



Growler Aircraft Operations at NAS Whidbey Island and OLF Coupeville



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Naval Air Station Whidbey Island Complex

The Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island complex has two airfields: Ault Field and Outlying Landing Field (OLF) Coupeville.

- **Ault Field** is located in Oak Harbor, Washington, on the main NAS Whidbey Island installation. It is a busy, multiple-mission airfield with numerous types of aircraft conducting both training and routine operations.
- **OLF Coupeville** is located approximately 11 miles south of Ault Field in Coupeville, Washington, and is used primarily for a specific type of aircraft training operation called "Field Carrier Landing Practice," or FCLP.

One of the missions of the NAS Whidbey Island complex is to support aviator training for the airborne electronic attack mission and to operate from either an aircraft carrier or from land bases. NAS Whidbey Island is the primary home for the Department of Defense (DOD) tactical electronic attack community in the United States. Navy electronic attack squadrons are designated as "VAQ squadrons," and NAS Whidbey Island has supported the VAQ community for more than 40 years.

NAS Whidbey Island supports many other aircraft and their respective missions. Routine training for many types of aircraft are conducted at Ault Field, including:

- EA-18G Growler,
- P-3 Orion, which will be replaced by the P-8 Poseidon beginning in 2016,
- H-60 Seahawk,
- C-40 Clipper, and
- transient aircraft.

Additionally, cargo and passenger aircraft-loading and transit also occur at Ault Field with C-5, C-17, and C-130 aircraft. The station also has three search and rescue helicopters that operate and train here to support the EA-18G Growler aircraft units.



The VAQ Mission and Growler Presence at NAS Whidbey Island

The Navy's electronic attack aircraft have been single-sited at NAS Whidbey since the 1970s. The mission of the Navy's electronic attack aircraft is to suppress enemy air defenses and communications systems. Additionally, Navy electronic attack aircraft disrupt enemy land mines and improvised explosive devices in order to protect the lives of U.S. service members. The Navy was directed to assume the airborne tactical electronic attack mission for all of the DOD. This mission was formerly shared by the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps and will now be carried out solely by the Navy with the EA-18G Growler aircraft.

Currently, nine carrier squadrons (Carrier Air Wing), four expeditionary squadrons (three active squadrons and one reserve squadron), and one training squadron (Fleet Replacement Squadron) are at NAS Whidbey Island, for a total of 82 operational aircraft. The carrier and expeditionary squadrons have similar missions but differ in where they deploy and how they train before deployment.

- **Carrier squadrons** deploy on aircraft carriers and conduct periodic FCLP training to qualify to land on aircraft carriers.
- **Expeditionary squadrons** deploy to land-based locations and therefore do not normally require FCLP training prior to deployment.
- **Training squadrons** provide initial qualification training, including FCLP for all first-tour EA- EA-18G Growler aviators, and refresher training for EA-18G aircrew returning to a squadron after non-flying assignments.

The transition of VAQ squadrons from the legacy EA-6B to the new EA-18G began in 2008 and will be completed by 2016. The last EA-6B squadron (VAQ-134) completed its last deployment in November 2014 aboard the USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH.



OLF Coupeville and Field Carrier Landing Practice

Why does the Navy need OLF Coupeville?

Aviator training at NAS Whidbey Island relies on two airfields to support air operations—Ault Field and OLF Coupeville. OLF Coupeville was designed in 1943 for pilots to train to land on an aircraft carrier, and it provides the most realistic training for FCLP.

The Navy's OLF in Coupeville is designed and very well suited for FCLP operations. It is close to its home base, which maximizes training while keeping costs down; it is located in an area with low-density development; it has very little ambient light, which allows aviators to closely replicate the way landings are conducted aboard a carrier at night; and training at OLF Coupeville allows the Navy to conduct daily operations in less time—thereby reducing impacts to the local community. Although FCLP operations can be (and are) conducted at Ault Field, FCLP operations at Ault Field are conducted at the expense of other aircraft missions. When FCLP operations are flown at Ault Field, all other flights and aircraft training there are restricted or delayed.

Why is FCLP essential?

