

Olympic National Park

Hear Our Olympics

Fighter jet noise over Olympic National Park is drowning out natural sounds.

What Nature Sounds Like

The wild Olympic Peninsula is like nowhere else. Its special qualities have been recognized as a national park, wilderness area, International Biosphere Reserve, and World Heritage Site. Twenty-four species of plants and animals are found only here.

The peninsula is also “the most acoustically diverse” and “least noise polluted” place in the Lower 48 states, according to local resident and natural sound expert Gordon Hempton. With ocean surf, lush forests, high mountain meadows with whistling marmots, bugling Roosevelt elk, and flowing rivers it offers a wide range of experiences, habitats – and sounds. This place is the epitome of what the natural world sounds like.

According to a 1994 National Park Service report to Congress, an impressive 91 percent of visitors to national parks come to enjoy the natural soundscapes. Olympic National Park is also the most popular national park in the Northwest, with over 3 million visitors in 2015. The park’s well-known Hoh Rain Forest and wilderness coast are used year-round.

“Olympic National Park is the best natural area in the entire Pacific Northwest... it is unmatched in the world.” International Union for Conservation of Nature, 1981 World Heritage nomination

Some of the Loudest Aircraft in the World

As remote as the Olympic Peninsula is, it is within minutes of Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, which has served as a military airbase since World War II. More recently, NAS Whidbey Island has become home to squadrons of EA-18G “Growlers,” so-called because of the deep, cacophonous roar made by their powerful engines. In a 2009 report on Jet Engine Noise Reduction, the U.S. Naval Research Advisory Committee identified these Growlers as some of the loudest aircraft in the skies.

Growlers and similar aircraft can create sounds so loud that they can damage hearing in people nearby. In fact, the Navy has identified hearing loss as the top occupational health hazard for its sailors.

The Navy has recently based more than 80 Growlers at NAS Whidbey Island, with more planned to come. The Navy proposes to increase fighter jet training over and around Olympic National Park. This will include parking trucks at up to 15 sites on surrounding roads to broadcast electromagnetic signals at the warplanes.

Hoh Rainforest
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Navy EA-18G “Growler” Jet.
Courtesy of US Navy, Paul Farley



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Olympic airspace is a choice, not a necessity

Unfortunately, the training will affect some of the most popular wilderness, trails and visitor centers of Olympic National Park, including the famous Hoh Rain Forest and spectacular wilderness beaches. This is not the only place available to the Navy, but it's the closest to their runways on Whidbey Island.

Currently the Navy does similar training at Mountain Home Air Force Base in southern Idaho, not far away for a fighter jet. There are other airbases and military airspace available to them, too. According to the Navy's own analysis, using the Olympics is a convenience and not essential for their training needs.

Save the sounds of the Olympics

NPCA recognizes Olympic National Park and its wild surroundings as a unique natural heritage. The park is a sanctuary, offering peace, solitude and the opportunity to enjoy natural quiet and the sounds of nature. Visitors and residents alike value its peacefulness and wild character. Navy jet training can and should be done elsewhere; this place is too special to degrade and one of the few places in the Lower 48 states where natural sounds still prevail. To protect the natural sounds of Olympic National Park, NPCA is launching a campaign called *Hear Our Olympics*.

Have you heard the jets? Tell us your story by emailing northwest@npca.org.

Take action! Ask the National Park Service to certify Olympic National Park as a "Quiet Park."

Contact: Olympic National Park
Superintendent Sarah Creachbaum
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“How often we speak of the great silences of the wilderness and the importance of preserving them... their beauty may not change, but should their silences be broken, they will never be the same.”

Sigurd Olsen, 1958