

# Olympic National Forest extends review period for Navy's electronic warfare training plan

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More than 80 EA-18 Growler jets are based at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island. They're the centerpiece of the Navy's electronic warfare program. Each jet is armed with equipment to detect, disable or destroy radars and other enemy communications.

The U.S. Forest Service announced Friday that it is slowing down a Navy proposal to enhance jet training above Olympic National Forest.

For the second time, the Forest Service is extending a public comment period on the Navy's request to use forestland for electronic warfare training that would benefit a growing fleet of EA-18 Growler jets based at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.

The Navy wants to use up to 15 sites in the forest as temporary stations for three trucks equipped with electronic communications gear. The jets would be challenged to find electronic signals emitted by the trucks as practice for the surveillance and radar-busting assignments handed to Growler jets in war zones.

Hundreds of people have already commented on the proposal, with many expressing concerns about how the training would impact wildlife or the atmosphere of the forest. Opponents protested outside of the Forest Service headquarters in Olympia on Oct. 24.

"I've decided to extend the current public comment period to ensure the public has plenty of time to share their thoughts," said Forest Service Pacific District ranger Dean Millett in a news release. The new deadline is Nov. 28.

The Navy on Nov. 6 is scheduled to hold a public meeting on the proposal in Port Angeles. It is to take place at 6 p.m. at the City Council chambers, 321 E. Fifth St.

Training could take place up to 260 days a year, but the Navy says the trucks would be rotated among the 15 locations.

The noise generated by the jets should not be noticeably different from the sounds of Navy training that already occurs above Olympic National Forest, Navy officials told The News Tribune.

The Navy has said it will take steps to protect forest users, such as posting signs and shutting down training if people move into an exercise area.

The Navy has 84 Growler jets stationed on Whidbey Island. It wants to use the Olympic Peninsula for electronic warfare training area as an alternative to a location 400 nautical miles away in Idaho.

Read more here: <http://www.thenewstribune.com/2014/10/31/3462620/forest-service-slows-down-navy.html#storylink=cpy>