



Keeping Northwest California wild since 1977

April 15, 2014

Attention: Ms. Kimberly Kler  
1101 Tautog Circle, Suite 203  
Silverdale, WA 98315  
CC: Secretary of the Navy, NMFS, USFWS, and Congressman Huffman

RE: US Navy Northwest Training and Testing EIS/OEIS

Dear Ms. Kler,

On behalf of the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) and our 19,333 members and online supporters, we request that the Navy rescind the proposed training and testing activities and explore other alternatives to train military personnel that do not put hundreds of thousands of species at risk in the global commons.

During the Navy's open public comment period for this project, we were able to gather 6,203 people's names who oppose the proposed training and testing activities. Their names and the petition are attached. Many of the people who signed our online petition also developed their own comments, which are also attached. Mark Matsunaga told us that all of these statements would be accepted as official public comment.

The proposed activities would result in significant harm to whales, dolphins, fish and countless other marine animal species including many species, such as Humpback and Sperm Whales, that are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Testing and training activities including the use of explosives, weapons firing, sonar and other acoustic devices would result in risks that would disrupt basic behaviors of marine mammals, including activities necessary for survival such as migration, surfacing, navigating, hearing, nursing, breeding and feeding. For these reasons, the proposed activities would result in violations of the Endangered Species Act by placing threatened and endangered species in jeopardy.

The analysis of effects to marine mammals, especially endangered species is severely inadequate, as the Navy does not disclose anywhere in the EIS the total number of species that will be adversely affected. Upon contacting the Navy's Public Affairs Officer, Mr. Mark Matsunaga asking where we can find total numbers of individual marine mammal species that the Navy would "take" during the proposed activities, he did not know the total number of individual species that would be affected by the proposed training and testing operations, he said that you would have to add up the tables, but he could not specify which tables would need to be added. Knowing this, how can cooperating agencies, concerned public citizens and international

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governments provide accurate assessment of the project and meaningful comments if the documentation fails to disclose the total number of species that will be disturbed or killed? The cumulative effects of this project, combined with the impacts of the Navy's historic and ongoing operations, will significantly harm the environment and endangered species and is not in the best interest of the global commons.

We believe that the Navy's analysis of environmental impacts is inadequate and is in violation of several environmental laws for the following reasons:

1. Navy does not disclose anywhere in the EIS the total number of species that will be adversely affected, and therefore the EIS does not address total cumulative impacts;
2. The cumulative effects of this project, combined with the impacts of the Navy's other testing ranges and their historic and ongoing operations is not analyzed;
3. These operations will inflict significant harm the environment and sensitive species and is not in the best interest of the global commons, which is in direct violation of Executive Order 12114;
4. The Navy has not followed the proper procedure for consulting with NMFS for the take permits, since the application was submitted to NMFS prior to publishing the FEIS; and
5. The Navy has failed to consult with Native American tribes about the impacts of the Navy's activities on traditional tribal use of marine resources as required by the Navy's 2005 Policy for Consultation with Federally Recognized Indian Tribes and the President's Executive Order 13175 on Consultation and Coordination with Tribal Governments (65 Fed. Reg. 67249, November 6, 2000);

Activities like dumping debris on the seafloor, spreading toxic chemicals, detonating explosives, and blasting high intensity mid-frequency sonar will significantly degrade habitat areas, including many sensitive habitat areas that serve for countless species, and that are critical to the health and survival of dozens of marine mammal populations.

The proposed mitigation measures will not prevent significant negative impacts to marine species. Human lookouts on the ships and fish finders are inadequate for reducing impacts to marine mammals, as the sonar, expended materials and toxic chemicals would travel beyond the distances that people and fish finders can detect animals. Any approval of Navy training exercises must rely on the best available science and consider the impacts of such activities over the long-term. However, the Navy fails to account for the decades of operations that have negatively affected our oceans, marine mammals, and other species that depend on clean safe waters to survive.

Some questions we would like to have answered are:

1. How many total individuals will be harassed, harmed or killed by the proposed project?
2. Where is the Navy prohibited from conducting harmful testing and training operations?
3. Why are these operations necessary if these types of operations are already being carried out in other training range complexes?
4. How can cooperating agencies make educated decisions without the complete and final analysis (prior to release of the FEIR)?
5. What alternatives have been explored i.e. virtual simulator trainings?

If the Navy insists on using live sonar, explosives and other toxic chemicals and dangerous weapons, at the very least, the operations should be concentrated in one small area where the least amount of sea life exists, in a dead zone, and clear boundaries should be set up to protect the rest of our waters from being destroyed.

In conclusion, the EIS is severely inadequate, the mitigation measures are pitiful, and the proposed actions would result in violations of several regulations that are in place to protect the environment and species from these types of harmful activities. All of the actions in the NWTR duplicate operations in other ranges and are therefore unnecessary for “training” purposes. The risk is too large; please rescind the proposed training and testing activities and explore other alternatives to train military personnel that do not put hundreds of thousands of species at risk in the global commons.

Sincerely,

Amber Shelton,  
Online Coordinator

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