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January 13, 2017

Objection Reviewing Officer  
Reta Laford  
Olympic National Forest  
1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW  
Olympia, WA 98512

**RE: OBJECTION Pacific Northwest Electronic Warfare Range**

Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218, Wilderness Watch objects to the Draft Decision Notice (DDN) issued by District Ranger Dean Millet, Pacific Ranger District, Olympic National Forest, for the Pacific Northwest Electronic Warfare Range.

Pursuant to Part 218, Wilderness Watch is the lead objector. Contact Person: Gary Macfarlane. The full objection and attachments/ references are attached on the CARA site.

Wilderness Watch filed comments on the scoping letter. If you would like to discuss the issues raised in our objection with us, we would welcome the opportunity to meet via phone conference.

Sincerely,

Gary Macfarlane  
Board Member  
gary@wildrockies.org  
(208)-882-9755

## **The DDN and EA Inadequately Analyze Impacts to Wilderness in Violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wilderness Act**

In our comments we noted:

*The EA does not discuss the impacts of this proposal on the Olympic Wilderness (Olympic National Park), the Colonel Bob Wilderness, Washington Islands Wilderness, the Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness or the Pasayten Wilderness. All five of these Wildernesses are within, or partially within, the MOAs outlined in the EA (see figures 1.3-1 and 1.3-2).*

*Furthermore, the EA does not analyze whether flight paths would go outside of the MOAs. Given the location of the bases, the flights would have to go outside the MOAs. Thus, additional Wildernesses would likely be affected. The Stephen Mather, Glacier Peak, Mount Baker, Noisy Diobsud, Boulder River, Henry M Jackson, Wild Sky, Alpine Lakes and San Juan Islands Wildernesses could be affected.*

*The EA only says this about the topic:*

*Noise-sensitive areas are those areas where noise interferes with normal activities associated with its use. Normally, noise-sensitive areas include residential, educational, health, religious structures and sites, parks, recreational areas (including areas with wilderness characteristics), wildlife refuges, and cultural and historical sites. In the context of facilities and equipment, noise-sensitive areas may include such sites in the immediate vicinity of operations, pursuant to the Noise Control Act of 1972. Users of designated recreational areas are considered sensitive receptors.*

*There is no site-specific analysis of noise or any other impacts, either from the planes and how they may operate differently for this project, or from the emitters, some of which would be stationed near Wilderness. The only mention is of recreation areas which may have wilderness characteristics. Even if this is an erroneous conflation of recreational areas with Wilderness, it is not an analysis the impacts to Wilderness or wilderness character. Indeed, the Wildernesses affected in the MOAs are not even mentioned by name. The EA contains no analysis of Wilderness. Thus, the EA fails to comply with the Wilderness Act and NEPA.*

The wilderness analysis (including impacts to wilderness character) in the EA is not even an afterthought. The word wilderness is only mentioned 3 times in the EA: 1) page 3.2-13, the Salmo Priest Wilderness which is in northeastern Washington in context of caribou, 2) page 3.3-3 in context of areas with wilderness characteristics (see our comment quoted above), and 3) wilderness protection plans in context of a coalition in northeastern Washington. Nowhere is it recognized the Colonel Bob Wilderness is within the MOA. The document is inadequate. Not only is that a serious omission in terms of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis, the EA and DDN fail to recognize the Forest Service's duty to protect Wilderness. The first sentence of Section 2(a) of the 1964 Act describes the purpose of the Act:

*In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural*

*condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness. For this purpose there is hereby established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally owned areas designated by Congress as "wilderness areas", and these shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character, and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness; and no Federal lands shall be designated as "wilderness areas" except as provided for in this Act or by a subsequent Act.*

In brief that purpose is to keep some areas unoccupied and unmodified. And this protection is for present and future generations--for all time--in perpetuity. Congress identified a new resource--the resource of wilderness.

Further Congress defined wilderness in section 2(c) as a place "in contrast" to areas where humans and their works dominate, "where the earth and community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Thus, there is a clear intention that Wilderness must remain in contrast to modern civilization, its technologies, conventions, and contrivances. Indeed, there is the mandate to preserve wilderness in perpetuity.

In response to our comments, there is simply the contention that the Navy in the EA determined that it would have no impact on small wilderness. On the face of it, such a conclusion is absurd, given the fact the EA does not specifically analyze the Colonel Bob Wilderness (or other wildernesses within other MOAs). In any case, military jets flying at low elevations have a tremendous impact on the Wilderness and those in it. There are two key points the EA and DDN fail to address:

- The Navy has no authority over or expertise in wilderness administration or wilderness stewardship. The deference given to this conclusion in the Forest Service's DDN suggests that agency had little or no involvement in preparation of the EA.
- Even if the Forest Service was fully consulted and made the erroneous and unsupported findings in the EA, the Forest Service knows full well that artificial sounds have an impact on wilderness character. The Forest Service's own document, *Keeping It Wild 2: An Updated Interagency Strategy to Monitor Trends in Wilderness Character Across the National Wilderness Preservation System* (Landres et al. 2015, see Attachment 1) has an indicator of *Remoteness from sights and sounds of human activity outside the wilderness*. Also, wilderness.net, the website for agency wilderness professionals has extensive documentation on the impact of sound on Wilderness <http://www.wilderness.net/sound#> There is a long history of the importance of natural soundscapes in Wilderness documented in the Attachment 1 and on the wilderness.net website. There is also case law requiring the Forest Service to evaluate the impact on Wilderness of a snowmobile trail on the border of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Furthermore, the EA conflates the impacts of supersonic military aircraft with high altitude

commercial air traffic. The intensity of the sound, including sonic booms is much greater for the military aircraft. They planes when flying over Wilderness will likely be lower than 2,000 feet above the Wilderness (see Attachments 1, 2 also found at <http://www.wilderness.net/nwps/manageIssuesPCUaircraft> and Attachment 3). This is not adequately evaluated. With virtually no analysis of the impacts to Wilderness, the DDN and EA violate the Wilderness Act and NEPA.

Remedies:

Do not issue the special use permit.

Prepare an adequate NEPA document (EIS) that considers the impacts to Wilderness.

Work with the Navy, the National Park Service, other national forests and the FAA to come up with changes in the plan to reduce impacts to Wilderness.

### **Need for an EIS**

The finding of no significant impact (FONSI) makes no mention of Wilderness, although the Colonel Bob Wilderness is clearly within the MOA. However, Figure 1.3-2 of the EA does not delineate the boundary of the Wilderness nor does it delineate the boundary of Olympic National Park. The failure of the FONSI to recognize that the Wilderness is within the MOA goes to the significance issue. Had that been recognized, a FONSI would not have likely been possible. An EIS must be prepared to consider the impacts on Wilderness.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, there is case law requiring the preparation of an EIS for the impacts on a snowmobile trail very close to the boundary of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The Forest Service cannot let an inadequate EA, prepared by the Navy, which does not address Wilderness, substitute for a necessary EIS.

Remedy:

If the project is to be pursued, prepare an EIS that adequately looks at the impacts to Wilderness and other resources, in conjunction with other federal agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> The impact on the Olympic National Park, including the designated wilderness, also points to the need for an EIS. That is why we strongly suggest the Forest Service coordinate with other federal agencies on preparation of such a document if the project goes forward.