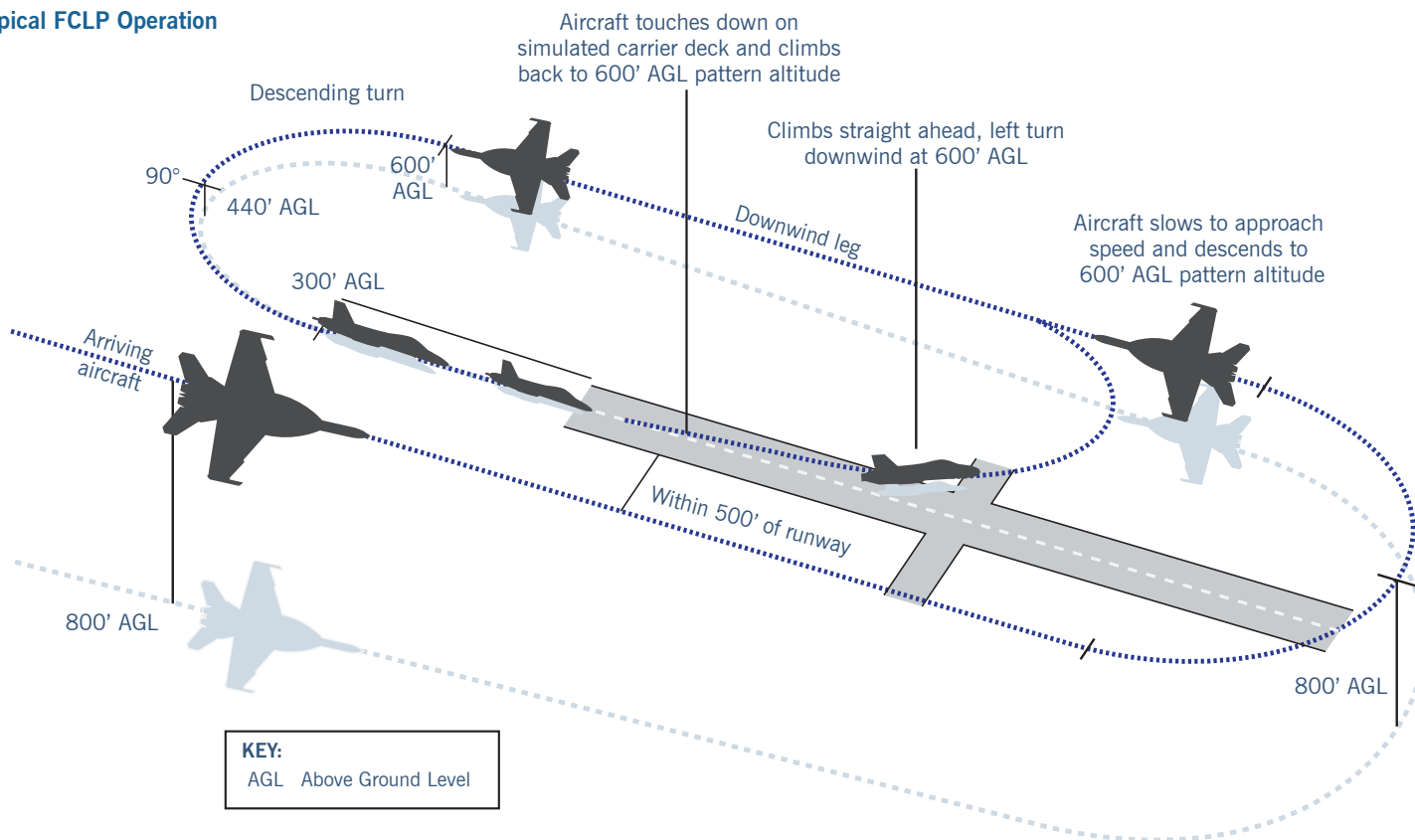
Landing on an aircraft carrier is one of the most difficult and dangerous tasks a Navy pilot must do, and FCLP training is critical in preparing pilots for landing on aircraft carriers. FCLP operations are intended to teach proper carrier landing techniques on shore, where the risks can be safely managed, before conducting operations at the aircraft carrier.

