

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
Department of the Navy

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR EASTERN WASHINGTON AIRSPACE EXTENSION

Pursuant to the United States (U.S.) Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500–1508) implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and U.S. Department of the Navy (hereinafter referred to as the Navy) NEPA regulations (32 CFR Part 775), the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required for the Eastern Washington Airspace Extension in Northeastern Washington State. The action recommended to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for implementation is as set out in Alternative 1. The FAA is a cooperating agency for this action. The FAA will conduct an independent review of the Proposed Action to determine if it will adopt all or part of the Navy's EA, and then issue its own decision, such as a Finding of No Significant Impact or Record of Decision.

Proposed Action: Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, a command of the Navy, is requesting the FAA establish an extension to existing Special Activity Airspace (SAA) in Eastern Washington to meet mission readiness requirements for the Commander, Electronic Attack Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CVWP). Under the Proposed Action, the FAA would establish an extension to existing vertical and lateral airspace dimensions to the west of the existing airspace over northeastern Washington State. The Proposed Action also includes a redistribution of CVWP training flight sorties analyzed in the 2010 Northwest Training Range Complex (NWTRC) EIS/Overseas EIS (OEIS), hereinafter referred to as NWTRC EIS/OEIS, to accurately characterize how CVWP is projecting to use the airspace.

Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action: The purpose of and need for the Proposed Action is to enhance training and operational readiness of CVWP squadrons based at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island (NASWI), by maintaining aircrew skills, providing the ability to accommodate future training requirements, and maximizing training opportunities in the NWTRC. Current vertical and horizontal airspace dimensions of the Okanogan and Roosevelt Military Operations Areas (MOAs) and associated Molson, Methow, and Republic Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA) do not fully meet the training and operational readiness requirements of CVWP. The airspace extension would help compensate for a training airspace reduction that occurred in 2020. The redistribution of sorties accounts for the differences between EA-6B and EA-18G training activities. EA-18Gs typically fly at higher altitudes, and redistributing the sorties among the existing and proposed SAA enables more effective use of the airspace. The Proposed Action is needed to further the Navy's execution of its congressionally mandated roles and responsibilities under 10 U.S. Code section 8062.

Alternatives Considered: The EA analyzed the potential environmental impacts of the following alternatives:

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not occur. The locations and areas of the Okanogan A/B/C MOAs and Molson and Methow ATCAAs, and Roosevelt A/B MOAs and Republic ATCAA would remain the same, and there would be no redistribution of the number of flights in the SAA from the 2010 NWTRC EIS/OEIS.

Alternative 1: Alternative 1 consists of the extension of the airspace through the establishment of the new Okanogan D MOA and Mazama ATCAA. In addition, Alternative 1 would redistribute the number of flights and flight profiles within the SAA. The overall total number of annual sorties would decline slightly from what was analyzed in the 2010 NWTRC EIS/OEIS. The total number of annual sorties in the

Okanogan MOAs and overlying ATCAAs would decrease, and the number of annual sorties in the Roosevelt MOAs and overlying ATCAA would increase.

Alternative 2: Alternative 2 consists of the addition of Okanogan D MOA and the overlying Mazama ATCAA that would occur under Alternative 1. Alternative 2 also considers an increase in the total number of annual sorties. This alternative allows for the greatest flexibility for the Navy to maintain readiness when considering potential changes in the national security environment.

Alternatives Considered but Not Carried Forward for Detailed Analysis:

Reinstatement of the Former Molson South High ATCAA: The Molson South High ATCAA was removed by the FAA due to air traffic concerns in 2020. The reinstatement of the Molson South High ATCAA is not being pursued as an alternative in the EA.

Roosevelt C MOA and Republic ATCAA Extension: In October 2021, the Navy proposed to the FAA the extension of the Roosevelt MOAs through an extension of the Roosevelt C MOA and the Republic ATCAA to the east of the current SAA. The FAA considered and was amenable to the extension but countered that accepting it would require the entire Republic ATCAA ceiling be reduced from 50,000 feet (ft.) to 32,000 ft., which would result in a reduction in size of the overall available training space. Therefore, the Navy withdrew the proposal because the lateral airspace gained from the extension would not outweigh the loss of vertical airspace.

