

# Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Navy Announces EIS Preferred Alternative for Growler Operations at NAS Whidbey Island and Releases NHPA Section 106 Consultation**

The Navy has identified a preferred alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzing EA-18G Growler operations at NAS Whidbey Island and Outlying Landing Field (OLF) Coupeville because it provides the best training for our pilots and impacts the fewest number of residents living in the community.

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 (CVW). This alternative adds 36 aircraft at NAS Whidbey Island. Additionally, this plan calls for nine total CVW 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 (PLM), formerly known as MAGIC CARPET. Both of these factors decreased overall FCLP requirements from 42,000 presented in the Draft EIS to 30,000 annually – a 30% reduction.

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 preferred alternative places the majority of FCLP operations at OLF Coupeville because OLF Coupeville provides more realistic training for our aviators. OLF Coupeville has been continuously used for FCLP since the late 1960s. OLF Coupeville's pattern best replicates the CVN pattern, building and reinforcing the correct habit patterns and muscle memory. OLF Coupeville sits on a 200-foot ridge surrounded by flat terrain, similar to the aircraft carrier operating on the water. The low cultural lighting around Coupeville and the ability to completely darken the field also closely resembles at-sea conditions from the pilots' perspective.

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## GROWLER EIS PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE-2-2-2-2

Both airfields will have an increase in operations, the majority of which will be at Ault Field. Ault Field is a busy, multi-mission airfield while OLF Coupeville is the preferred and ideal field for FCLP. The preferred alternative places the majority of FCLP operations at OLF Coupeville as it provides the most realistic training for our aviators.

Unlike OLF Coupeville, Ault Field sits in a valley surrounded by higher terrain, limiting pattern options and providing a visual picture unlike conditions at sea. The City of Oak Harbor and Ault Field both have artificial lighting and visual cues not experienced by pilots at sea. FCLP at Ault Field often disrupts departures and arrivals of other aircraft not participating in FCLP; this disruption results in extended flight tracks and longer hours of operation which in turn affect more residents living in the community. The interruption of other vital operations from FCLP operations at Ault Field has become increasingly important with the addition of three more Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance squadrons to NAS Whidbey Island that operate the P-8 Poseidon, which is replacing the P-3 Orion.

The Navy continues consultations with other federal, state and local agencies as the EIS nears completion.

Today, the Navy has distributed a document to consulting parties and published this document on the EIS website ([www.whidbeyeis.com](http://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 findings indicate no direct adverse effects due to construction, demolition or airfield operation, and no indirect adverse effects due to noise-induced vibration.

The Navy has determined that there will be indirect adverse effects to the Central Whidbey Island Historic District as a result of more frequent aircraft operations affecting certain landscape components of the district. Specifically, the preferred alternative would affect perceptual qualities that contribute to the significance of the landscapes. The Navy is continuing consultation to resolve these 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 Navy’s responses to public comment themes received on the Draft EIS.

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***MEDIA ADVISORY: Interested members of the media are invited to participate in a media availability tomorrow (June 26), beginning at 10 a.m. Subject matter experts will be available to answer questions about the Navy’s preferred alternative announcement and the Section 106 consultations. Location of the media availability will be the NAS Whidbey Island CPO Club, 1080 W Ault Field Rd #138, Oak Harbor, WA. Please RSVP to Mike Welding, NAS Whidbey Island Public Affairs Officer, at 360-257-2962.***