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Navy gives public more comment time

By **MONICA KRAUTH** The Daily Journal
Posted: 03/19/2009 12:06:05 AM PDT

The public comment period for a U.S. Navy testing program in the Pacific Ocean has been extended to April 13 to allow for additional input. Because of the continued public interest, the Navy extended the period for comments on the Northwest Training Complex Draft Environmental Impact Statement one month beyond March 11. Because the period would end on a weekend, the public comment period is extended through April 13.

The DEIS examines the potential environmental effects of the Navy's proposal for expanding ocean and land-based operations by conducting underwater demolitions, electronic communications and testing explosives and surveillance systems.

The extension came to light last week after residents in potentially affected areas wrote letters and spoke to Congressman Mike Thompson (D-Napa Valley) about their concerns. In a statement released Tuesday from Washington D.C., Thompson said, "I'm pleased that after I met with the Navy, they agreed to extend the public comment period and allow everyone more time to weigh in. The Navy will come to Mendocino and hold a public meeting to hear concerns and answer questions from the community. I've asked the Navy and fishing organizations to look more closely at the impact this proposal will have on ocean wildlife and fishing families."

Just days before March 11, Thompson told KZYX that he is "opposed to what the Navy is trying to do unless they can prove it's not going to be a problem for the fisheries."

Capt. Tim

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Gillespie, who fishes out of Noyo Harbor, said Tuesday that he knows Thompson personally and that he has confidence the elected official would protect the fisheries. "Anything will concern me if it's an impact on fishing, especially on the whale migration," Gillespie said.

According to a Feb. 13 article in the Oregon newspaper, the Newport News-Times, the Navy's tactics worry fishermen. One of the skippers quoted found a "piece of naval detritus his crew hauled in during a recent sojourn at sea. They're not exactly sure what the three-foot-plus, barnacle-encrusted aluminum canister is, but speculation, based on serial, bar code and other numbers from it range from a mortar casing to an aircraft cylinder used to launch missiles."

The article goes on to say that the "Navy junk gets tangled in the trawl nets and it can, depending on shape and size, wreak havoc with nets and other equipment. Other Navy activities can have more dire consequences."

The range complex extends westward in the Pacific Ocean (to 250 nautical miles beyond the coast of Washington, Oregon and Northern California) and east to Idaho.

Public safety issues, that the site lists, include: "potential hazards inherent in flight activities, vessel movements, underwater detonations, offshore use of sonar, and onshore explosives training."

For more information, contact Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest 1101 Taulog Circle Ste. 203; Silverdale, WA 98315 Attn. Kimberly Kler. To submit comments online, visit: www.nwtrangecomplexeis.com.

Monica Krauth can be reached at udfeatures@pacific.net.

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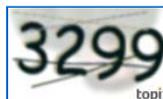
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