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## Navy: Whidbey training flights to resume in 2014

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**COUPEVILLE, WASH.** — Months after the Navy called a moratorium on training flights over Whidbey Island, because of noise complaints, Navy officials have informed residents the flights will be returning in January.

The Naval landing strip was built in World War II when planes were fewer, slower and quieter. Since 2008, the field has been a training ground for Navy Growlers, Boeing-built jets used to suppress radar. Their arrival led to local complaints and a lawsuit in July.

The [Seattle Times reports](#) that despite the complaints about an increase in noise from continuous takeoff-and-landing training flights, the Navy is working on an environmental-impact statement to bring in two more squadrons of Growlers by 2015. The last day of the public comment period is Jan. 3, 2014.

The Navy called a moratorium in late May on using the airfield until January 2014. Last week, Navy officials notified Whidbey residents that it will resume flying at that time but would limit the flights to about 6,000 a year.

There are 83 Growlers at the base, and by 2015, there are expected to be 114. They won't all be at the base at the same time since some may be deployed elsewhere, said Mike Welding, the air station's public-affairs officer. The Navy says the new jets won't be used on aircraft carriers and therefore won't need to do the touch-and-go training flights from the airfield.

In 2005, after another environmental study, the Navy told residents that the Growlers would have little impact and be fewer and quieter than the Prowler jets they were replacing. Instead, the Navy's flight statistics show the number of flights has steadily increased.

In 2005, there were 7,682 flights, according to Navy statistics, compared with 9,669 in 2012. In the first five months of 2013, there were 5,688 flights.

Residents say training flights over their homes happen from 10 a.m. to 1 a.m. at least five days a week. The Navy says that night

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training is critical to pilot training, especially for night landings on aircraft carriers.

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Island County has an ordinance requiring all homebuyers to sign a noise-disclosure statement, acknowledging they've been warned about jet noise, but many say they never saw the disclosure and some didn't even realize they bought property in a Navy flight-training zone.

Island County Commissioner Jill Johnson says the complaining residents should remember that "the Navy is the largest employer and the one with the most economic significance" to the island.

In 2012, the Island County Economic Development Council reported that the wages for enlisted personnel were \$726 million compared to \$66 million in wages from the retail industry, the next closest category, according to Ron Nelson, the council's executive director.

Ever since the Navy put planes in populated areas during World War II, there have been complaints about noise and counterarguments from those who say the roar of Navy aircraft is the "sound of freedom." As bases have closed worldwide, air traffic has consolidated at the stations that remain.

Whidbey now has the 450 sailors and six aircraft that were in Naval Station Rota, Spain, until 2005. It has the Electronic Attack Squadron transferred from Joint Base Andrews, Maryland. In the decades past, squadrons from Sand Point, Alameda, Calif., and Barbers Point, Hawaii, were sent to Whidbey.

Today there are 46 Navy bases remaining across the world and 50 that have closed or consolidated, sending aircraft and service personnel to other stations.

"OLF Coupeville is crucial to providing our pilots a facility where they can realistically train" and provides an area where pilots can fly day or night in conditions similar to being at sea, Navy spokesman Anthony Popp said in an email.

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