For an aviator training and qualifying to land on an aircraft carrier, there is simply no substitute for conducting training in a real aircraft in real airspace. After decades of perfecting the art of landing on an aircraft carrier, the Navy has learned how to best prepare pilots for this very demanding task, and it believes it has achieved the right mix of simulated and live training. While the Navy does use simulated training extensively, and this training is extremely valuable, it cannot replace the feel and the physiological conditions experienced through live training.

How often do aircraft conduct FCLP operations?

Operations at OLF Coupeville are cyclical and tied to aircraft carrier schedules. Generally, FCLP training occurs in concentrated periods followed by periods of little to no operations. Concentrated FCLP training periods occur for a squadron prior to a carrier's at-sea period. FCLP may also occur if the Navy is required to surge multiple aircraft carriers and carrier air wings in response to emergent operations throughout the world. This surge would be followed, however, by a reduction in operations while forces are deployed.

Typical FCLP Operation



The Navy's Proposed Action

Proposed Action

The Navy began the planning process in early 2013 to analyze the impacts associated with the potential addition of up to 36 EA-18G Growler aircraft at the NAS Whidbey Island complex. This includes stationing additional personnel and their families in the surrounding community to support the additional aircraft.

While Congress may ultimately purchase more than 36 aircraft, not all aircraft purchased would be operational at NAS Whidbey. Non-operational aircraft include those used for tests and tactics development elsewhere and aircraft that are not operating because they are undergoing major maintenance. The number of back-up and attrition reserve aircraft at a particular location varies depending on maintenance and delivery schedules.

With additional aircraft, the Navy would need to conduct more aircrew training, which would result in more Growler operations. This requires that the Navy analyze this increase in operations and the distribution of operations between Ault Field and OLF Coupeville.

The EIS scope will analyze impacts from multiple alternatives for operating the Growler inventory out of NAS Whidbey Island. The alternatives include variations of the following factors that will determine aircrew training requirements:

- Total number of aircraft that would operate from NAS Whidbey Island
- Number of aircraft assigned per squadron
- Number of land-based squadrons
- The distribution of aircraft operations between Ault Field and OLF Coupeville.

Why is the Navy proposing this action?

The threat from potential adversaries has grown increasingly sophisticated as electronic technology becomes more readily available. In response, the DOD has identified an increased need for tactical electronic attack aircraft to address potential future needs and requirements.



EA-18G Growler

OLF Coupeville



Ault Field



Assessing Noise

What is noise?

Noise is defined as unwanted sound that interferes with normal activities. The Navy is conducting a noise assessment of current and proposed future operations at NAS Whidbey Island and OLF Coupeville as part of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The study will use the best available and accepted science to analyze aircraft noise.

How is noise assessed?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and DOD measure aircraft operational noise levels in decibels (dB) using two federally accepted and standard metrics: the Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) and the Sound Exposure Level (SEL).

DNL represents the average sound energy of events over a 24-hour period, with a 10-dB penalty added to nighttime (10:00 pm to 7:00 am) operations. This 10-dB penalty accounts for the added intrusiveness of noise when background noise levels are low and noise-sensitive activities, such as sleep, are taking place. DNL takes into account all of the factors that influence our perception of noise in an average day including loudness, number and duration of events, and time of day.

SEL represents the total noise energy of a single event, such as a flyover, as if it occurred in one second. This metric combines the loudness and duration of the event.

Supplemental noise metrics are used to provide a better understanding of noise exposure and compatible land uses around airfields. Supplemental noise metrics evaluate annoyance, speech interference, sleep disturbance, the potential for noise-induced hearing loss, and non-auditory health effects of noise.

How is noise modeled?

Noise is modeled using a computer program called NOISEMAP, which is the primary noise-modeling program used by the DOD to predict cumulative noise around airfields. The NOISEMAP modeling program calculates noise contours resulting from aircraft operations and illustrates where aircraft noise occurs and its sound level.

