents); booster dose rate, 6%

- Ages 60 to 69 — 57.1% vaccination rate (1,759 of 3,082 residents); booster dose rate, 1.3%

- Ages 50 to 59 — 48.5% vaccination rate (1,111 of 2,289 residents); booster dose rate, 1.8%

- Ages 40 to 49 — 49% vaccination rate (805 of 1,644 residents); booster dose rate, 1.3%

- Ages 30 to 39 — 36.7% vaccination rate (714 of 1,947

residents; booster dose rate, 0.9%

- Ages 20 to 29 — 39.6% vaccination rate (515 of 1,301 residents); booster dose

rate, 0.7%

People with questions about COVID-19 vaccines or other topics can call the Health Department at 541-523-8211.

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