

03.28.17

Kilmer Presses Navy for Answers on Impacts of Training Missions on Olympic Peninsula

TACOMA, WA – Today, Representative Derek Kilmer (WA-06) pressed the Navy for answers on the impacts of training missions on the Olympic Peninsula. In a letter to Sean Stackley, Acting Secretary of the Navy, Kilmer asked for further clarification on recent activity near Olympic National Park and surrounding communities.

In a series of questions to the Navy, Kilmer asked how public comments were incorporated into the environmental review for projects like Growler flights and electronic range testing. He also questioned whether the Navy has worked with other agencies to most effectively measure how much jet noise can be heard on the Olympic Peninsula.

Kilmer wrote in the letter: *“Given your agency’s mission, I request assistance in further understanding your recent and ongoing efforts impacting Washington’s Sixth Congressional District. Like many of my neighbors, I want my kids, and their kids to enjoy the pristine environment that I have been privileged to experience.”*

Full text of the letter follows.

March 27, 2017

Dear Secretary Stackley,

The United States Navy plays a critical role in protecting America’s safety and commerce. Given your agency’s mission, I request assistance in further understanding your recent and ongoing efforts impacting Washington’s Sixth Congressional District.

Like many of my neighbors, I want my kids, and their kids to enjoy the pristine environment that I have been privileged to experience. I am also passionate about supporting the men and women, both active and retired, who have committed themselves to military service. My interests in protecting our environment, maximizing public participation, and supporting our military service members are not mutually exclusive. Similarly, I believe that the missions of the Department of the Navy and federal agencies that protect and manage natural and cultural resources do not conflict with each other on all counts.

In line with my oversight responsibilities and in order to respond to requests I have received from constituents, I would appreciate responses to the additional following questions:

- *Of the recent environmental reviews in addressing proposed action impacting Washington’s Sixth Congressional District (EIS for EA-18G Growler Airfield Operations at NAS Whidbey Island and OLF Coupeville, and the EIS for Northwest Training and*

Testing (NWTT), and the Environmental Assessment for Electronic Warfare Range), have they all had public comment periods? Have any of the reviews included steps that skipped public comment periods where required by law, regulation, or practice?

- Has the Navy modified the EA-18G Growler Airfield Operations at NAS Whidbey Island and OLF Coupeville, the Northwest Training and Testing (NWTT), and Electronic Warfare Range projects following the receipt of public comments? If so, please share which proposed actions were modified and how.*
- May you please share with me a copy of the Department of Defense –United States Department of Agriculture 1988 Master Agreement which outlines the responsibilities of both agencies in the planning of activities on National Forest System lands?*
- Is the Navy required under the 1988 Master Agreement to substantiate the need for Defense Department use of non-military lands by providing the public with a report that DOD-owned lands are unsuitable or unavailable? If so, how was this requirement fulfilled for the proposed electronic warfare training project?*
- We have heard claims that the number of EA-18G aircraft may be increased to 160. Is this true? If so, what is the schedule for increasing the number to this level over time?*
- What specific reasons dictate the Navy using the Military Operational Areas (MOAs) over the Olympic Peninsula instead of others in the region? Specifically, for the electronic warfare range proposal, what is the rationale for choosing this region?*
- I have been told in the past that the vast majority of training flights in the MOAs over the Olympic Peninsula should occur over 10,000 feet. What specific reasons require the Navy to conduct flights over within the MOAs under 10,000 feet above ground level?*
- How do pilots know that they are flying within the boundaries of a Military Operational Area?*
- Have the geographic boundaries of Military Operational Areas ever been modified? If so, what is the process to consider changes?*
- We have heard that there may be a “Phase Three” Environmental Impact Statement regarding the Northwest Training and Testing Project. Is this true? If so, when would the public be notified?*
- How has the Navy measured noise and its impact on natural resources and the communities within Washington’s Sixth Congressional District? To what extent do the Navy’s methods predict and or document expected impacts to specific communities and geographic regions?*

In order to maximize the success of all federal agencies and ensure effective governance, it is in our nation’s best interest for the Navy to work cooperatively with its federal partners. As a

member of the House Appropriations Committee approaching the Fiscal Year 2018 budget cycle, it is important that I understand how the Navy is working with other federal agencies in my community. I therefore request your assistance with answering the following questions:

- Has the Navy received requests for information regarding their current and planned activities in the Puget Sound Region throughout the past few years from other federal agencies? If so, has the Navy provided the requested information? If not, why not?*
- Does the Navy utilize standards used by your other federal agencies for environmental reviews? If not, what standards are different and how does that impact results and your agency's mission?*
- Did the Navy proactively reached out to the Environmental Protection Agency, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the National Park Service to participate as cooperating agencies in the EIS for EA-18G Growler Airfield Operations at NAS Whidbey Island and OLF Coupeville, the EIS for Northwest Training and Testing (NWTT), and the Environmental Assessment for Electronic Warfare Range?*
- To what extent have other federal agencies expressed interest in acting as cooperating agencies for the EIS for EA-18G Growler Airfield Operations at NAS Whidbey Island and OLF Coupeville, the EIS for Northwest Training and Testing (NWTT), and the Environmental Assessment for Electronic Warfare Range?*
- Has the Navy met all consultation requirements when processing the projects listed above?*
- What requests has the Navy received from the Environmental Protection Agency, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the National Park Service to modify the projects listed above and which requests have been adopted?*
- What processes does the EPA utilize to ensure that the communications it has and decisions it makes with other federal agencies are coordinated and concurred with your staff at the local, regional, and national level?*

As you know, the National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to share environmental reviews with state and local governments and the public. I appreciate the efforts that the Navy has taken to fulfill this obligation. In order to further improve the navy's effort in this regard, I would appreciate the Department's consideration of the following requests:

- Would the Navy review and revise the current policy on environmental planning to encourage the Department to notify federal agencies and the public as early in the process as practicable to support their participation?*

- *Would the Navy facilitate question and answer sessions at public engagement sessions on proposed actions?*
- *Would the Navy work with Congressional offices to identify community news outlets prior to the publication of public notices?*
- *If there are no (or few) public comments, would the Navy consider extending the public comment period?*

Again, I appreciate your assistance with this request and look forward to reviewing your response before budget hearings pertaining to the FY 18 appropriations cycle occur.

Sincerely,

Derek Kilmer

US Representative