3. Complaints

3.1—Complaints to Navy

Citizens of the Ebey's Reserve (COER) submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request from the Navy seeking all telephone and email noise complaints about the Growlers received between 2018 and 2020. The information obtained is summarized here.

3.1.1. Number of Complaints. A summary of the complaint numbers for 2020 is presented in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. .

Table 3.1. Number of phone and email complaints by month in 2020, as tallied from the Navy's FOIA'd spreadsheet.

Month	Total: Phone & Some Email Complaints [a]
January	73
February	160
March	32
April	249
May	153
June	688
July	598
August	539
September	463
October	343
November	255
December	401
MINIMAL TOTAL	3,897

[a] Minimal total because a large but unknown number of email complaints were not received by the Navy from August to January 31, 2020, due to email snafu.

A news release was also prepared and is available at https://citizensofebeysreserve.com/2021/06/15/navy-loses-email-complaints-on-growler-noise/, and Whidbey News Times wrote a related article: https://www.whidbeynewstimes.com/news/navy-noise-complaint-data-lost-in-glitches/

Table 3.2. Number of phone and email complaints by region in 2020, as tallied from the Navy's FOIA'd spreadsheet. Note that there were only 102 days of FCLPs at the OLF.

Region	Total: Phone & Some Email Complaints[a]	Notes
North Whidbey Island	381	Oak Harbor
Central Whidbey Island	2002	Coupeville (1759) and Greenbank (143)
Port Townsend	587	Other than Central Whidbey, the next most affected by FCLPs at the OLF.
South Whidbey Island	116	Freeland southward
Other Olympic Peninsula	209	All but Port Townsend
Camano Island & La Conner	350	
Anacortes & San Juan Islands	221	
Other areas	31	
MINIMAL TOTAL[1]	3,897	

[a]Minimal total because a large but unknown number of email complaints were not received by the Navy from August to January 31, 2020, due to email snafu.

Due to its proximity to the OLF, Central Whidbey citizens complained at a rate nearly 4 to 10 times that of the other areas. Among the other areas complaint numbers were

relatively similar, revealing a common dislike of and problems with Growler noise throughout Whidbey Island and adjacent communities.

Between August and March 2021 no emails to the complaint line were received because the email system for complaints was taken down and not replaced until early March 2021. The Navy does not know how many complaints were emailed in but not received during that time. And the email problem did not kick emails back to the sender. Therefore, complainants believed their email complaints were being received and would have had no reason to discontinue sending email complaints during the inactivated period. A few post-August email complaints that happened to be sent to the Public Affairs Officer (different email address than the complaint address) were, however, transferred over into the data base.

Prior to the Navy's email going down in August about 7% to 10% of the complaints in the data base were emails. Between August 1 and December 31 there were 2,001 phone complaints in the data base. At the 7-10% email rate, that means about 140 to 200 emails were not received, increasing the total to about 4,000 complaints in 2000. An anonymous (name, address not given) calls or emails are apparently not included in the data base unless they can be linked by a revealed phone number or email address to prior calls or emails that logged the personal data[1]. The number of such dismissed complaints is unknown but could be fairly large. Hence the actual complaint total can be assumed to be greater than 4,000.

But that number needs still additional expansion. Here's why. Iterative (2 or more) complaints, whether by phone, email, or combo, that are received within some unspecified timeframe are lumped as one complaint, even though the substance of the

[1] Each call or email in the spreadsheet is assigned a unique ID number linked to a "Caller ID" number, which in turn is linked to a name and address. Every complaint in the spreadsheet has that data. If the complainant's phone has been previously linked to name and address and the incoming phone number is revealed (not blocked), then the required data may pop up, facilitating inclusion of the complaint in the data base. But that "if" is unknown. Without such linkage being established, the personal data would be unknown, and it appears the complaint could not be included since all complaints include the redacted personal data cells. That applies similarly to emailed complaints.

complaints may differ.[2] Hence, say in a family where mom is trying to watch TV, dad is trying to have a business phone conversation, and their two teens are trying to do homework, they could each be highly annoyed and phone in to complain, but because it is the same phone number, their four individual complaints would be counted as one. Now flip side, let's say only dad phoned and explains that all four family members are distressed for various reasons; still those would count as one. So that 4,000+ tally of people impacted by jet noise becomes even larger.

