



Navy Announces Preferred Alternative for Final Environmental Impact Statement for Growler Operations at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island and Releases Section 106 Consultation

The Navy has identified a preferred alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzing EA-18G Growler operations at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island and Outlying Landing Field (OLF) Coupeville.

Alternative 2 has been identified as the preferred alternative for force structure. This alternative establishes two new expeditionary squadrons and adds two aircraft to each squadron that operates off aircraft carriers. This alternative adds 36 aircraft at NAS Whidbey Island. Additionally, this plan calls for nine total carrier squadrons and five expeditionary squadrons.

Scenario A has been identified as the preferred alternative for Field Carrier Landing Practice (FCLP) distribution. Under this scenario, Ault Field will support four times the number of total aircraft operations when compared to OLF Coupeville—specifically 88,000 total operations would occur at Ault Field, with 24,100 at OLF Coupeville; 23,700 of those operations at OLF Coupeville would be FCLP flown by EA-18G Growlers. Since airfield operations are defined as either a takeoff or landing, under this scenario about 12,000 FCLP passes would occur annually at OLF Coupeville.

The operational numbers in the preferred alternative incorporate additional analysis of changes to Navy training that will reduce impacts to local communities. The reductions the Navy studied were based on two factors, the number of pilots needing training and a reduced FCLP requirement due to Precision Landing Mode, formerly known as MAGIC CARPET. Both of these factors decreased overall FCLP requirements from 42,000 presented in the Draft EIS to 29,600 annually—a 30% reduction under the preferred alternative.

No final decision has yet been made. The ultimate decision with respect to force structure and FCLP distribution will be made by the Secretary of the Navy or his representative, and announced in a Record of Decision no earlier than 30 days following the public release of the Final EIS.

The Navy continues consultations with other federal, state, and local agencies as the EIS nears completion. The Navy has distributed a document to consulting parties and published this document on the EIS website (www.whidbeyeis.com) summarizing consultation efforts with respect to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) for the increase in EA-18G "Growler" aircraft and airfield operations at NAS Whidbey Island. This document summarizes consultation efforts for this undertaking under NHPA; presents information requested during previous consultations through correspondence and meetings between October 2014 and October 2017; and documents the Navy's historic properties identification effort and determination of effects.

The Navy is announcing this information in a continued effort to provide timely and transparent information on its analysis and planning process. The Navy expects the Final EIS to be released later this summer or early fall. The Navy has considered 4,335 public comments received on the Draft EIS and updated the Final EIS with new and clarifying information. An appendix in the Final EIS will provide the Navy's responses to public comment themes received on the Draft EIS.