



## AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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March 3, 2006

Ms. Stacey M. Zee  
FAA Environmental Specialist  
Southwest Regional Spaceport EIS  
c/o ICF Consulting  
9300 Lee Highway  
Fairfax, VA 22031

Dear Ms. Zee,

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), on behalf of more than 406,000 members nationwide, submits the following comments regarding the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the proposed Southwest Regional Spaceport. While AOPA supports the advancement of the commercial space industry, full consideration must be given to the impact commercial space operations will have on general aviation operations within the National Airspace System (NAS). In addition, AOPA contends that the establishment of commercial space ports and subsequent commercial space launches must not require temporary or permanent flight restrictions for any portion of their operation.

### **Commercial space launches in the National Airspace System**

Safety is paramount and must be the primary consideration with regard to integration of commercial space operations into the NAS. AOPA recognizes the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has a congressional mandate to ensure that commercial space launches provide a sufficient level of safety for all users of the NAS. However, this mandate does not justify or require temporary or permanent flight restrictions.

AOPA encourages the FAA to form a working group to examine ways in which commercial space transportation can occur seamlessly within the NAS. Considering a majority of the proposed launch vehicles will simply be altered versions of certified aircraft, the FAA should reasonably be able to provide standard separation services for non-participating aircraft.

### **The Southwest Regional Spaceport EIS**

The EIS for the Southwest Regional Spaceport must include the anticipated impacts on the NAS, specifically with regards to general aviation operations. In light of the fact the first few critical moments of flight for the commercial space vehicles will occur in altitudes where general aviation operations typically occur, the impacts to general aviation operations must be addressed in the EIS.

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Given that the proposed site for the Southwest Regional Spaceport is in close proximity to the White Sands Missile Range, and the thousands of miles of existing restricted airspace, the EIS should address the cumulative impact of any additional proposed airspace restrictions. Though a potential temporary flight restriction of only a few miles may not seem to be significant, it has the potential to produce a major impact when combined with existing restricted airspace. With that in mind, AOPA urges the FAA to utilize the existing expanse of restricted airspace associated with the White Sands Missile Range in lieu of further restrictions.

AOPA appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the upcoming EIS for the Southwest Regional Spaceport. We encourage the FAA to fully examine all of the associated impacts to general aviation operations and fully expect the FAA to provide for a seamless integration of commercial space launches into the NAS without the need for additional flight restrictions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heidi Williams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heidi Williams  
Director  
Air Traffic Services