

This document contains three Opinion letters to the Seattle Times. The first two articles are in response to the Opinion written by the Navy, printed on page 5

Navy should use our data on Growler noise, not dismiss it

Jan. 8, 2021 at 12:19 pm Updated Jan. 8, 2021 at 12:19 pm Seattle Times



An EA-18G Growler engine's thrust with afterburner propels its takeoff with a loud roar from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island during an exercise. (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times)

By

[Lauren Kuehne](#) and [Julian Olden](#)

Special to The Times

We are the scientists who published a recent study documenting significant noise from military aircraft on the

Olympic Peninsula, leading to the recent Op-Ed by the commanding officer of Naval Air Station Whidbey Island [[“Navy captain: Growlers do not pose significant noise threat to southern resident orcas,”](#) Jan. 4, Opinion]. We understand that the Navy might be concerned with the implications of these data, but object to the apparent attempts in the Op-Ed to avoid the simple factual conclusions of the research and discredit the science.

Before our [study](#), there was no empirical data tracking the sources of aircraft noise on the Peninsula. It was impossible to evaluate what the current, and proposed, increases in Growler training meant for people and wildlife. Briefly stated, our research found that noise from Growler jets is currently a chronic and dominant feature of the Olympic Peninsula soundscape, which will only be exacerbated by planned increases in training. By identifying when and how often the aircraft fly — and how loud they are — our research allows for a critical evaluation based on scientific data. Given the Navy’s claim to be “committed to environmental stewardship,” we would think they would welcome the results from our study.

Yet the Navy appears willing to disregard and refute (without offering any evidence) years of robust, on-the-ground acoustic monitoring, including analysis of thousands of hours of sound data. None of the arguments presented by the Navy — from anecdotes about hiking with family to the altitude of the jets to the amount spent on orca research — are relevant to the fact that the Growlers are generating significant noise.

Our [research](#) showed that residents and visitors to the Olympic Peninsula are typically experiencing more than an hour of Growler noise heard throughout the daytime. That duration is only going to expand with increased training.

There are a number of inaccuracies in the Navy’s Op-Ed that the public should understand. Where the piece states that the Navy “disagree[s] with some scientific methodologies and conclusions researchers made,” it then presents no actual data, describes no methodologies and erroneously references conclusions that were not made in the study. For example, our study did not assert that Growlers were “destroying the park’s soundscape or harming its wildlife.” Rather, over a year of detailed monitoring, we established how much of the aircraft

noise is military (88%), when and how often noise from Growlers is present (most weekdays, concentrated during daytime hours), and how loud it is (at times loud enough to warrant hearing protection). This is in the rural and wilderness setting of the Olympic Peninsula, which is otherwise relatively free from human noise. A separate published study provides evidence that aircraft noise also permeates deep into the water.

Additionally, the Navy says it averages only 8.8 flights a day over the Peninsula. Most people hear the word “flight” and think of an aircraft momentarily passing overhead. But what the Navy fails to mention is that a flight is in fact a 60- to 90-minute training session by a jet; training with multiple jets simultaneously is typical. Furthermore, our research showed that each training session impacts large expanses of the military operations area, which sits over the western half of Olympic National Park. A typical commercial aircraft passes overhead in about two minutes and at 35,000 feet. Characterizing up to 90 minutes of high-speed training at 6,000 to 20,000 feet as a “flight,” and then comparing it to commercial and recreational air traffic, is both inappropriate and misleading.

In all this, we see an unfortunate pattern of attempting to divert attention from and downplay the impact of the air training operations, rather than acknowledging the extent of the noise pollution and working with stakeholders to mitigate it. We encourage the Navy to use our research results for its stated goal of engaging in partnerships and conversation with stakeholders, rather than trying to silence the science.