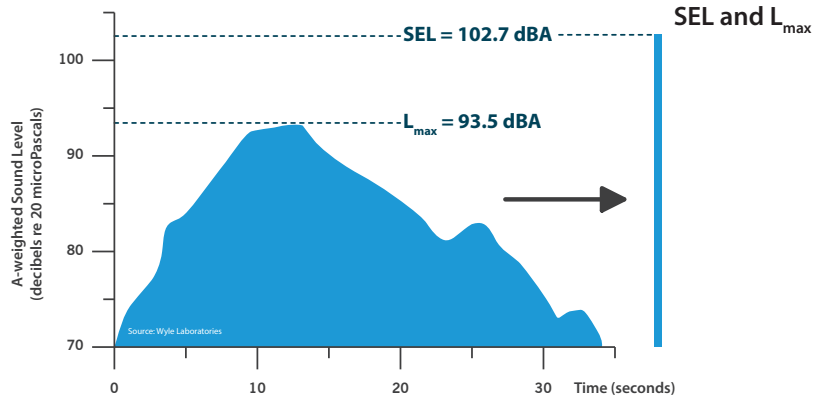
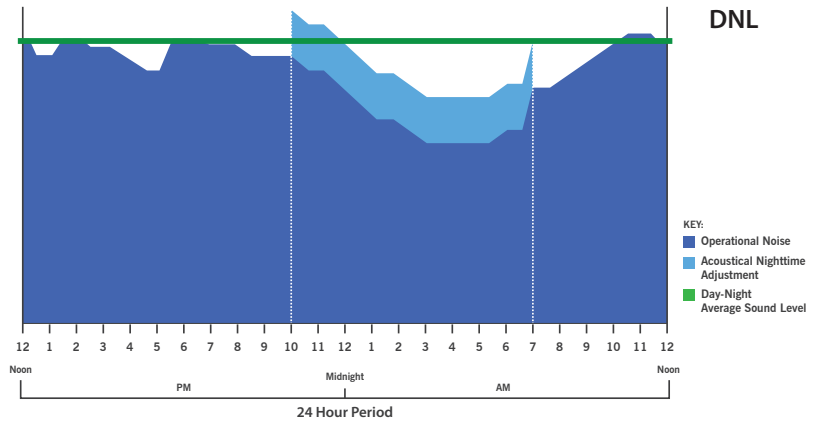
Computer noise modeling is the federally accepted standard. Modeling allows planners to analyze noise impacts to an entire community because noise impacts vary due to a wide range of factors that would be very difficult to duplicate using real aircraft. These factors include the type of aircraft, number of operations, flight tracks, altitude, power settings, speed of the aircraft, terrain, temperature, and relative humidity. Engine maintenance testing is also included in the modeling. Results are presented on maps in the form of DNL noise contours. Noise modeling is the most accurate method for estimating total aircraft noise.

What's the noise profile for the EA-18G Growler?

The EA-18G Growler noise profile is based on extensive noise measurements taken from actual FA-18E/F Super Hornets (both in flight and on the ground) because the EA-18G was derived directly from the FA-18F Super Hornet, a proven aircraft platform. They share the same airframe and engine, and have approximately the same in-flight weight.

In order to properly compare noise levels between the EA-6B Prowler and the EA-18G Growler, extensive noise analysis of the EA-6B Prowler was completed in 2003 to ensure the Navy had updated measurements. With updated reference noise data available, an operational noise comparison between the EA-6B and EA-18G was conducted for NAS Whidbey Island and OLF Coupeville in May 2004. This study evaluated and compared the noise modeled from normal flight operations and ground run-ups of the EA-6B and EA-18G. Flight operations included departures, arrivals, FCLP operations, and ground control approach (GCA) box patterns (a radar or "talk down" approach directed from air traffic control). For this 2004 study, it was assumed that no net change in the number of flight operations would exist between the two variants of aircraft. Despite what is believed by some, the comparisons of sound levels clearly demonstrated that the EA-18G generated less flight noise than the EA-6B. This noise reduction is driven by the better flight characteristics of the EA-18G. While the two aircraft sound different, the EA-18G has similar or lower sound levels (2 to 8 dB SEL lower) under most conditions, and the EA-18G climbs away from the ground more quickly than the EA-6B.

Additionally, the EA-6B Prowler is a very old aircraft. As a result, the EA-6B requires significantly more maintenance actions and more ground maintenance run-ups, and produces more noise events than the EA-18G. Since the EA-18G is a new aircraft and requires less maintenance, it also requires fewer ground run-ups, resulting in fewer noise impacts to the community.



L_{max} , or maximum instantaneous sound level, is the highest A-weighted sound level measured during a single event and is used to assess the potential for speech and classroom learning interference.

