

**Eastern Washington Airspace Extension
Draft Environmental Assessment
Frequently Asked Questions from Virtual Public Meetings
Posted March 15, 2024**

- 1. How did the Navy benchmark the noise model with actual measurements (provide a reference)?**
 - The noise model algorithms used in the noise analysis were created by the U.S. Air Force using measurements of actual aircraft in flight. Since then, several studies have been conducted to confirm the accuracy of the modeled noise levels. In studies conducted in 1992, 1996, 2021, and 2022, the conclusions have all shown that “the noise model operates as intended and provides an accurate prediction of sound levels from aircraft operations.”
 - The noise levels of modeled aircraft (a key input to the model) are accurate as they were obtained by measuring sound generated by the specific aircraft in various parameters under controlled conditions.

- 2. Why is the Navy not preparing an Environmental Impact Statement for this action?**
 - In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) is prepared for a proposed action that is not likely to have significant effects or when the significance of the effects is unknown. This Proposed Action is to extend military training airspace (through designation by the Federal Aviation Administration [FAA]) and redistribute where current training flights occur within the overall airspace. Similar training has been occurring since 1977 in the existing Military Operation Areas (MOAs) and Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspaces (ATCAAs).
 - At this point in the Navy’s analysis, the findings in the Draft EA do not indicate any significant effects to the human or natural environment. However, public participation is an important component of the environmental analysis, and the Navy welcomed public comments during the public review and comment period for the Draft EA. All official and substantive comments are being considered in the preparation of the Final EA. Should the Navy find that the Proposed Action would generate significant impacts, a decision would then be made to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

- 3. What are the instantaneous dBA (A-weighted decibels) levels for noise exposure under 2,000 feet?**
 - One noise metric that can provide information about the noise environment is the maximum noise level (L_{max}). The L_{max} is the highest sound level measured during a single event where the sound level changes value with time (e.g., an aircraft overflight). The L_{max} is unaffected by the number of training activities, and is affected by several factors that are specific to a particular overflight (e.g., altitude, engine power setting). Due to the flight activities being dispersed throughout the airspace, people on the ground experience noise events with a wide range of L_{max} values. In this setting, overflights with the highest possible L_{max} (i.e., the aircraft passes directly overhead at the lowest permitted altitude and highest engine power setting) are

relatively rare. At distance of 2,000 feet, the maximum noise level is 96.6 dBA. At a distance of 1,000 feet, the maximum noise level is 104.8 dBA. At a distance of 500 feet, the maximum noise level is 112.1 dBA. The floor of the proposed Okanogan D MOA is 11,500 feet above mean sea level. Since the highest terrain beneath this area is less than 9,000 feet, there is no opportunity for anyone to be closer than 2,500 feet from any aircraft operating in the proposed airspace. For the existing airspace, the floor in certain sections is as low as 300 feet above ground level (AGL), so a closer encounter would be possible, though infrequent. See Appendix B (Noise Analysis) of the Draft EA for more information.

4. How will the Navy monitor noise levels to make sure the 46 dB noise level is not exceeded?

- The Navy does not plan to monitor noise levels in this area. Previous monitoring studies involving the EA-18G aircraft have demonstrated the accuracy of the noise model used in this analysis. Of note, the noise modeling results in a maximum Day-Night Average Noise Level (DNL) of approximately 49 dBA. Those sound levels are found only at the highest elevations as shown in Table 3.2-2 in the Draft EA.
- The 46 dB noise level referred to in the question is the DNL, which is noise averaged over a 24-hour period as described in Section 2.1 (Noise Metrics) of Appendix B (Noise Analysis). Maximum, instantaneous noise levels could exceed 49 dBA (Table 3.2-3). The maximum noise level (L_{max}) provides a simple metric to describe single noise events. Depending on an individual's distance from the aircraft, these instantaneous noise levels could approach or even exceed 100 dB, depending on aircraft power settings. Maximum noise levels for three typical power settings are shown in Appendix B in Table 4-9.

5. The presentation states that noise will remain "consistent" with current conditions. However, changes in cumulative average levels are modeled to increase by up to 15 dB. This clearly suggests that noise will not remain "consistent" in the region unless there are other relevant details that have not been mentioned?

- The existing ambient noise levels beneath the Okanogan D MOA, the proposed new airspace average 30.6 dBA. If Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) is selected, the projected average noise levels would range from 37.9 dBA at the lower elevations to 45.7 dBA at the higher terrain elevations, resulting in an increase of 7.3 to 15.1 dBA (DNL). Beneath the existing airspace, the noise analysis shows that average noise levels would be the same or slightly lower than current levels. See Section 4.3 of Appendix B of the Draft EA for additional information. The maximum DNL in the area remains within standards set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for all land uses.

