

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

**Finding of No Significant Impact for the Transition of
Expeditionary EA-6B Prowler Squadrons to EA-18G Growler at Naval
Air Station Whidbey Island, Oak Harbor, Washington.**

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulation (40 CFR 1500-1508) implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, Navy Regulations (32 CFR Part 775), and Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5090.1C, the Department of the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been issued for the transition of the Expeditionary electronic attack (VAQ) squadrons at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island, Oak Harbor, Washington from the aging EA-6B Prowler aircraft to the newer EA-18G Growler aircraft.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide deployable land-base Expeditionary electronic attack community assets that meet Department of Defense requirements. The proposed action is needed to retain the Expeditionary VAQ mission and capabilities.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would transition the Expeditionary VAQ squadrons at NAS Whidbey Island from the EA-6B Prowler aircraft to the EA-18G Growler aircraft in the 2012-2014 timeframe. The proposed action includes:

- Retaining the existing Expeditionary VAQ mission capabilities at NAS Whidbey Island.
- Performing the in-place transition of three existing Expeditionary VAQ squadrons homebased at NAS Whidbey Island from the older EA-6B Prowler aircraft to the newer EA-18G Growler aircraft.
- Potentially relocating one Reserve Expeditionary VAQ squadron from Joint Base Andrews to NAS Whidbey Island and transitioning from the older EA-6B Prowler aircraft to the newer EA-18G Growler aircraft.
- Adding up to 11 EA-18G Growler aircraft to the Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) at NAS Whidbey Island to support the Expeditionary VAQ community.
- Modifying certain facilities at Ault Field to provide facilities and functions to support the new aircraft type and a modest increase in personnel to support the Expeditionary VAQ community.

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ALTERNATIVES

The EA analyzed three action alternatives and a No Action Alternative. The alternatives were developed to provide options for different aircraft-loading scenarios.

Alternative 1. Three Expeditionary VAQ squadrons currently based at NAS Whidbey Island would transition from the older EA-6B Prowler aircraft to the newer EA-18G Growler aircraft, and six EA-18G Growler aircraft would be added to the FRS to support the training requirements of the Expeditionary VAQ community. Alternative 1 would result in a total increase of nine aircraft at NAS Whidbey Island. The Expeditionary VAQ squadrons would transition to the EA-18G Growlers at a rate of about one squadron per year. Each Expeditionary VAQ EA-18G squadron would be manned by the majority of personnel transitioning from the corresponding EA-6B Prowler squadron. Alternative 1 would result in the addition of 91 personnel at NAS Whidbey Island.

Total annual aircraft operations would increase approximately 2.7 percent under Alternative 1. New construction and the replacement of existing facilities would include an approximately 32,500-square-foot addition to Hangar 10, expansion of the Flight Line Electrical Distribution System (FLEDS), and construction of the flight simulator building.

Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative). Three Expeditionary VAQ squadrons currently based at NAS Whidbey Island would transition from the older EA-6B Prowler aircraft to the newer EA-18G Growler aircraft; the one reserve Expeditionary VAQ squadron from Joint Base Andrews would relocate to NAS Whidbey Island and transition from the older EA-6B Prowler to the newer EA-18G Growler aircraft; and six EA-18G Growler aircraft would be added to the FRS to support the training requirements of the Expeditionary VAQ community. This would result in a total increase of 14 aircraft and the addition of 311 personnel; 97 of the 311 additional personnel would be selective reservists at NAS Whidbey Island. Under Alternative 2, the relocated reserve squadron would function under its own command structure with assigned personnel and aircraft.

Total annual aircraft operations would increase by approximately 3.1 percent under Alternative 2. New construction and demolition would include an approximately 32,500-square-foot addition to Hangar 10, expansion of the FLEDS, and construction of the flight simulator building. Alternative 2 would also include construction of an approximately 25,200-square-foot addition to Hangar 12.

Alternative 3. Three Expeditionary VAQ squadrons currently based at NAS Whidbey Island would transition from the older EA-6B Prowler aircraft to the newer EA-18G Growler aircraft, and 11 EA-18G Growler aircraft would be added to the FRS to support the training

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requirements of the Expeditionary VAQ community and the reserve Expeditionary VAQ squadron relocating to NAS Whidbey from Joint Base Andrews. Alternative 3 would result in a total increase of 14 aircraft and 311 personnel would result; 97 of the 311 additional personnel would be selective reservists at NAS Whidbey Island. However, under Alternative 3, the relocated reserve squadron would function as part of the FRS, sharing personnel and aircraft.

Total annual aircraft operations would increase by approximately 3.1 percent under Alternative 3. New construction and demolition would include an approximately 32,500-square-foot addition to Hangar 10, expansion of the FLEDS, and construction of the flight simulator building. Alternative 3 would also include construction of an approximately 4,300-square-foot addition to Hangar 12.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that may occur with implementation of the proposed action would range from no impact to minor impact, with no significant impacts to the human environment.

The proposed action would not result in significant impacts to airspace, airfield operations or aircraft safety. Although there is an increase in the number of operations of approximately 2.7 percent for Alternative 1 and approximately 3.1 percent under Alternatives 2 and 3, there is an overall reduction in the noise contours. The proposed action would not modify the current airspace surrounding NAS Whidbey Island and the current EA-6B Prowler flight tracks and flight operations would remain unchanged.

