

The Navy's final decision on Olympic jet training - full speed ahead - modest course correction?

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From:

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Olympic Sound Defenders,

Today the Navy issued their record of decision (announcement below) a year after the associated supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) was completed for their operations in their expansive Northwest Training and Testing Range. It appears to be full speed ahead for the Navy, but with an interesting and modest tweak to avoid some flights over Olympic National Park.

The NWTR is a huge body of offshore water from northern California up through Washington's coast and even a section in Alaska. It's mostly ocean, but it also includes airspace over the west side of the Olympic Peninsula.

Highlights include:

- Avoiding Olympic NP by transit flights between the Whidbey Island air base and the training airspace by flying north of the park down the Strait of Juan de Fuca. If this is the case, this represents an improvement over past conditions where the Navy jets flew out and back over most of the park. However, we'd like to see the maps and learn more about whether this will be a mandatory route or more optional. Interestingly, the Navy took pains to say this route change was NOT part of their SEIS decision process – not sure what that's about yet.
- Dismissal of research done on military jet frequency and noise levels on several grounds – nothing new here, what about commercial air lines, sometimes the rain is louder, it's loud but it doesn't last very long, few people are there to hear it.
- Three pages of rebuttals to concerns raised by NPCA through the Earthrise Law Center.

We'll have to carefully review this document and see what more information we can get on routes, impacts and noise. It is notable that the Navy had to take a year to reassess their work after their final SEIS was issued in 2020, but mostly it appears to be shoring up their defenses more than changing their operations. The one improvement may be rerouting some return flights back to the base, but 27% of Olympic NP remains within their jet training area and flight numbers are still set to increase. Meanwhile, impacts around Whidbey Island and the greater Puget Sound area remain.

...the Navy may be hearing our concerns, but not yet listening to most of them.

Message to elected officials: there is still a Navy jet noise problem over the Olympics and Puget Sound.

See below for Navy Press Release

Northwest Training and Testing Supplemental EIS/OEIS

Record of Decision for the Northwest Training and Testing Supplemental EIS/OEIS Available

The U.S. Navy, after carefully weighing the operational and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action, is announcing the release of the Record of Decision to continue training and testing activities at sea and in associated airspace within the Study Area as described in the Northwest Training and Testing (NWTT) Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS).

The Record of Decision documents the Navy's decision to continue training and testing activities within the Study Area as described in the NWTT Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS under Alternative 1, the Preferred Alternative. Implementation of the Preferred Alternative will allow the Navy to fully meet current and future training and testing requirements. The Navy is committed to being a good steward of the environment and will continue to implement mitigation measures to avoid or reduce potential environmental impacts from training and testing.

The Navy made this decision after considering its operational needs; the potential impacts training and testing activities may have on human, natural, and cultural environments; and comments from elected officials, government agencies, tribes, nongovernmental organizations, and the public on the proposal and environmental analysis. The Navy also considered comments received following the publication of the Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. New and major substantive comments are addressed in the Record of Decision.

The Navy is committed to providing the public an accessible version of the Record of Decision during COVID-19 conditions. The Record of Decision, Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS, and supporting documents are available online at www.NWTTEIS.com.

If you need assistance accessing the document or have media inquiries, please contact Ms. Julianne Stanford, Navy Region Northwest Public Affairs Office, at julianne.stanford@navy.mil or 360-867-8525. For all other queries or if you require additional information about the project, please contact Ms. Jackie Queen, Project Manager, at projectmanager@nwtteis.com.

For more information, or to view the Record of Decision, please visit www.NWTTEIS.com.

The Navy strived to keep the public informed throughout the National Environmental Policy Act process. Thank you for your continued interest and participation in this important project.