6. Is the Navy evaluating the effect of the proposal on the economy in Mazama?

- Potential impacts related to the economic and social conditions of the region are provided in Section 3.6 of the Draft EA (Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice). This section analyzes potential impacts on several socioeconomic resources, such as land-based recreation and tourism activities. Military training airspace has been in place in this region since 1977, with no indications of significant impact on socioeconomic resources. The Navy invites you to review Section 3.6 of the Draft EA for further details.

7. **It's hard to understand — given the relatively small size of the proposed extension (393 square nautical miles) and the much larger area to the east — why is it needed? Is it the altitude of the Mazama extension? Is it the continuity and access for the jets coming from Whidbey Island?**
 - Aircrew typically train by flying in either the Okanogan MOA and overlying ATCAAs or the Roosevelt MOA and overlying ATCAA, not across both areas. Due to the removal of training airspace in 2020, current vertical and horizontal airspace dimensions of the Okanogan MOA and associated ATCAAs do not fully meet the training and operational readiness requirements of aircraft squadrons. The vertical (altitude) and horizontal distances of the proposed Okanogan D MOA and Mazama ATCAA would provide sufficient airspace for realistic training based on current flight profiles.
8. **Will the Growler flying schedule be reported? Otherwise, how will people protect their ears when out biking or skiing in the Mazama area?**
 - Aircraft flying schedules cannot be made publicly available. However, as in the past, Notices to Air Missions will be disseminated by the FAA with information on upcoming or ongoing military training exercises with airspace restrictions.
9. **It's not clear where 'low' flights are allowed or why they are allowed in this populated valley. Is there recourse or reporting residents can take? What if a pilot goes rogue, how would we know?**
 - Some low-level aircraft maneuvers are required in preparing flight crews for their national defense mission. As established by the FAA, the Okanogan B and C MOAs and the Roosevelt B MOA have lower altitude limits allowing maneuvers as low as 300 feet AGL. However, the Navy's standard operating procedures for flights in this area do not permit maneuvers lower than 500 feet AGL. Though aircraft periodically conduct maneuvers in the lower portions of these airspace areas, the majority of flight time occurs at relatively high altitudes, with approximately 80% of all flight time occurring above 15,000 feet above mean sea level.
 - Residents may submit a noise complaint if Navy aircraft are believed to be outside the altitude limits or outside the horizontal dimensions of the airspace. It should be noted that aircraft are permitted to conduct periodic low altitude maneuvers in those areas identified above. Navy pilots are held to the highest safety standards and follow all FAA flight and safety procedures. Please provide pertinent information to the Naval Air Station Whidbey Island noise complaint line at (360) 257-6665 or via e-mail at NASWI_Noise_Comments@us.navy.mil detailing your encounters.
10. **Why does the Navy's proposed expansion area have to be over Washington wilderness areas and forests instead of other areas without wildlife and wilderness recreation? It seems Washington's natural areas are being decimated by Navy activity.**
 - As is the case for the National Airspace System across the country, airspace across this region is highly congested and must be managed by the FAA to ensure public safety. When considering existing air traffic routes and patterns in this region, complete avoidance of military training airspace overlying designated Wilderness Areas was not possible.

- To accommodate the training requirements of Navy squadrons, the proposed airspace extension is critical to enhancing operational readiness and aircrew skills. The Navy considered other areas as alternatives but did not carry those forward for analysis in the EA due to those alternatives not meeting the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action, or the reasonable alternative screening factors presented in Section 2.2, which includes being agreeable to the FAA. More information on alternatives considered but not carried forward for detailed analysis is included Section 2.4 of the Draft EA.
- Regarding impacts on wildlife and wilderness recreation, noise associated with military aircraft overflights within existing airspace is anticipated to remain consistent with current conditions. Wildlife would experience similar but slightly lower sound levels to current conditions because flight tracks would be spread out over a wider area. Under Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative), wildlife would be exposed to new levels of noise from aircraft overflights in the proposed Okanogan D MOA and Mazama ATCAA. These overflights would result in short-term, infrequent, and localized increases in noise levels; however, the increase in noise levels would not compromise the general health of individuals or populations of wildlife.
- The Navy is consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on potential impacts on Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species and designated critical habitat. The Navy's analysis has determined that the Proposed Action is not likely to adversely affect ESA-listed species and designated critical habitat. The USFWS has previously concurred with this determination for training activities within the existing airspace.