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## NAVY DOWNSIZES PUGET SOUND DETONATIONS

Fewer Blasts, Smaller Charges and Long-Sought Marine Monitoring Adopted

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Seattle — Faced with a lawsuit, the U.S. Navy has finally agreed to dramatically scale back its use of explosives in the ecologically sensitive waters of Puget Sound, according to documents posted today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) and Wild Fish Conservancy. The two organizations sued the Navy earlier this year to stop needless damage to protected marine life from the Navy's underwater demolitions training program.

A key part of the suit demanded that the Navy follow the guidance of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) for minimizing harm to federally protected species such as bull trout and marbled murrelets. The Navy had been resisting that guidance for nearly eight years.

Under the FWS consultation, dated November 7, 2008, the Navy agreed to significantly reduce impacts of its operations to win FWS certification of compliance with the Endangered Species Act, including –

- Cutting detonation locations down from four locations to only one, Crescent Harbor east of Whidbey Island next to the naval air station. Three other sites (Holmes Harbor, Port Townsend Bay and Hood Canal) will be spared further blasts;
- Charges will be limited to 2.5 pound packets of C-4 explosives and there will be only six underwater and four surface blasts a year, down from as many as 60 detonations a year using up to 20-pound charges; and
- The Navy will maintain a 500-meter zone free from any marine mammals and implement a protocol for monitoring the size of fish kills caused by the explosions.

These restrictions are in place only through December 31, 2009, however. Long-term safeguards for the naval explosives training program will likely be settled in the pending PEER/Wild Fish Conservancy suit.

"We are happy that the Navy has decided to begin down the path toward legal compliance and we will escort them into full compliance," stated PEER Staff Counsel Adam Draper, whose organization responded to frustrated civilian agency scientists who had been unable to persuade the Navy to adopt even minimal biological safeguards. "This agreement demonstrates that any supposed conflict between protecting Puget Sound and protecting national security is utterly specious."

In contrast to the stance of FWS, its sister agency, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) required no mitigation measures from the Navy which detonates live explosives in Puget Sound waters to provide "realistic" training for its divers in destroying and disabling mines.

"Certainly the Navy needs to conduct some kind of training program but it is just as certain that they did not need the extensive program they first proposed," said Kurt Beardslee, Executive Director of Wild Fish Conservancy. "We hope that they follow the recommendations of FWS to further reduce or even eliminate all the harm to Puget Sound that they cause."

The PEER/Wild Fish Conservancy suit, pending before the U.S. District Court in Tacoma, challenges the Navy's failure to comply with the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. The groups are represented by the local law firm Smith & Lowney.

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[Read key excerpts from FWS Biological Opinion \(full BiOp available upon request\)](#)

[See the tortured history of FWS consultation with the Navy](#)

**Look at the PEER-Wild Fish Conservancy lawsuit and what led to its filing**

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