3.1.2. Complainant Details. While each logged-in complaint gets a unique ID number linked to a Caller ID number, it is unclear whether the Caller ID number is specific to a name of a given individual or is specific to a phone number or email address that could be used by multiple people (presumably family members).

Based on examination of the spreadsheet the unique Caller ID numbers appear to be sequentially assigned (1, 2...133...4475...etc. to x). Based on those ID numbers, it appears, there have been at least 4,500 complainants (i.e., unique Caller IDs). While probably not all 4500 complainants phoned or emailed in 2020, a large portion surely did. Importantly, the callers who did complain only represent a small portion of the total population disturbed by Growler noise for several reasons. An unknown percentage of the unhappy distressed population did not know about the complaint line, or did not want to provide their name/address/phone number, or were too intimidated or timid to phone, or decided it would do no good so did not bother, or relied on someone else in the family or friend group to do it, etc. Based on these factors, the real number of unhappy individuals is likely 10 or more times 4,500.

3.1.3 Responses to Complainants. As explained by LCDR James Carson to COER attorney Zachary Griefen (March 23, 2021), the Navy lost all its responses to complaints from January to early October 2020:

> *Regarding the records lost in a computer hardware failure, all of the records lost were emails from NASWI's Community Planning Liaison Officer (CPLO) to*

[2] One of the spreadsheet columns makes note of complainants who called and/or emailed back during the same general timeframe, but those addition complaints are not assigned as discrete complaints (i.e., they are not counted).

members of the public that had sent a complaint to NASWI regarding aircraft noise. Prior to your request, the CPLO had archived all his previous emails that would be responsive to your request on his hard drive but unfortunately his hard drive failed in early October 2020 and attempts to recover the data stored on it were unsuccessful. He was unable to provide these lost emails, though he knows they would have been responsive. We do not know how many emails were lost. The email records released to you are those responsive records still in existence because they were created after the hard drive failure.

There were 18 responses by the Navy (most all by phone) to complaints between October 1 and December 31—i.e., the latter part of 2020 when responses were not lost. During that period there were 999 complaints. Hence, the response rate was 1.8%.

One column in the Navy spreadsheet notes whether the caller is a frequent caller. It seems nearly all complainants are identified as frequent. Presumably, the purpose of that designation is for the Navy to somehow try to claim that it's just a handful of folks raising a stink over jet noise. Any claim like that is not cogent or defensible. The complaint line is not a survey, which is the only way the Navy could ascertain the various levels of animus over the Navy and its Growler noise problem. That column has no more value or propriety than a column revealing racial identity, gender, or religious affiliation. If a person phones in twice, he/she may have two different things to complain about, or perhaps is twice as upset as the next person.

The number of complaints is not and should not be used as an index of the number of people upset during a given training operation or training period. Each day thousands of folks who may be mildly to severely annoyed by Growler training do not bother to complain for a wide variety of reasons. Really, the only value of the complaint line is to create the false impression that the Navy is responsive to civilian complaints, yet in reality, very few complaints are ever responded to—about 1.8%—and those that are, tend be related to answering specific questions rather than addressing annoyance complaints. So, if you have a question, the Navy may respond, but if you are just grousing, the Navy could care less.

3.2—Complaints to Quiet Skies

An organization in San Juan County, Quiet Skies, in 2015 established a communication hub for reporting Growler noise complaints [https://www.facebook.com/quietskiesoversanjuancounty/]. They have compiled an impressive amount of credible data, which they compile in quarterly reports. At this writing the latest report is for March-May 2023. That report is available at Mar to May 2023 Quarterly Rpt. Prior reports are also available at their web site at All Quarterly Reports.