



# InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council

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## InterTribal Cultural Conservation for Sinkyone Indian Lands



December 15, 2010

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President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

*Delivered in person 12/16/10*

Re: Proposed Expansion of the Northwest Training Range Complex

Dear President Obama:

The InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council (Council) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) cultural conservation organization comprised of ten federally recognized, sovereign Indian Tribes that retain and maintain important cultural ties to the coastlines and the offshore waters of Mendocino and Humboldt Counties in Northern California. The Council's constituent Tribes are: Cahto Tribe of Laytonville Rancheria; Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians; Hopland Band of Pomo Indians; Pinoleville Pomo Nation; Potter Valley Tribe; Redwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians; Robinson Rancheria; Round Valley Indian Tribes (a sovereign nation of 7 confederated Tribes); Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians; and Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians. Each of these Tribes is a sovereign nation that maintains its own government-to-government relations with the United States of America.

The Council was founded in 1986 by, and for the benefit of, its member Tribes and is charged with protecting the cultural-ecological resources that constitute the heritage of the indigenous Tribal Peoples of the historic Sinkyone Tribal territory, which is located within southern Humboldt and northern Mendocino Counties and includes adjacent marine waters and islands. The Council was featured in the photo-essay entitled *Native Lands*, published in the August 2010 edition of *National Geographic*, as one of several Tribal entities in the U.S. that is engaged in groundbreaking revitalization of the environment by merging traditional land stewardship approaches with the latest in ecosystem management techniques.

The Tribes' connections to the marine resources and waters of this region are ancient and well documented, and these connections are indisputably vital to the culture, sustenance, health, and continued wellbeing of the Tribal members of this region.

The U.S. Navy is proposing to expand its Northwest Training Range Complex (NWTRC). This area contains numerous marine and anadromous species that are culturally important to Tribal Peoples of both the coastal and the inland regions of Northern California. The species that would be affected by the proposed expansion of the U.S. Navy's Northwest Training Range Complex include those that are Endangered and Vulnerable.

The U.S. Navy's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed expansion of the Northwest Training Range Complex and the U.S. Navy's Request to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for Authorization for the Incidental Harassment of Marine Mammals, specifically include the ability to "take" dozens of species of marine mammals (i.e., whales, dolphins, and seals) that would be severely affected by the proposed expansion.

**InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council is a Nonprofit Consortium of California Indian Tribes**

**• Cultural Conservation • Native Stewardship • Watershed Rehabilitation • Cultural Ecology Education**

The U.S. Navy's request to NMFS for Authorization for the Incidental Harassment of Marine Mammals would result in the death of millions of sea mammals if the expansion were approved. We remain unequivocally opposed to the destruction of marine mammals and other marine species, as well as the impacts on marine sanctuaries and reserves that will result from the proposed expansion as outlined in the EIS.

The Council holds fee title to and manages the 3,845-acre InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness property, which is located adjacent to the coastal Sinkyone Wilderness State Park. This is the first-ever InterTribal Wilderness area, and it is located at the very southernmost extent of the proposed expansion. However, as indicated above in our discussion of Sinkyone aboriginal territory, our area of geographic concern extends much farther north than the property to which we hold title.

The U.S. Navy's proposed expansion would result in irreversible impacts to the many sensitive marine resources along the entire coastline of the historic Sinkyone territory, including seaweeds, shellfish, rockfish, and a host of other animal and plant species that would be negatively affected by the proposed increase in training activities. Other Tribes to the north of the Sinkyone territory would be affected similarly. These coastal resources, along with the marine resources and waters, constitute a critical part of the cultural heritage and aboriginal use rights of the Tribes of this region who continue to rely upon them for traditional subsistence and ceremonial usage. Damage to these cultural resources without the express consent of the Tribes of this region would constitute serious violations of the Tribes' sovereignty, cultural heritage, and aboriginal and human rights.

The Tribes of this region have never ceded their aboriginal rights, including their rights to steward, protect, gather, harvest, and otherwise utilize marine and coastal resources that are necessary for the preservation and the continuation of our ways of life.

The U.S. Navy's proposed expansion of the Northwest Training Range Complex would infringe upon, threaten, and seriously degrade marine and coastal resources important to the Tribes and to the general population of this region. In addition, the Navy has failed to adequately consult with the Tribes of Northern California, as required by law, regarding its proposed expansion. Consultation with Tribes includes more than simply requesting their comments on a proposed project. It means entering into meaningful government-to-government discussions to examine issues of Tribal concern, including those listed above. We request that you require the Navy to enter into meaningful consultations with the Tribes affected by the project, as required by law.

The EIS is replete with inadequacies, contradictions, lack of reliable data, and insufficient mitigations. Due to the shortfalls of the Navy's proposal, the expansion is certain to cause irreparable harm to the ecological, cultural, economic, recreational, and scenic values of Northcoast marine and coastal areas.

We also request an extension of the U.S. Navy Final Environmental NWTRC public comment period. Additionally, we request Congressional Hearings on this matter to ensure the Tribes and the public have the opportunity to bring their concerns to the attention of lawmakers and the Navy.

The InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council is adamantly opposed to the U.S. Navy's expansion of the Northwest Training Range Complex and is advocating for the No Action Alternative as outlined in the EIS.

Instead of expanding its Northwest Training Range Complex, the Navy should develop plans for reducing its training and testing activities within the NWTRC, thus contributing to the healing and revitalization of our ocean waters and all the life that they contain.

Sincerely,

*[signed by]*

Priscilla Hunter  
Chairwoman