National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires all federal agencies, including the Navy, to ensure decision-makers consider potential environmental effects of a proposed action, consider reasonable alternatives to accomplishing the proposed action, promote transparency by informing the public of these potential environmental effects, and provide for public comment.

- Each NEPA document addresses a specific proposed action, separated from other actions by its purpose and need, independent utility, timing, and geographic location.
- Some NEPA documents are stand-alone documents; others tier off and/or expand the analyses of other NEPA documents.
- NEPA documents for training (e.g., *the Northwest Training and Testing EIS*) focus on training activities occurring within a range complex or military operation area and involve different types of aircraft, ships, and range-complex enhancements.
- NEPA documents for aircraft home basing actions (e.g., *the EA-18G Growler EIS*) focus on aircraft operations in and around the airfield and facility needs.
- NEPA documents for installations focus on infrastructure enhancements for host and tenant command missions.
- Every environmental document considers the cumulative impacts to the environment from other relevant past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (federal, state, local, and private) in addition to the proposed action.

Ongoing Growler Environmental Impact Statement

In September 2013, the Navy announced the preparation of the EA-18G Growler EIS to evaluate the environmental and human health impacts of the proposed home basing of additional EA-18G aircraft at NAS Whidbey Island. The public was invited to participate in the NEPA process by submitting comments to define the scope of the Draft EIS analysis in 2013, and again in 2014 when the project's scope was updated.

The EIS will analyze impacts from multiple alternatives for operating the EA-18G Growler inventory from the NAS Whidbey Island complex. The alternatives include variations in the total number of aircraft that will be operational at NAS Whidbey Island, the number of aircraft assigned per squadron, the number of expeditionary squadrons, and the distribution of aircraft operations between Ault Field and OLF Coupeville. The EIS will study the impacts to the community from noise and impacts to biological and natural resources, cultural resources, air quality, and safety, among other topics. Additionally, community impacts such as land use compatibility, growth, and socioeconomic conditions will be evaluated.

The Draft EIS is expected to be released in spring 2016 and is expected to be completed in the summer 2017.

Based on a 2004 Washington State study, NAS Whidbey Island accounts for more than 85 percent of all economic activity in Island County, with 68 percent of all jobs on Whidbey Island directly or indirectly tied to the station. The EIS will describe the economic impact of the proposed action, including the construction/renovation of facilities at Ault Field, and stationing new personnel and their family members at NAS Whidbey Island and in the surrounding community.

Public input is an integral part of the EIS process. The public and agency stakeholders were invited to comment on the issues to be evaluated in the EIS during open houses held in October 2013, October 2014, and December 2014. The public will be able to review and comment on the Draft EIS in 2016.

Join the mailing list at www.whidbeyeis.com and click on Mailing List Sign-up.



Environmental Impact Statement Schedule



NAS Whidbey Island has worked with members of local communities, including homeowners and realtors, to improve understanding of the impacts that are an inherent part of aviation operations. Navy officials routinely meet with elected community officials, school representatives, and community organizations. NAS Whidbey Island frequently corresponds with numerous media outlets and utilizes social media, such as the station's Facebook page, to share flight schedules and other information and to solicit public feedback. Where possible and if weather conditions allow, station officials modify flight operations to minimize noise impacts, such as during weekends and during school exams. Additionally, NAS Whidbey Island holds an annual open house and hosts over 2,000 guests annually through a vibrant tour program. Officials also participate in monthly meetings with a variety of local businesses and organizations.

The following is a list of dedicated outreach efforts designed to improve understanding of the noise impacts that are an inherent part of airfield operations at NAS Whidbey Island and OLF Coupeville:



- Bi-annual briefings with community leaders from areas impacted by the station's operations or economic activity.
- Regular meetings with Coupeville's elected leaders about operations at OLF Coupeville.
- Engagement with local elected officials and community leaders from all communities around NAS Whidbey Island through the bi-annual Community Leadership Forum.
- NAS Whidbey Island's community planning liaison involvement in formulating a design forum for the building and real estate community to explore additional noise mitigation efforts.
- Attendance at the monthly Council of Government and Transportation Planning meetings.
- Participation in over 7,000 hours of community service activities, particularly through the installation's Partnership in Education Program.