***Lauren Kuehne** is an environmental scientist, emphasizing acoustics and bioacoustics in much of her work. She was a researcher in the College of the Environment at the University of Washington for many years, and now does independent consulting.*

***Julian Olden** is a professor in the College of the Environment at the University of Washington. His research over the past two decades has informed science-based solutions to environmental challenges facing the Pacific Northwest and beyond.*

Growler noise: Navy must be stopped

Jan. 8, 2021 at 12:26 pm Updated Jan. 8, 2021 at 12:26 pm Seattle Times

By

[Letters editor](#)

The Seattle Times

Re: [“Navy captain: Growlers do not pose significant noise threat to southern resident orcas”](#) [Jan. 3, Opinion]:

The Navy doesn't care what harm it does to whales or people. They have spent no time investigating the impact of the planes on humans or wildlife.

I have lived on Camano Island since 1999. We rarely heard Navy planes until April of 2019. Now we hear them every weekday, sometimes most of the day and sometimes well into the evening. The noise of these planes lingers in the sky like a bad odor. The plane may not even be visible, but the noise is awful.

Right now, they can do anything they want, and there is no accountability. There need to be limits on when they can fly and how often they can fly. The Navy should not be allowed to continue to ruin one of the prettiest places in the Northwest. Our congressional delegation needs to stand up and address the problems being caused by the Navy. No federal entity should be allowed to destroy the environment and people's lives who live there.

Cindy Custer, Camano Island

The following appeared in the Seattle Times, January 3, 2021

Navy captain: Growlers do not pose significant noise threat to southern resident orcas

By Matt Army

Special to The Times

Earlier this month, The Seattle Times published a story that cited studies that have raised questions about whether Navy jet noise affects southern resident orcas and the soundscape of the Olympic Peninsula [“Navy Growler jet noise loud enough to reach orca pods even 100 feet underwater, new research shows”].

We disagree with some scientific methodologies and conclusions researchers made in these studies.

One study states noise from Growlers disturbs orcas and contributes to their harm from collective pressures. Researchers recorded the sound of takeoffs at the airfield in the water directly adjacent to the runway, with our collaboration.

We do not believe these studies demonstrate that very short durations of localized noise (takeoff from a runway) will have significant effects on the orcas where data shows they seldom visit. Likewise, we disagree with extrapolating this data across the Puget Sound, as our aircraft do not fly a takeoff profile in other areas where the orcas habitually live and feed.

Researchers also recorded aircraft noise from within the Olympic Peninsula Military Operations Area, which overlays the western 25 miles of the peninsula and which the FAA designated for military training flights in 1977. The data it presented did not substantiate claims that Navy-related aircraft noise is destroying the park’s soundscape or is harming its wildlife.

I have visited these areas from Hurricane Ridge to the Hoh Rain Forest with my family and have heard sounds from Growlers myself. The U.S. Navy has flown over the Olympic Peninsula and throughout the Pacific Northwest for decades since the 1920s and from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island since the 1940s.

This is a critical training area for our military due to the unencumbered airspace, and we strive to keep this area as undisturbed as possible and make every effort to minimize effects in places we train, strictly adhering to environmental regulations.

Comparatively, our flights over the Olympic Peninsula are relatively low in number. During a normal day of air traffic departing or arriving from multiple airports on the Olympic Peninsula and surrounding Puget Sound, about 7% of that traffic involves military aircraft. We average 8.8 flights to the Olympic Military Operations Areas per day during the workweek and rarely fly on weekends. All our flights in that area operate above 6,000 feet, 95% are above 10,000 feet and 75% are above 20,000 feet.

What many people do not realize is that being good stewards of the environment is critically important to conducting our national security mission at sea, in the air and on land.

Your Navy continues to be a leading contributor to scientific research and projects to improve marine habitats and to further our collective understanding of marine species here in the region. For example, we recently funded almost \$3 million in orca research and more than \$1 million for studies of their prey fish.

We remain engaged in partnerships and conversation while defending our nation and protecting the beautiful environment that makes this region so special for all of us.

Matt Army is commanding officer, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island. He has flown over 3,000 hours and 80 combat missions in aircraft, including the F-14 Tomcat and F/A-18F Super Hornet.