

M1 Introduction

The Navy would like to thank the elected officials, American Indian tribes and nations, federal regulatory and state resource agencies, business and community leaders, organizations, and individuals for taking the time to review the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), attend the public meetings, and submit comments on the Draft EIS. The public comment period and public meetings are an essential aspect of the environmental review process. This appendix to the *Final EIS for EA-18G "Growler" Airfield Operations at NAS Whidbey Island* contains comments on the Draft EIS. The public comment period ran from November 10, 2016, to February 24, 2017, and included five public meetings held in Port Townsend, Oak Harbor, Lopez Island, Anacortes, and Coupeville, Washington. The public comment period for the Draft EIS began on November 10, 2016, with publication of the Draft EIS Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register*. The initial deadline for public comment was January 25, 2017. Due to requests from the public, the Navy extended the public comment period to February 24, 2017. The Navy issued a press release with notification of the comment period extension on January 13, 2017, followed by an announcement of the extension of the public comment period published in the *Federal Register* on January 23, 2017, and January 24, 2017. Display advertisements with the public notice of the comment period extension were published in local newspapers from January 19, 2017, through January 25, 2017. In total, the public comment period comprised 105 days.

Comments collected during the Draft EIS public comment period were received from elected officials, American Indian tribes and nations, federal regulatory and state resource agencies, business and community leaders, organizations, and individuals. Comments were provided through one or more of the following comment-submittal methods:

- in writing, while attending one of the Draft EIS public meetings
- orally to the stenographer, while attending one of the Draft EIS public meetings
- electronically, via the project website at www.whidbeyeis.com
- electronically, via email
- in writing, by mail

Section 1.10, Public Participation: Draft EIS Review, provides a summary of comments received by topic area during the Draft EIS public comment period. As identified in Section 1.10.4, the most common concerns raised by the public during the Draft EIS public outreach effort include the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and alternatives, noise and vibration, human health effects, airfield operations, socioeconomic impacts, and biological resources. Section 1.11, Public Participation: Comment Themes, details frequently raised comment topics identified during the Draft EIS public comment period with information on how the EIS analysis considers each topic.

M1.1 Comment Response Process

The Navy considered and responded to comments received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as detailed in this Final EIS. The Navy's responses to comments received during the public comment period are included here in their entirety. In accordance with 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1503.4, comments were assessed and responded to as follows:

- The Navy project team carefully reviewed the comments received. Each comment was assigned to a resource-specific specialist from the Navy's interdisciplinary team.

- Within each comment submittal, substantive comments were identified for consideration of possible updates to the EIS analysis. Generally, substantive comments included items such as questions related to the alternatives analysis and components of the Proposed Action; resource-specific methodology, analysis, or impact conclusions; or the use, adequacy, or accuracy of data used to support the analysis.
- The EIS analysis was updated with new information and clarifying language as warranted to address public comments. Comment responses were developed for every comment based on the above-described comment review and EIS update process. Responses identify, as appropriate, sections of the EIS where revisions were made or details on where additional information is provided within the EIS, or an explanation is provided for why a comment does not warrant an EIS change or further response.

In summary, the public comments received on the Draft EIS have resulted in technical edits that improve the accuracy and thoroughness of the Final EIS analysis. Although the conclusions of the Draft EIS and Final EIS remain the same, the operational changes announced in September 2017 (i.e., the reduction in the number of pilots as defined by the latest information on the enhanced Electronic Attack mission and the implementation of Precision Landing Mode [PLM], also known as MAGIC CARPET) had an overall benefit of lessening the impacts across all alternatives and scenarios. The Final EIS provides clarifications and identifies changes that were made to the Draft EIS (see Section 1.13). The Navy response to public comment themes is provided in Section M2 of this appendix.

M1.1.1 Personally Identifiable Information and Comment Coding

Public comments are received from a wide spectrum of public stakeholders with an interest in the Proposed Action and express a wide range of views and concerns. To encourage full participation of all public stakeholders, the Navy has chosen to protect personally identifiable information (PII) of private individuals because some individuals prefer anonymity or may be discouraged and potentially intimidated by opposing views of others. To the maximum extent possible, the Navy has kept PII confidential and put measures in place to only release the city, state, and five-digit zip code for individuals (private citizens) who provided comments. PII is any data that could potentially identify a specific individual or can be used to identify, contact, or locate a single person. Examples of PII include an individual's name, physical address, email address, or place of employment. PII included in the body of comments was redacted for the purposes of publishing this appendix.

In order to keep PII private and to allow commenters to find their comments in this appendix, the Navy assigned each comment an alphanumeric code based on components of the commenter's name. Individuals who commented on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) during the public comment period may find their comments using the following method:

- Each individual commenter was assigned a nine-digit alphanumeric code (AAABB0000) that corresponds with their first and last name and the number of comments submitted. "AAA" is the first three letters of the commenter's last name, "BB" is the first two letters of their first name, and the four-digit sequential number begins with 0001 and increases with each comment received from that individual. For example, the first comment received from an individual named John Doe would have the comment code DOEJO0001.
- For comments submitted in an official capacity, such as by elected officials or agency representatives (federal, state, or local), all official commenter information is retained. The

official contact information of the agency official is not considered PII; therefore, official comments are provided under the agency name or representative as they were submitted as part of the official record. For ease of reference and review, official comments are provided at the beginning of the Comment Index (M3) and the Response to Comment (M4). They are organized alphabetically according to federal, state, or local jurisdiction.

- Special cases:
 - For instances where limited information is provided, a lower case “x” is used in place of letters or numbers. Examples include instance in which only a last name is provided, such as “Doe,” and the resulting comment code would be DOExx0001. Similarly, if only the first name “John” is provided, the comment code would be xxxJO0001. If a first or last name is too short to fill in the code (i.e., three letters for the last name or two letters for the first name), a lower case “x” is also used. For example, if the commenter is J Doe, the comment code would be DOEJx0001.
 - When a comment is submitted with no name or the commenter wrote “anonymous,” the comment is coded ANONY0000, and the four-digit numbers increase sequentially. Comments included among the comments coded as “anonymous” include those comment submittals that were blank and had no comment provided, or ones in which the comment was unintelligible.