



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Navy Announces Record of Decision for Growler Environmental Impact Statement

After carefully weighing the strategic, operational, and environmental consequences of the proposed action analyzed in the Growler Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the Navy has made the decision to implement Alternative 2A (the Preferred Alternative), which adds 36 EA-18G operational aircraft at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island, stations additional personnel and their family members at the NAS Whidbey Island complex and in the surrounding community, constructs and renovates facilities at Ault Field, increases airfield operations at both Ault Field and Outlying Landing Field (OLF) Coupeville, and changes the distribution of field carrier landing practice (FCLP) to 20 percent occurring at Ault Field and 80 percent occurring at OLF Coupeville.

This decision does not change the continuation of airfield operations of other aircraft (including P-8A, P-3C, EP-3, MH-60 and transients) operating from the NAS Whidbey Island complex.

The proposed action will enable the Navy to augment its existing Electronic Attack community at NAS Whidbey Island complex with additional aircraft in order to provide Combatant Commanders with expanded electronic attack capabilities to support our national defense requirements consistent with the Navy's responsibilities under Title 10, United States Code (U.S.C), Section 5062.

In selecting this action alternative, the Navy carefully considered a number of factors, including the strategic and operational importance of augmenting our nation's electronic attack capabilities, ensuring quality of pilot training, and balancing the impacts of the proposed action on the human and natural environment. Of the 15 combinations of alternatives and scenarios analyzed in the Final EIS, Alternative 2A impacts fewer people overall living in the surrounding communities – only four more than Alternative 3A (fewest) and 567 fewer than Alternative 1E (greatest) based on estimated number of people living within the 65 dB DNL or greater noise contour.

The preferred alternative places the majority of FCLP operations at OLF Coupeville because OLF Coupeville provides more realistic training for our aviators. OLF Coupeville has been continuously used for FCLP since the late 1960s. OLF Coupeville's pattern best replicates the aircraft carrier landing pattern, building and reinforcing the correct habits and muscle memory for pilots. OLF Coupeville sits on a 200-foot ridge surrounded by flat terrain, similar to the aircraft carrier operating on the water.

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GROWLER RECORD OF DECISION -2-2-2-2

Unlike OLF Coupeville, Ault Field sits in a valley surrounded by higher terrain, limiting pattern options and providing a visual picture unlike conditions at sea. The City of Oak Harbor and Ault Field both have artificial lighting and visual cues not experienced by pilots at sea. Furthermore, Ault Field is a busy, multi-mission airfield. FCLP at Ault Field often disrupts departures and arrivals of other aircraft not participating in FCLP; this disruption results in extended flight tracks and longer hours of operation which in turn affect more residents overall living in the community. Due to the recent addition of three more Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance squadrons to NAS Whidbey Island operating the P-8 Poseidon, which is replacing the P-3 Orion, Ault Field has less ability to absorb these disruptions.

Under Alternative 2A, annual airfield operations at the NAS Whidbey Island complex will increase up to 33 percent over the No Action Alternative, for an estimated total of 112,100 operations annually, including 88,000 operations at Ault Field and 24,100 operations at OLF Coupeville. Because FCLPs involve both a takeoff and a landing, and because each takeoff and each landing are counted as a single operation, the projected total of FCLPs at OLF Coupeville is 12,000. Since each airfield “operation” is defined as either a takeoff or landing under this scenario, about 12,000 FCLP “passes” would occur annually at OLF Coupeville. This change amounts to an increase from approximately 90 hours (1% of total hours per year) to 360 hours (4% of total hours per year) in aircraft activity at OLF Coupeville.

Operational levels at Ault Field and OLF Coupeville have varied historically depending on Navy mission requirements. Projected operational levels from implementation of Alternative 2A will be comparable to historic flight operations experienced from the 1970s through the 1990s at NAS Whidbey Island complex.

The implementation of Alternative 2A will include measures that reduce noise impacts in the community, including the mitigation measures identified in Appendix H of the Final EIS and the use of Precision Landing Mode (PLM, a.k.a. MAGIC CARPET) to reduce the overall number of FCLPs compared to the number proposed in the Draft EIS. The Navy will continue to invest in new technologies to reduce aircraft engine noise. The Navy has and will continue to coordinate with appropriate federal regulatory and state resource agencies and comply with appropriate permits and reporting requirements.

A copy of the Record of Decision has been provided as an attachment to this press release, and is also available on the Growler Environmental Impact Statement website:

<http://www.whidbeyeis.com/>