As stated above, all three action alternatives would reduce the noise environment surrounding NAS Whidbey Island. Although the transition to the Expeditionary EA-18G Growler will result in more operations at the base, the day-night level (DNL) noise zones will decrease resulting in fewer people living within the greater than 65 decibel (dB) DNL noise zone. A minor beneficial impact on the noise environment surrounding NAS Whidbey Island will occur if the any of the action alternatives are implemented.

None of the three action alternatives would result in significant impacts to land use, air quality, water resources or environmental management. Installation land use, regional land use and land use compatibility would not be impacted by any of the action alternatives. Island County is in attainment for all criteria pollutants; therefore, the Clean Air Act General Conformity Rule does not apply. Additionally, mobile source emissions regulations are not applicable to the proposed action. Annual emissions from construction would be below the 250 ton per year threshold for all criteria pollutants for all action alternatives. Water quality would not be impacted by any of the action alternatives. Any runoff from the addition of 0.2 acres of impervious surface resulting from the construction of new buildings

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is anticipated to be retained on-site. No significant impacts will occur to the Installation Restoration Program sites or to hazardous materials and waste management.

Construction activities and operational increases would not result in significant impacts to biological resources. Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would not affect marine mammals or any threatened and endangered species with the exception of the marbled murrelet. Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 may affect but are not likely to adversely affect the marbled murrelet. The Navy informally consulted with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on impacts to the marbled murrelet. The USFWS concurred with the Navy's determination. The action would not result in reasonably foreseeable "takes" of marine mammal species or bald eagles. Local wildlife would not be impacted for the implementation of Alternatives 1, 2 or 3. Additionally, migratory birds would not be impacted by the implementation of Alternatives 1, 2 or 3.

The three action alternatives would not result in significant impacts to cultural resource. There would be no effect to architectural or archaeological resources. Hangars 8, 10, and 12 and the flight simulator building were determined by the Washington State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to be not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Hangar 10's six auxiliary buildings are also not eligible because the buildings are less than 50 years old. The Navy consulted with the SHPO and the SHPO concurred with the Navy's determination that Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would have no adverse effect on historical resources.

Construction activities and the increase of either 91 personnel (under alternative 1) or 311 personnel (under alternatives 2 and 3) would create a positive impact to the local and regional economy. The construction associated with the proposed action would create short-term beneficial impacts because local labor forces would be utilized and material would be purchased to support construction. The local economy would benefit from the increase in personnel and their families to Island County however this benefit would be minor. For Alternatives 2 and 3 the selective reservists would likely currently reside in the surrounding area and are therefore considered part of the current local economy. As a result, no significant impact to the local or regional economy would result from the implementation of alternatives 1, 2 or 3.

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Based on the analysis of environmental impacts, the three action alternatives would not cause disproportionately high and adverse environmental effects on low income or minority populations or environmental health or safety risks that would disproportionately affect children.

The Navy submitted a negative Coastal Consistency Determination to the Washington State Department of Ecology to ensure compliance with the Coastal Zone Management Act. The Washington State Department of ecology concurred with the Navy's finding that the proposed action would not affect the coastal resources or uses of Washington State. The Navy also sent letters to three local Native American tribes informing them of the proposed action. The tribes did not submit any written or verbal comments or concerns about the proposed action.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Navy released the Draft EA for public review on July 27, 2012, and provided the public until August 13, 2012 to submit comments. The public comment period began with the Public Notice in local newspapers on July 28, 2012 indicating the availability of the Draft EA and the locations of public review copies. A press release was also distributed to media outlets serving the area surrounding NAS Whidbey Island. Public Notice letters were also sent directly to elected officials and known interest groups. The Draft EA was made available on the Naval Facility Engineering Command Northwest web site: (https://portal.navfac.navy.mil/portal/page/portal/navfac/NAVFAC_WW_PP/NAVFAC_EFANW_PP), and at two local libraries. Per the request of three local city commissioners, the Public Review Period was extended to August 31, 2012. The Navy issued a press release on August 14, 2012, announcing the extension of the Public Review Period and submitted letters to the local officials who made the request. During the extended comment period, the EA remained available on the websites and at local libraries and additional copies of the Draft EA were placed in two additional local libraries.

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A total of 233 comments were received during the public review period of which 129 comments expressed support for the proposed action and 104 comments expressed concern about the existing operations. Of the 104 comments expressing concern, 54 were specifically concerned about the noise environment in the City of Coupeville and the areas surrounding Outlying Landing Field (OLF) Coupeville. Although Fleet Carrier Air Wing (CVW) Growler squadrons routinely fly in the vicinity of Coupeville, the Expeditionary VAQ Squadron Growlers identified in this proposed action do not fly at OLF Coupeville. Additionally, several emails and letters were received requesting extensions of the public review period, calling for comments from other individuals, and providing news articles and media releases. Public comments received were addressed in the Final EA.

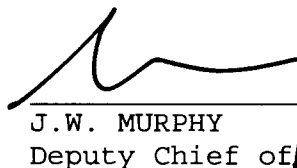
FINDING

After review of the EA prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and U.S. Navy procedures for implementing NEPA (32 CFR 775), no significant impacts were identified for any of the alternatives on the resource areas examined. The Navy finds that transitioning Expeditionary EA-6B Prowler squadron to EA-18G Growler squadrons will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. In addition, cumulative impacts of the proposed action in combination with other past present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions, would not be significant. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

A copy of the EA, including this FONSI, can be obtained from: Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Public Works Department, Environmental Division, 1115 West Lexington Street, Oak Harbor, WA 98278.

10/30/12

DATE



J.W. MURPHY
Deputy Chief of Staff
For Shore and Environmental
Readiness
United States Fleet Forces
Command