The Navy’s An Equal Opportunity Deployer: Deadly Sonar Training Slated to Span Both East and West Coasts

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After posting my blog yesterday on the Navy's Northwest Training Range Complex, several people voiced concerns about similarly worrisome sonar training on the East Coast. People should be concerned. Here's what's happening.

NRDC is mobilizing activists to protest recent rules that would allow the Navy to "take" - harass, injure and kill - marine mammals more than two million times per year in its Hawaii and California ranges, as well as along the entire Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico. Click here to send a message to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) urging it to revise its dangerous rules. Your message will be copied to the White House and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), which issues the sonar rules for the Navy.

These rules are staggering in scope! The most shocking is the Navy's Atlantic Fleet Active Sonar Training (AFAST), which would allow dangerous mid-frequency active sonar exercises to occur over millions of square nautical miles along the entire East Coast and Gulf of Mexico. By the Navy's own estimates (which dramatically underestimate actual harm to marine mammals), these exercises will harass marine mammals almost two million times each year - and almost ten million times over the course of the five-year permit. The Navy would use the same sonar technology that has been implicated in mass injuries and mortalities of marine mammals around the world, without putting into place any meaningful safeguards to protect marine mammals.

NRDC is also fighting the Navy's proposed Undersea Warfare Training Range (USWTR) off the coast of Florida. The Navy plans to build a 500-square-mile sonar testing ground - with over 470 exercises slated for each year - off Jacksonville, Florida. Unfortunately, the proposed site is located next to designated critical habitat for the highly endangered North Atlantic right whale. This critical habitat is the only known calving ground for the approximately 300 remaining North Atlantic right whales. North Atlantic right whales have been hunted nearly to extinction (because of their slow movements and time spent near the surface of the water they were known by early whalers as the "right" whale to kill). Even NOAA has concluded that the "loss of even a single individual right whale may contribute to the extinction of the species." Yet the Navy wants to build a sonar training range right next to their only calving ground. Click here to read our letter urging NMFS to deny the Navy's request.

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