

The New York Times The Opinion Pages

Search Opinion

Advertise on NYTimes.com

EDITORIAL

Marine Mammals and the Navy's 5-Year Plan

Published: October 11, 2012

Between 2014 and 2019, the United States Navy hopes to conduct testing and training exercises in the Atlantic and the Pacific that will involve sonars and explosives of many different kinds.

Connect With Us on Twitter

For Op-Ed, follow @nytopinion and to hear from the editorial page editor, Andrew Rosenthal, follow @andyrNYT.



Over the years, the Navy has been forced to acknowledge what science has clearly demonstrated: noise generated by sonar and underwater detonations can kill marine mammals, like whales and porpoises, and disturb their normal feeding, breeding and migration. In preparing for its

upcoming exercises, the Navy has asked the National Marine Fisheries Service for approval to "take" a number of marine mammals — "take" being the broad term for everything from killing these creatures to disturbing their habits.

This all sounds as it should be, with the Navy requesting permission from the agency, as required by various laws protecting marine mammals and endangered species. But the numbers say something else. In its testing areas in the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific, the Navy estimates that between 2014 and 2019 it will "take" nearly 33 million marine mammals — everything from blue whales to elephant seals.

Most of these creatures will be disturbed in some way but not injured or killed. But the damage could still be considerable. Sound travels much faster through water than it does through air, magnifying its impact, and many of the sounds the Navy plans to generate fall in the frequencies most damaging to marine mammals. More than five million of them may suffer ruptured eardrums and temporary hearing loss, in turn disrupting normal behavioral patterns. As many as 1,800 may be killed outright, either by testing or by ship strikes.

The Navy is proceeding on the basis of a 2008 Supreme Court decision, in which Chief Justice John Roberts Jr., writing for the majority, argued that the public interest in our military defense tipped the scales "strongly in favor of the Navy." We disagree, and so do the environmental organizations that have sued the Navy in the past. Perhaps most alarming is the Navy's conclusion — after an exhaustive list of potential injuries and the uncertainties involved in estimating them — that "impacts on marine mammal species and stocks would be negligible." This is wishful thinking, at best.

The Navy says the exercises are necessary to test its readiness and weapons systems, and it promises to make every effort to lessen the adverse consequences for marine mammals. But the sonic chaos the Navy plans to inflict on the oceans must be added to the long list of other threats facing these mammals, some of which, like the North Atlantic right whale, are on the endangered species list.

It is up to the National Marine Fisheries Service to send the Navy back to the drawing board. The damage it intends to do is simply unacceptable.

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

GOOGLE+

E-MAIL

SHARE

PRINT

REPRINTS

MIA WASIKOWSKA

Log in to see what your friends are sharing on nytimes.com. [Privacy Policy](#) | [What's This?](#)

Log In With Facebook

What's Popular Now

That Cuddly Kitty Is Deadlier Than You Think



Tiny Kentucky Town Passes Ban on Gay Bias



Advertise on NYTimes.com

Today's Headlines Daily E-Mail



Sign up for a roundup of the day's top stories, sent every morning.

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

MOST E-MAILED

MOST VIEWED



1. That Cuddly Kitty Is Deadlier Than You Think



2. That Daily Shower Can Be a Killer



3. OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR When Jim Crow Drank Coke



4. DAVID BROOKS A Second G.O.P.

5. STANLEY FISH 'Les Misérables' and Irony



6. As Music Streaming Grows, Royalties Slow to a Trickle

7. WELL Keeping Blood Pressure in Check

A version of this editorial appeared in print on October 12, 2012, on page A26 of the New York edition with the headline: Marine Mammals and the Navy's 5-Year Plan.

FACEBOOK TWITTER GOOGLE+ E-MAIL SHARE

 Get 50% Off The New York Times & Free All Digital Access.

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

United States Navy

United States Defense and Military Forces

Endangered and Extinct Species

Mammals



8. DRAFT
The Treachery of Translators



9. BOOKS
A Crash Course in Playing the Numbers

10. Aging in Brain Found to Hurt Sleep Needed for Memory

[Go to Complete List »](#)

[Show My Recommendations](#)



Try short rib chili nachos for the perfect Super Bowl recipe

ALSO IN VIDEO »

The Manti Te'o hoax and other doozies
Get a glimpse of a typical day in our near future.

nytimes.com

VIDEO

The New York Times
 HOME DELIVERY + FREE DIGITAL ACCESS. [SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



OPINION »



Invitation to a Dialogue: Forcing Treatment

BUSINESS »



French Automakers' Problem Is Consumers

HEALTH »



Wear a Helmet When Hitting the Slopes

MUSIC »



Bringing the Sinatra Style Out in 'Rigoletto'

OPINION »

Op-Ed: Treat Greed in Africa as a War Crime
Corrupt heads of state are only part of Africa's problem. Avarice and exploitation are root causes.

DINING & WINE »



A City Drenched in Sugar

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Autos](#) | [Site Map](#)

© 2012 The New York Times Company | [Privacy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Terms of Sale](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work With Us](#) | [Advertise](#)