Use of Olympic and Boardman SAA: The Navy considered increasing training sorties in both the Olympic and Boardman SAA, and Warning Area 237 (over water) in lieu of training in Eastern Washington SAA. However, none of these airspace areas are a direct substitute for the existing and proposed airspace because they could not support the required capacity of training sorties occurring in Eastern Washington SAA in addition to training currently occurring in these airspaces. The range instrumentation and geography of these airspace areas also make them unable to meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action. Additionally, the Boardman SAA does not have sufficient horizontal and vertical airspace to meet required training scenarios.

Environmental Effects:

No significant direct, indirect, or cumulative environmental impacts would occur from implementing the Proposed Action. Certain environmental resources (marine resources, geology and soils, hazardous materials, water resources, and traffic and infrastructure) were not analyzed in detail in the EA because implementation of the Proposed Action would not be likely to result in any potential environmental impacts on these resources or impacts would be negligible. Potential environmental impacts on acoustic environment (noise), air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, American Indian traditional resources, public health and safety, and socioeconomics, environmental justice, and children's environmental health and safety risks, are summarized here.

Acoustic Environment (Noise): In response to comments by federal and state agencies, and the public, an Acoustic Environment section was added to Chapter 3 (Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences) of the Final EA to better describe potential impacts associated with aircraft noise.

Under Alternative 1, the maximum day-night average sound level (DNL) in the existing airspace would be 49.3 dBA, a 0.6 dBA decrease from the No Action Alternative. The proposed airspace extension would experience a change in environmental conditions due to the introduction of military aircraft overflights and associated aircraft noise. As a result, the maximum DNL in the proposed airspace would be 45.7 dBA. Because the maximum DNLs resulting from military aircraft overflights in both the existing and

proposed airspace would be well below the FAA's significance threshold of DNL 65 dBA for noise effects of an action, the implementation of Alternative 1 would not result in significant impacts on the acoustic environment.

Air Quality: All pollutant emissions under Alternative 1, except for nitrogen oxides and carbon dioxide, would decrease compared to the baseline, and there would be a negligible change in emissions compared to No Action Alternative emissions due to slight differences in the total number of sorties. The estimated emissions under Alternative 1 are well below the applicable prevention of significant deterioration major thresholds used as screening level thresholds of significance for attainment areas. The greenhouse gas emissions from implementing Alternative 1 would result in a minor increase as compared to the greenhouse gas emissions for the No Action Alternative due to the assumed composition of other Navy aircraft sorties in the existing and proposed airspace (i.e., 50/50 split between F/A-18 and F-35 aircraft) and the resulting difference in emission factors. Implementation of Alternative 1 would not result in significant impacts on air quality since the estimated emissions are well below all applicable thresholds.

Biological Resources: The Proposed Action is not expected to result in any long-term consequences to individual species, their populations or habitat. Wildlife below the proposed airspace extension would be exposed to new levels of noise from aircraft. The airspace is predominately above western Okanogan County, with a small area above eastern Skagit County and northeastern Chelan County, and would also overlie the western portion of the designated Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth National Wilderness Areas. Wildlife exposed to low-altitude aircraft overflights under Alternative 1 could exhibit short-term behavioral or physiological responses, but not to the extent where the general health of individuals or populations would be compromised. Aircraft overflights in the SAA, including the addition of Okanogan D MOA, are not expected to result in chronic stress based on the short duration and infrequency of exposure because of the following:

1. DNLs in the airspace are lower than historic averages and are slightly lower than noise modeled for the No Action Alternative.
2. There is an overall lack of concentration of flights at a given altitude, area, and power setting.
3. There would be a relatively small number of overflights below 4,000 ft. above ground level (approximately one/day) and a relatively brief amount of time (seconds) that aircraft would be at lower altitudes.
4. Exposures would be intermittent and infrequent as training activities consist of non-continuous events.
5. The probability of an animal or specific location (e.g., nest, den) experiencing overflights more than once per day would be low due to the random nature of flight within the airspace and the large area of land overflown.
6. Short-term behavioral responses would not be expected to affect individual animal fitness or have population-level effects.
7. Individual animals would be expected to recover quickly from these responses.

