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NOAA may prohibit Navy sonar testing at marine mammal 'hot spots'

January 22, 2010 | 2:49 pm

Marine mammal "hot spots" in areas including Southern California's coastal waters may become off limits to testing of a type of Navy sonar linked to the deaths of whales under a plan announced this week by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

NOAA also called for development of a system for estimating the "comprehensive sound budget for the oceans," which could help reduce human sources of noise -- vessel traffic, sonar and construction activities -- that degrade the environment in which sound-sensitive species communicate.

The plans were revealed in a letter from NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco to the White House Council on Environmental Quality. In the letter, Lubchenco said her goal is to reduce adverse effects on marine mammals resulting from the Navy's training exercises.

Environmentalists contend that sonar has a possibly deafening effect on marine mammals. Studies around the world have shown the piercing underwater sounds cause whales to flee in panic or to dive too deeply. Whales have been found beached in Greece, the Canary Islands and the Bahamas after sonar was used in the area. Necropsies showed signs of bleeding in the ears.

Michael Jasny, senior policy analyst for the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the plans were prompted by rules developed during the final days of the Bush administration that allow Navy sonar testing and training along the Atlantic Coast, the Gulf of Mexico, around Hawaii and the waters off Southern California through 2013.

"The Navy's Southern California range is over 120,000 nautical miles in size -- about the size of California itself," Jasny said. "The Bush administration did not put a square mile of this vast area off limits to sonar."

"The big question now," he added, "is whether the Obama administration has the will to actually bring about a proper balance between national security and environmental protection."

-- Louis Sahagun

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January 23, 2010

It is now time to put limits on the U.S. Navy Warfare Testing programs in the Pacific, Atlantic, and the Gulf of Mexico.

The NWTRC (Northwest Training Range Complex) covers Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Northern California. The Navy intends to use sonar in these areas as well. If there are concerns about the use of sonar in Southern California then there should be concerns with its usage the Pacific Ocean along the entire coastline of these states.

The Navy Warfare Testing programs also include bomb blasts both above and below the ocean surface, toxic chemical usage, mid and high range frequency sonar, underwater detonations, underwater construction, and future warfare testing which will take place over land and ocean areas.

Please go to www.nwtrangecomplexeis.com and click on documents. You will find the Navy Environmental Impact Statement and can read the information about their plans at this Navy site. In addition, Congressmen Waxman and Thompson, and all the Oregon Senators, including Senator Boxer have confirmed that 11.7 million marine mammals will be harmed by the Navy's Warfare Testing in a letter - 2009. And they have confirmed that testing will be conducted in marine mammals sanctuaries and other sensitive areas like breeding habitats.

The testing is underway in Southern California, Hawaii, the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. And it is soon to be extended to Northern California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho. It is time for U.S. Congressional Hearings and a ban on using sonar along the California and Oregon coastlines.

Please note that fish, marine life, and human health are not protected during these programs. The fishing industry will also be harmed by these programs.

It is time to protect the Pacific Ocean from redundant warfare testing which is now taking place in the Atlantic, Pacific, and the Gulf of Mexico by both the U.S. Navy (and the U.S. Air Force in the Gulf of Mexico).

Respectfully,

Rosalind Peterson
Agriculture Defense Coalition

Posted by: Rosalind Peterson | January 23, 2010 at 03:41 AM

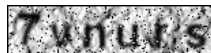
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