

September 23, 2013

I am writing you as President of Citizens of the Ebey's Reserve for a Healthful, Safe and Peaceful Environment ("COER"). COER is a Washington non-profit corporation situated in Central Whidbey Island, Washington and is dedicated to the closure of the Navy Outlying Field Coupeville ("OLF"). The OLF is a 1942 emergency landing strip designed for aircraft of that era but is currently being used by EA18G Growlers and EA6B Prowlers based at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island ("NASWI") for field carrier landing practice ("FCLP").

At the outset let me state that COER has one and only one goal: to close OLF Coupeville.

The OLF immediately abuts Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve ("Ebey's"), a 24,000 acre "National Park" which was established by Congress to protect and celebrate this culturally and historically significant area. The Town of Coupeville, the center of Ebey's Reserve, is the second oldest town in Washington State and is a showcase of Victorian era architecture. Ebey's Reserve preserves and demonstrates a way of American coastal frontier life that no longer exists. Ebey's could be described as the Pacific Northwest's version of Williamsburg, Virginia. Ebey's Reserve is also an important migratory bird habitat. Military flight operations conducted over this sensitive area are destroying this National treasure.

Navy operations are also severely damaging the lives of thousands of people who live in and around Ebey's Reserve. Our children play baseball and soccer directly under the Navy flight path with jets less than 500 feet overhead. Jets fly over our hospital. It is undisputed that Navy FCLP operations are completely incompatible with residential development, and yet they are ongoing over residential areas of Central Whidbey.

In a 2005 Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by the Navy with regard to bringing the Growlers to Whidbey Island, and again in a 2012 EA prepared in conjunction with bringing additional squadrons, the Navy inaccurately represented the impacts of such deployments upon Central Whidbey. Those EAs represented that overall noise levels would be reduced, largely because there would be fewer operations conducted at the OLF, and consequently there would be a reduction in adverse impacts upon the local communities. As the Growlers began to transition into Whidbey however, those representations proved false.

As revealed by our group through independent scientific testing, human beings perceive the Growler as much louder than the Prowler. Decibel measurements at various locations around the OLF revealed highly dangerous noise levels from Growler operations. Moreover, instead of the promised fewer operations, flight operations at the OLF were expanded, reaching intolerable levels in 2011 and by 2012 they were 300% of 2008 operations. Because the Navy would not directly address our concerns, we were obligated to file a NEPA action in Federal court. Recently the Navy conceded the validity of this NEPA action and agreed to re-open the 2005 and 2012 EAs. However, the Navy is now seeking to bring in even more Growlers as part of this newly agreed-to EIS process.

The Navy's misrepresentations have severely damaged its image and reputation in our community and elsewhere (as attested by the hundreds who view our website and blogs daily). On Whidbey Island there is a growing discussion for total base closure. There is a movement on the north end of Whidbey Island

to relocate all Growlers to a secluded unpopulated training facility. Further, people in other areas of the country impacted by military flight noise and training are watching our progress, asking us for help in their areas, taking lessons from what we are doing here. We are clearly having an impact with our single issue: closing OLF Coupeville.

It is undisputed that our cause is generating tremendous public awareness. However, our objective to close the OLF has, not surprisingly, been mischaracterized and demonized. Business interests in the City of Oak Harbor to the north are afraid that closing the OLF might result in the loss of NAS Whidbey Island and have initiated a counter-public relations campaign. As a result our Whidbey Island community has become divided in an ugly way. A campaign has been started in Oak Harbor to boycott all Coupeville businesses, whether they support closing the OLF or not. Worse, threats of violence have been made against American citizens on record in support of closing the OLF merely for exercising their Constitutional Rights of free speech and seeking government redress. This is not how Americans should treat each other and is further damaging the image of the Navy and of our federal government.

I must emphasize, the members of our organization are not anti-Navy and are not trying to close NASWI. I repeat COER is limited in its focus to one issue, one very small part of the Navy's overall operations: closing the OLF.

As we see the situation, the U.S. Navy has always had and wants to maintain a sterling reputation and be honored rather than mistrusted and despised. It cannot flex its muscles and ignore its severe effects on its neighbors simply because it has the power to do so. The large controversy brewing here is without doubt tarnishing the Navy's reputation.

People in four counties around NASWI are losing tens and probably hundreds of millions in property values due to Navy over flights. With current sequestration and defense budget cuts the cost to the Navy of compensating all those who are impacted by NASWI jet noise is potentially enormous and would devastate the historical culture and current economy.

Instead, our group wants to work with the Navy to structure a closure and transfer of OLF Coupeville. If the Navy agreed tomorrow in a binding manner to close the OLF, COER would close up shop and dissolve. Until then, we will be relentless and continue to grow our cause and protect our Whidbey Island communities and our historical way of life.

The Navy has many options and alternatives beyond maintaining the negative status quo with its impacts on our physical and mental health, property values, safety, and business growth. Claims that the Navy has no alternative other than to use the OLF are an obvious distortion, as proven by the fact that the Navy suspended all operations at the OLF last June in anticipation of our lawsuit. There are no FCLPs being conducted today at the OLF; yet training goes on. Similarly, claims that an OLF must be within 50 miles of its main base also ring false when one considers that the Navy in Virginia Beach tried very hard to move its FCLP to a new OLF in the lowlands of North Carolina, over 100 miles to the south.

We believe it makes more sense for the Navy to close the OLF and conduct FCLP training at a safe, modern facility. Suggested alternatives are building a parallel runway at NASWI or moving the Growler squadrons to a different location altogether. We understand that the Navy facilities at China Lake, a remote unpopulated location, would welcome the Growlers with open arms. NASWI could continue to

be the home base for the new P8A Squadrons thus maintaining the Navy's position in the Pacific Northwest without negatively impacting the residents of Whidbey Island and surrounding areas.

On the other hand, battling to continue the use of the World War II era OLF does not make any rational sense. The OLF is not safe for the pilots who train there, for the people of Central Whidbey who live there, and certainly not for the thousands each year that visit Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve.

This should not be a test of wills. The operations at the OLF are a serious crisis that needs to be addressed rationally. It is time for someone in a position of authority to stand up and acknowledge that a different solution must be found. Continuing or, worse yet, expanding Navy flight operations at the OLF is simply not an option for Central Whidbey and is guaranteed to result in years of federal litigation. We are requesting that each of you put aside any preconceived notions and work with us to find a solution to this problem before this social and cultural divide worsens. If we work together we can come up with a solution. We at COER stand ready.

Thank you.

Ken Pickard

President, Citizens of the Ebey's Reserve