The Navy consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for activities under Alternative 1 that may potentially affect Endangered Species Act-listed species and designated critical habitat, in accordance with section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act. On April 17, 2024, the Navy received a letter of concurrence from the USFWS that the activities under Alternative 1 are not likely to adversely affect ESA-listed species and designated critical habitat due to the elevation, short frequency, and intermittent duration of aircraft overflights associated with the Proposed Action. The Navy conducted a

literature review that included current species status information for the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) (and critical habitat), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) (and critical habitat), and North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) beneath the proposed airspace extension. The literature review also included updated information for species beneath the existing SAA, along with a review of the most current understanding of the potential impacts of aircraft overflights on wildlife.

Cultural Resources: The Navy consulted with the Washington State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Washington SHPO did not object to the Navy's determination of "no historic properties affected" for activities under Alternative 1 or request additional information or time for review. Thus, the Navy fulfilled its responsibilities under Section 106.

Under Alternative 1, the introduction of noise associated with aircraft activity under the proposed airspace extension would not be at a level that would result in physical harm (vibration-related) to National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-listed or NRHP-eligible sites, and overall noise levels underlying the existing SAA would be less than those under the No Action Alternative. In addition, while there may be changes in the setting under the proposed airspace extension associated with new aircraft activity, it is not expected to have a significant impact based on the maximum DNL noise exposure of 45.7 A-weighted decibels (dBA). No cultural resources outside of historic properties have been identified through consultation; therefore, there would be no impacts on cultural resources under Alternative 1.

American Indian Traditional Resources: On August 23, 2023, the Navy invited three federally recognized tribes (the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, and the Kalispel Tribe of Indians) to government-to-government consultation. Under Alternative 1, no significant impacts on American Indian traditional resources would occur as result of the establishment of the proposed airspace extension because the Navy has not identified American Indian traditional resources underlying the proposed airspace.

Proposed redistribution of the number of flights and flight profiles in the SAA is not expected to have significant impacts on American Indian traditional resources because noise levels would be less than baseline noise levels.

Public Health and Safety: FAA regulations and Navy standard operating procedures that are in place ensure the safe execution of aviation training activities. The FAA issues Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) to disseminate information on upcoming or ongoing military training exercises with airspace restrictions.

The maximum modeled DNL sound levels that would occur from aircraft activity in the proposed airspace extension would be 45.7 dBA. The maximum DNL for the entire Action Area would be 49.3 dBA, which would be less than the FAA's DNL 65 dBA significance threshold.

The highest modeled Maximum Received Noise Level (L_{max}) a person would potentially be exposed to is 123.9 dBA. For this to occur, an aircraft would have to be operating at 97 percent engine power, traveling at 360 knots, and located directly above a person at an altitude of 500 ft. Because the flight activities are dispersed throughout the airspace, persons 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., aircraft passes directly overhead at the lowest permitted altitude and the highest engine power setting) are relatively rare. The potential for a person to be in the vicinity of aircraft while operating at the given parameters and producing maximum noise levels is limited because there is an overall lack of concentration of flights at a given altitude, area, and power setting, and aircraft would be at lower altitudes for a relatively brief amount of time. In the event a person is exposed to the highest possible L_{max} , exposure would be short in duration (only a couple of seconds).

Therefore, there would be no significant impacts on public health and safety under Alternative 1.

Socioeconomics, Environmental Justice, and Children’s Environmental Health and Safety Risks: Under Alternative 1, the proposed airspace extension’s maximum DNL is 45.7 dBA and the entire Action Area’s maximum DNL is 49.3 dBA. Since the maximum DNL in the Action Area would be below the FAA’s DNL 65 dBA significance threshold, airborne acoustics from Navy aircraft overflights would cause minimal disruption to land-based recreational and tourism activities.

