

Seattle Times, August 11, 2022

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Restore the balance between Navy's needs and civilian communities impacted by Growler jets

Aug. 11, 2022 at 2:46 pm Updated Aug. 11, 2022 at 4:18 pm

By

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Special to The Times

This past weekend, the Blue Angels' Seafair show wowed audiences. With its spectacular flying and bursts of loud noise, this show, for some, is a rare experience for fun and entertainment. The Blue Angels' debuted the new Super Hornet jets, promoted as 25% "Bigger. Louder. Faster" jets than the last generation.

A fact unknown to most is that the Super Hornets are essentially identical aircraft to the Navy's Boeing EA-18G Growler jets based on the popular tourist destination and rural community, Whidbey Island. Unlike the weekend-long Seafair show, however, Growlers fly year-round over businesses, farms, schools and hospitals. Imagine living with jets louder than the Blue Angels tearing low through the sky from early morning until late at night throughout the week — including weekends. Imagine these jets circling in groups or one-after-the other over your home with no relief. This is the experience of thousands of people across Northwest Washington.

Naval Air Station Whidbey Island was commissioned back in 1942. A lot has changed in both technology and the population of Northwest Washington since then. Coupeville, the primary Growler training location, once a sparsely populated farming area neighbored by a military base, is now a growing community inundated by jet noise. In 2019, the Navy planned to [quadruple](#)

[the number of Growler takeoffs or landings](#) to 100,000 operations per year by 2022, according to the state Attorney General's Office. For years, residents across the region have reported negative health impacts including cardiac and mental health issues, stress and hearing loss, in addition to economic hardship, loss of tourism and challenges for children.

Just days before Seafair, federal Judge Richard Jones [ruled that the Navy violated federal law](#) in its Environmental Impact Study (EIS) of expanded Growler jet operations. There were four issues cited, including failure to quantify noise impacts on classroom learning and not investigating alternative Growler sites.

This ruling was in response to lawsuits filed by state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, Paula Spina and Citizens of Ebey's Reserve (COER), a nonprofit member group of the Sound Defense Alliance, affirming the need for a solution to the jet noise issue.

The [Sound Defense Alliance](#) (SDA) has been working across Northwest Washington to develop the "Roadmap to a Remedy." We seek to address this issue in a way that restores the balance between military needs and civilian communities.

We call on the Navy, the federal administration and all elected officials to:

- Keep Naval Air Station Whidbey Island open with an emphasis on leveraging Washington's exceptional track record for innovation and environmental protection in partnership with the base leadership.
- Return Growler flight operations to the Pre-Record of Decision levels and relocate the 36 Growlers additionally called for in 2019.
- Conduct a new EIS that truly evaluates the Growlers' impact on Northwest Washington. This would require assessing siting alternatives for Growlers and environmental, health, economic and cultural impacts.
- Update the 1998 Department of Defense Growler Siting study, which recommended against siting the jets in Northwest Washington and determine a more suitable training location where the military mission is not

harmful to rural communities, Olympic National Park and Peninsula, and the Salish Sea.

Judge Jones' order requires the litigants within 30 days to agree on a response to his ruling or to prepare a court briefing schedule to determine what that should be. SDA agrees. We encourage the Navy to act in good faith, to be responsive to the directive and to negotiate a remedy that works for us all.

SDA stands ready to assist in striking a balance between military objectives and the interests of the people and places throughout Northwest Washington.

***Anne Harvey** is board chair of the Sound Defense Alliance, working to protect communities and the natural environment from harmful military activity around the Salish Sea, Puget Sound and the Olympic Peninsula.*