Navy Agrees to Sonar System Restriction

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The Navy agreed in a settlement approved Tuesday to limit where it operates certain sonar systems criticized by environmentalists as a threat to whales and other marine mammals.

The settlement approved by a federal judge in San Francisco restricts the Navy’s use of low-frequency sonar to specific military training areas near Hawaii and in the western Pacific Ocean.

“Today’s agreement maintains the Navy’s ability to test and train while shielding whales and other vulnerable species from harmful underwater noise,” said Michael Jasny, a policy analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council, which was the lead plaintiff in the case.

In February, Magistrate Elizabeth Laporte found that low-frequency sonar blasted beneath the ocean’s surface to detect submarines threatened the animals’ ability to find food and avoid predators.

In a separate case, the Navy is asking the Supreme Court to reconsider a federal appeals court ruling limiting the use of mid-frequency sonar in training exercises off the Southern California coast.

The Navy argues that the decision by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco threatens the readiness of sailors and marines while providing limited environmental benefit.