Occasional disturbances from military aircraft have been occurring in this area for several decades and are not expected to have lasting impacts on broader socioeconomic resources. Therefore, there would be no significant environmental impacts on socioeconomic resources under Alternative 1. In addition, aircraft overflights associated with Alternative 1 would produce emissions as discussed in Section 3.2 (Air Quality) of the EA, however, emissions would be well below all applicable thresholds. Because impacts to socioeconomic resources are negligible, and emissions from aircraft overflights associated with Alternative 1 would be well below all applicable thresholds, there are no disproportionately high impacts or adverse effects on any low-income populations or minority populations. Low-income populations analyzed in the EA include those families and all peoples in the counties underlying the proposed and existing airspace whose income is below the poverty line. Minority populations analyzed in the EA include people of the following demographic backgrounds in the counties underlying the proposed and existing airspace: black or African American, American Indian and Alaskan native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino (of any race). In addition to emissions being well below all applicable thresholds, the Navy’s safety measures that protect adults from potential health and safety impacts also protect children. Therefore, Alternative 1 would not disproportionately expose children to environmental health or safety risks.

Cumulative Impacts: Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions that occur within or potentially impact resources analyzed in the Action Area were included in the cumulative impacts analysis in the EA. These actions included the Pacific Northwest Electronic Warfare Range EA, the Copperstone Planned Development, and the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan EA. Because impacts associated with the implementation of the Proposed Action would be less than significant, there are no cumulative impacts on the resources analyzed in the EA when combined with the effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Public Outreach:

Regulations from the Council on Environmental Quality direct agencies to involve the public in preparing and implementing their NEPA procedures. The Navy prepared a Draft EA to inform the public of the Proposed Action and to allow the opportunity for public review and comment. FAA regulations require 30 days’ notice be provided prior to a public meeting; therefore, the Navy released the Draft EA for a 42-day public review period. On January 12, 2024, the public review period began with public notices in *The Spokesman Review*, *Statesman Examiner*, *Okanogan Valley Gazette-Tribune*, and *Methow Valley News*. The notice described the Proposed Action, solicited public comments on the Draft EA, listed the dates of the public comment period, provided the location and dates of the public meetings, and announced that CD copies and hard copies of the Draft EA were available for review at public locations (Okanogan Public Library, Twisp Public Library, Colville Public Library, Oroville Public Library, and Oak Harbor Public Library). A digital version of the Draft EA was also made available on the Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Northwest NEPA website at <https://pacific.navfac.navy.mil/NWNEPA>. In addition, the NASWI Public Affairs Officer distributed a news release announcing the availability of the Draft EA and the virtual public meetings to local, regional, and national print and broadcast (radio and television) media outlets on January 12, 2024. A second news release was distributed to media outlets

on February 2, 2024. Two virtual public meetings were held during the review period on February 13, 2024, and February 15, 2024. To fulfill a request from the latter meeting, a hard copy of the Draft EA was sent to the Winthrop Public Library. The Draft EA comment period yielded 6,189 comments; comments received were grouped into categories by topic, with responses provided, in the Final EA (Appendix D). Though the EA does not include each individual comment received, all comments have been compiled and can be accessed on the project website at <https://pacific.navfac.navy.mil/NWNEPA>.

Early engagement notifications were sent to elected officials, government agencies, and the following federally recognized tribes from Washington State: the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, and the Kalispel Tribe of Indians. Additional public notices included a postcard mailer, which was distributed to 33 nongovernmental organizations and community and business groups; tribal letters, which were mailed to six tribal leaders of federally recognized tribes; and stakeholder letters, which were mailed to 113 federal, state, and local elected officials and government agencies.

As part of the EA process, the Navy invited Government-to-Government consultations with the following federally recognized tribes from Washington State: the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, and the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, on August 23, 2023.

Finding: Based on the analysis presented in the Final EA, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and Navy policies and procedures (32 CFR Part 775); consideration of comments received during the public review of the Draft EA; and in coordination with the FAA, USFWS, Washington SHPO, and federally recognized tribes, the Navy finds that the Proposed Action as set out in Alternative 1 will not significantly impact the quality of the human and natural environment and recommends its full implementation to be carried out by the FAA. Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared.

Copies of the Final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact Statement are available on the Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Northwest NEPA website (<https://pacific.navfac.navy.mil/NWNEPA>), or by written request at the discretion of the Navy, sent to Attention: Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command NW, EV23, 1101 Tautog Circle, Silverdale, WA 98315.

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Date



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