OLF Coupeville Enhanced Engagement

NAS Whidbey Island officials remain engaged with Coupeville's elected officials and other members of the community, as they have been for decades. The Navy works with the Coupeville community in several different venues and implements recommendations arising from those discussions, such as publishing flight schedules and closures. In 2014, the Navy began sharing its weekly OLF Coupeville flight schedule with local media and posting it on the Navy's website and Facebook pages, and it created a telephone call-in line for those who have community noise concerns. The Navy's automated comment line provides the command's operations duty officers with an effective means of monitoring and tracking noise concerns.

Noise Concerns

NAS Whidbey Island's automated comment line (360-257-6665) represents an effort to improve service to local communities and enhance the Navy's focus on noise concerns. When the Navy receives a call expressing concern over noise or operations outside established flight tracks, officials investigate to determine whether Navy aircraft were operating that day and, if they were, whether they flew established flight tracks. The Navy works to ensure pilots adhere to flight tracks during ongoing and future operations.

Typical Flight Tracks at the NAS Whidbey Island Complex



Community Engagement (Cont.)

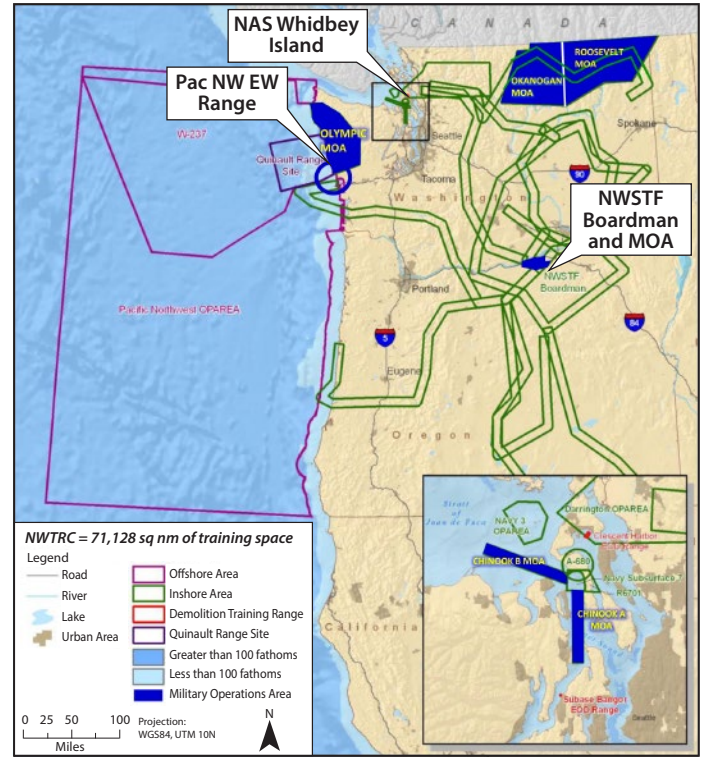
Environmental Impact Statement Public Outreach

For the ongoing EA-18G Growler EIS, the Navy announced its intent to prepare an EIS in the *Federal Register*, in local newspapers, online, and via mail. The public was invited to attend public meetings during scoping/re-scoping, and it will have an opportunity to attend additional meetings and submit additional comments following publication of the Draft EIS. Interested community members may join the project mailing list to receive updates. The Navy welcomes input from all stakeholders, including U.S. and Canadian citizens; business and community leaders; federal, state, and local officials; Native American tribes and nations; regulatory agencies; and non-governmental organizations.

Join the mailing list at www.whidbeyeis.com and click on Mailing List Sign-up.

NAS Whidbey Island based aircraft routinely conduct training in Military Operating Areas (MOAs) in the Pacific Northwest. The MOAs cover more than 71 thousand square nautical miles established as military training areas.

