

State of Washington – U.S. Navy Wants to Conduct War Games Along Coast

For war games next year, Navy wants to post trucks with electromagnetic radiation equipment on West End



These two U.S. Navy renderings show one of the camper-sized trucks that contain electromagnetic radiation emitting equipment.

By Paul Gottlieb

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FORKS — The Navy wants to allow three camper-sized trucks with electromagnetic radiation equipment to conduct war exercises with military aircraft from 15 sites in Clallam, Jefferson and Grays Harbor counties.

The locations — 12 in Olympic National Forest and three on state Department of Natural Resources land — would be part of the Pacific Northwest Electronic Warfare Range and would involve aircraft from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.

The trucks' activities would be protected from human encroachment by warning signs and taped barriers that would cordon off the areas when the emitters are operating.

If human activity such as camping or hunting is detected during operations, the emitter would be de-energized, according to the draft environmental assessment for the project available at <http://tinyurl.com/PDN-Electrowarfare>.

Extended close exposure to electromagnetic radiation could be a health hazard.

If the people did not want to leave, the emitters would be relocated to another available site.

The Navy hopes to start deploying the trucks for warfare exercises by September 2015, John Mosher, Northwest environmental program manager for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, said Thursday.

The emitters systems, operated by two crew members inside each vehicle, would provide the Navy “with the ability to simulate modern [electronic warfare] threats in an open-air environment to effectively and efficiently train the operators of these systems,” according to the assessment.

The project would include installation of communications equipment at a 16th site located at an existing government communications facility on Octopus Mountain on state Department of Natural Resources land in western Clallam County.

'No significant impact'

Greg Wahl, project lead and an environmental coordinator for the U.S. Forest Service, has issued a finding of no significant impact for the project for its Forest Service permit.

That eliminates the need for an environmental impact statement.

Wahl based his decision on a review of the project's health impacts.

“Human tissue is directly susceptible to shock or burns when metallic objects, which have absorbed high electromagnetic radiation, are touched,” according to the assessment.

“This type of burn would be similar to the type of burn produced inside a microwave oven,” it states.

“There are no conclusive direct hazards to human tissue as a result of electromagnetic radiation.

“Links to DNA fragmentation, leukemia, and cancer due to intermittent exposure to extremely high levels of electromagnetic radiation are speculative; study data are inconsistent and insufficient at this time.”

Three of the mobile emitter sites are about 10 miles northeast of Forks in Clallam County, Wahl said.

Six are in Jefferson County within 10 miles of the Quinault Reservation, while another is in Jefferson County 15 miles southeast of Forks, he said.

Four are in Grays Harbor County.

All of the Forest Service sites are off Forest Service roads.

The sites would be located on ridges and cliffs, with the direction of emissions toward open areas away from the cliff or ridge.

Dean Millett, district ranger for the Forest Service Pacific District, signed off on the environmental

assessment.

Millett said Thursday that the Forest Service roads where most of the emitters will be located are remote.

“They don't get much traffic unless there is some activity going on in the area,” he said.

He said the transmissions also will cease if large animals come into the area where the exercise is taking place.

Millett said he was not concerned about the electromagnetic radiation emissions.

“I think we are bombarded all the time and exposed to electromagnetic radiation from radio satellites, cellphones, TV signals — we get it from outer space from dying stars,” he said.

“This is just one more small dose.”

A comment period on the draft environmental assessment for the Forest Service permit, which ended July 10, was extended Thursday to Oct. 10, Wahl said Thursday.

Written comments should be submitted to Wahl at 1835 Black Lake Blvd. S.W., Olympia, WA 98512.

Questions or comments about the project should be directed to Wahl at gtwahl@fs.fed.us or 360-956-2375.

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