

The Truth About Navy Electronic Warfare Training

First, some numbers: 260 days per year, 8-16 hours per day, up to 153 of the loudest jets on the planet, capable of 150 decibels, burning 1304 gallons per hour and producing more carbon dioxide in one hour of flying than the average Washington citizen produces in a year or a car produces in 29,000 miles of driving—flying right over Washington’s spectacular and famously quiet Olympic Peninsula.

Next, a few facts: The Navy sneaked its Environmental Assessment past the public in August 2014, so thoroughly that not one public comment arrived from elected officials, tribes or individuals. One notice served the entire north and west Olympic Peninsula: an 8X11’ piece of paper in the Forks post office. The Navy then closed the 15-day comment period, declared no significant impacts, implied no public interest, and said nothing further needs be done. It even sent a letter to the Fish and Wildlife Service saying don’t bother to re-open consultation on endangered species.

After the public learned about this sleight of hand, 4,000 comments poured in to the Forest Service, 3300 of them before the comment period closed, 99.9% opposed. Yet the Forest Service, a science-based agency that did no independent investigation of its own to verify the Navy’s claims, has announced it plans to adopt that flawed EA and issue a permit to drive mobile emitters on forest roads. Is that legal? And now, they want to weaken protections in the Forest Plan?

As for noise, an FAA report estimates up to a 2.3 percent decrease in property value per decibel of aircraft noise. Other socioeconomic and psychological impacts from repeated exposure to jet noise are well documented. Does the Forest Service plan to reimburse property owners for takings that will result from issuing this permit? And what are potential impacts to the spotted owl, which has abandoned nesting habitat along the jet-plagued Washington coast for ten miles inland? The owl is being reclassified from threatened to endangered because its numbers are tanking. Does the Forest Service wish to contribute to its extinction?

At a public meeting in Forks, a citizen asked the Navy why there had been no notification to the public, while expressing concern about loss of property values due to jet noise. The Navy’s response? “Your fears are not real.”

Another asked, “Why not do this at China Lake or Yakima?” Navy: “Some areas have reached their capacity, so we are using other areas that are available to us.”

(Editor’s note: The only problem with this statement is that the Olympic Peninsula is not actually “available” unless the law is followed. Neither the Navy nor the Forest Service have properly followed the law.)

A former County Commissioner asked why an analysis of noise impacts was completely omitted, and said, “Noise is an essential problem.” He gave three compelling examples of prior false assurances from public agencies in response to legitimate apprehensions during public input processes, that justified the current cynicism. He expressed concern about impacts to hunters, hikers, fishermen and others, and doubt about the Navy’s assertion that electronic warfare expansion into the Olympic National Forest will not constitute increased air time over the Peninsula. The Navy did not respond, and he sat down.

At the same meeting, a few 911 emergency dispatch coordinators voiced concern about interference with emergency frequencies. One asked, "Have you specifically talked to Grays Harbor 911 dispatchers?" A Navy rep replied, "Not to my knowledge." When the citizen confirmed widespread concerns about interference and asked for 911 dispatch to have input, he answered vaguely, "We are committed to working with other agencies."

Another 911 worker, while expressing concern about the construction of a fixed emitter in Pacific Beach, said, "The [Navy] base is so small there that you can throw a ball 300 feet onto public land." She pointed to a map. "You have circles here, you have houses here, as well as the Pacific Beach Resort. Here is the main drag going into Pacific Beach. What are these areas being circled?" Navy representative John Mosher, who is in charge of the NEPA process, replied, "I'm not aware of this."

She continued, "This is what is circulating in our county, and you have not addressed it. It was not in your slide show tonight." Referring to the Navy's Environmental Assessment, Mosher answered, "There was an opportunity for comment, there were no comments, received, it was advertised in local papers."

"Which papers?" she pressed. "Obviously it was not in the North Coast News, which serves Pacific Beach, so how can you receive comments if we do not have the information?" Mosher replied, "We do the best to get the information to you."

She said, "How can we get you to address our issues?" Mosher replied, "You can talk to your representatives. We have completed the comment period." Angered, she retorted, "You have extended the comment period right here." Mosher's final words: "I'm not going to debate this."

A man introduced himself as retired Navy and asked why the Navy's maps did not show National Park boundaries, saying the increased warfare activity would impact tourism.

(Editor's note: In fact, the Navy's maps actually erased Lake Quinalt, Park boundaries, and most rivers.)

The Navy's answer? "We admit there are impacts, but we will try to minimize them."

At another meeting in Port Angeles, Forest Service District Ranger Dean Millett said, when asked why would you issue a permit for the Navy to use your roads when the effects of jet noise and electromagnetic radiation were never considered in any evaluations? Millett said, "That is outside of my decision space." When asked why the Forest Service didn't bother to conduct their own scientific investigations to verify the Navy's claims of no significant impacts, he said, "I believe the Navy has done a sufficient job for us."

Without considering the government's imperious attitude toward communities who dare to question the noise, pollution and possible effects from exposure to weaponized energy, there are still enough violations of law to drive a fully loaded logging truck through, yet the Navy keeps arguing that we're somehow unpatriotic for asking for a more transparent public process. **We are not against the Navy training its pilots. We just want a fair public process, which means a full, comprehensive EIS instead of this mess of dozens of separate and segmented processes that confuse and obstruct the real issues from being understood. The truth about Navy electronic warfare testing and training is not what the Navy is telling the public.**