Northwest Training Range Complex Overview



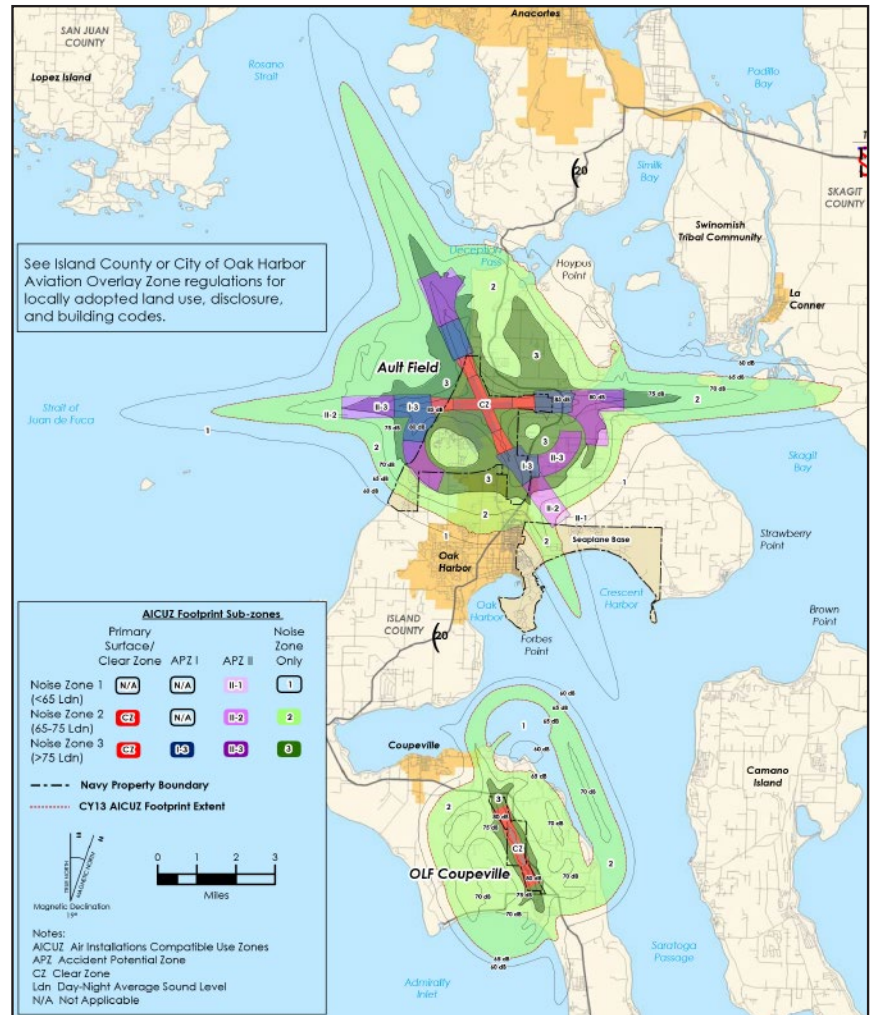
Air Installations Compatible Use Zones

Air Installations Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ) is a DOD program to promote compatibility between air installations and neighboring communities. The AICUZ program was developed to help avoid incompatible development in high-noise exposure zones; minimize public exposure to potential safety hazards associated with aircraft operations; and assure future operational capabilities of the airfields.

The community's land use regulatory agency is responsible for enacting land use controls to ensure the highest degree of health, safety, and welfare for its constituents. Naturally, cooperation between the Navy and the local community is key. Fortunately, the Navy and the local community enjoy a good working relationship, and Island County and the City of Oak Harbor have long-established land use and development controls to promote land uses compatible with ongoing flight operations at the NAS Whidbey Island complex.

To view the 2005 NAS Whidbey Island AICUZ map, visit: <http://whidbeyeis.com/files/public/NASWIAICUZ.pdf>

2005 AICUZ Map for the NAS Whidbey Island Complex





For further information, please visit the following websites:

EA-18G Growler Airfield Operations EIS project website: <http://www.whidbeyeis.com/>

U.S. Fleet Forces homepage: <http://www.public.navy.mil/us./Pages/default.aspx>

Northwest Region homepage: <http://cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrnw.html>

USFF Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/usfleetforces>

Navy Environmental website: <http://www.public.navy.mil/usff/environmental/Pages/default.aspx>

Noise Concerns:

*To comment or share concerns about air operations at the NAS Whidbey Island complex, call: 360-257-6665
or email comments to NASWI@navy.mil*

Public Affairs:

General questions can be directed to the NAS Whidbey Island Public Affairs Office at 360-257-2286