MENDOCINO, Calif. -- A remote and windswept area of the Mendocino-Humboldt shore called the Lost Coast is set to become a battleground if the U.S. Navy gets its way.

The sea-faring branch of the U.S. armed forces plans to hold live-fire, anti-submarine war games along the coastline.

"The Navy has the title requirement to train its sailors and airmen before they go into harm's way," said U.S Navy spoke person Kimberly Kler.

Not surprisingly, area environmental activists are making a stand against the Navy's proposed plans.

"The effects could be irreversible, and that's something we're not willing to allow," said Hawk Rosales of the Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council.

Recently peace activists delivered to Mendocino County Congressman Mike Thompson petitions signed by many opposed to the war games.

"We collected thousands and thousands of signatures protesting the Navy's attempts to militarize the ocean," said Judith Vidiver of the Ocean Protection Coalition.
Naval War Games Threaten Traquility On Lost Coast - News Story - KTVU San Francisco

The Navy acknowledges more than a half million marine mammals -- mostly whales and dolphins -- could be harmed by explosions and especially by sonar. But environmentalists say the true numbers could be as high as 11 million, even when warships are miles away.

"This technology is known to severely impact marine mammals, easily tens of miles away," said Michael Jasny of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

There were two public hearings held to discuss the subject. Both were barely attended.

Critics say the public hearings were disingenuous and that the Navy was really trying to fly under the radar, employing a kind of stealth maneuver to avoid public scrutiny. Activists say the Navy will not get away with it.

It was truly appalling, said Mendocino resident Meredith Smith. "It had so many frightening aspects and no real information."

Another Mendocino resident, Ron Eich, agreed: "I'm hoping there's going to be more information made available before a decision's made."

Activist Rosalind Peterson pored over the Navy's thousand-page environmental impact statement and raised the alarm.

"I think that everyone along the way kept quiet about this; hoping it would go through without us really knowing and having a voice in the process," said Peterson

The Navy says it wants to expand its anti submarine warfare training because of a growing threat from small, stealthy submarines that run quietly on diesel or advanced non-nuclear power.

40 countries from China to Chile and even Iran now operate such submarines.

"That is…one of the reasons why we train and [a reason] we need to train with sonar," said Navy spokesperson Kler. "To detect diesel submarines."

The Navy says it plans lookouts to watch for marine mammals.

"We are in compliance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act and under consultation with national marine fisheries service," defended Kler.

In fact, the Navy says it will scale down exercises when animals are spotted. Environmentalists call that mitigation “laughably inadequate.”

"The only effective mitigation currently known is for the Navy to stay out of areas that are particularly biologically important," said Jasny. "And that they have refused to do."

Another concern that has arisen is the question of who will clean up leftover chemicals, depleted uranium and shell casings produced by the war games that will pollute the sea.

"When you're dropping bombs and missiles in the ocean, it's impractical to talk about clean up," said Mendocino County Supervisor John McCowan. "That's really the heart of my concern; the uranium and shell casings produced by the war games that will pollute the sea."

"When does it stop, this intrusion from outsiders?" asked Stevenson. "This is our land; always has been."

Hawk Rosales of the Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council promises civil disobedience.

"All people have the responsibility to be the caretaker for Mother Earth," said Rosales.
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