



GULF_{of}ALASKA



NAVY TRAINING ACTIVITIES
SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT/
OVERSEAS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

February 2020



INTRODUCTION

The Gulf of Alaska provides invaluable training space needed to realistically train United States (U.S.) service members to maintain readiness to protect and defend the United States and its allies. Alaska's largest multi-service military training exercise is called Northern Edge. Maritime training activities conducted during Northern Edge occur within a designated Temporary Maritime Activities Area, which is located south of Prince William Sound and east of Kodiak Island (see Figure 1 on page 4).

The Navy is announcing its intent to prepare a supplement to the 2011 Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Navy Training Activities Final EIS/OEIS, referred to as the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS, and the 2016 GOA Navy Training Activities Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS, referred to as the 2016 GOA Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

The purpose of this Supplemental EIS/OEIS is to update the 2011 and 2016 impact analyses with new information and analytical methods the Navy developed and has used since 2016.

New information includes an updated acoustic effects model, updated marine mammal density data, and evolving and emergent best available science. The Navy is not proposing new activities or an increase in activities from current levels.

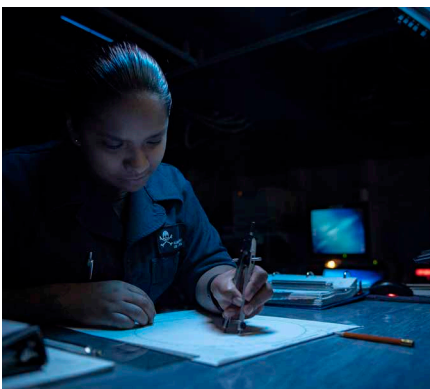
The Navy is preparing a Supplemental EIS/OEIS to renew required regulatory permits and authorizations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act. Current federal regulatory permits and authorizations expire in April 2022.



MILITARY TRAINING IN ALASKA

Since 1975, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command has met defense objectives through training military forces for potential crises in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Mission-critical military training activities in Alaska occur within the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex, which includes the Temporary Maritime Activities Area in the Gulf of Alaska and existing U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army inland air and land training areas. These training areas provide realistic environments for military forces and interagency partners to practice both simple and complex training activities. Training in Alaska allows for varying degrees of complexity and diversity, which enhances the quality of training and better prepares service members to respond to real-world situations.

Joint training exercises bring together personnel from different branches of the military to plan and conduct activities at sea, in the air, and on land. These exercises provide opportunities for forces to practice tactics, techniques, and procedures to improve coordination and fulfill military readiness requirements.



Training in Alaska is critical for the readiness of military personnel who protect and defend the United States and our allies.

IMPORTANCE OF REALISTIC TRAINING

MISSION OF THE U.S. NAVY

To maintain, train, and equip combat-ready military forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas.

NAVY TRAINING REQUIREMENT IN THE GULF OF ALASKA

To prepare Sailors for deployment by training in realistic environments.

Sailors must be ready to respond to any situation that may arise, ranging from large-scale conflict, maritime security operations, to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Their success is contingent upon realistic training that effectively prepares them to respond to an emergency situation or an act of aggression at a moment's notice. The Navy must maintain a rigorous, comprehensive training regimen to ensure ships are ready to deploy on schedule and Sailors are prepared to carry out their duties as required. Sailors must train with their equipment and systems before use during deployment.

Skills needed to achieve military readiness are perishable without constant practice. Training therefore must be diverse and as realistic as possible to prepare Sailors to complete their mission and ensure their success and survival. While simulators provide early skill repetition and enhance teamwork, there is no substitute for live training in a realistic environment. Alaska provides ideal conditions for realistic training scenarios in a large, diverse setting, which increases overall fleet safety and promotes future mission success.



NORTHERN EDGE JOINT TRAINING EXERCISES

Northern Edge exercises are Alaska's largest joint training exercises and occur biennially (typically every other year in odd years). The Navy has participated in Northern Edge exercises since the 1990s. These exercises are designed to replicate challenging scenarios and prepare service members to respond to crises, such as natural disasters, global conflicts, and threats to homeland security.

Northern Edge exercises typically last up to three weeks and occur between April and October when weather conditions are more ideal, which enhances training and reduces safety risk. Training activities are not conducted in extreme weather conditions due to safety concerns. Given the significant investment in resources associated with bringing military forces to Alaska, the exercises are scheduled for periods with the greatest chance for favorable weather. The specific dates of each biennial exercise are determined based on the availability of forces, deployment schedules, maintenance periods, and other exercises underway within the Pacific.

Between 6,000 and 14,000 personnel from all U.S. military services and interagency partners participate in these exercises. Exercise sizes vary, but each requires vast, Alaska-scale distances, similar to the conditions participants may face in the real world. Training is comprehensive and as realistic as possible. Maritime activities may include the following types of training:

- » Aircraft, ship, and submarine operations.
- » Weapons training and qualifications.
- » Aerial surveillance training.
- » Submarine detection and location.
- » Vessel searches and interdiction training.

The potential environmental impacts of Northern Edge exercises were analyzed in the 2011 GOA Final EIS/OEIS and 2016 GOA Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS. The Navy received permits from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the maximum level of activities proposed in those analyses, both in the number of exercises and in the scope of activities. The scope of activities per exercise are generally far less than the maximum extent of the Navy's permits. The Navy takes this permitting approach to allow for changes in training requirements in response to real-world events or shifts in Navy readiness priorities.

TEMPORARY MARITIME ACTIVITIES AREA

During Northern Edge exercises, the Navy establishes a maritime training area in the Gulf of Alaska called the Temporary Maritime Activities Area (TMAA). This area is the ideal location for training because of its proximity to a large contingent of Air Force and Army land training areas and airspace, as well as personnel, resources, equipment, and infrastructure in Alaska. The TMAA provides the vast space needed to maximize the realism of the exercises.

The TMAA is located far enough offshore of coastal areas to minimize impacts on Alaska Native tribal, commercial, and recreational fishing. The TMAA avoids many sensitive resources of the coastal regions and also has minimal overlap with salmon, herring, groundfish, and shellfish management areas.

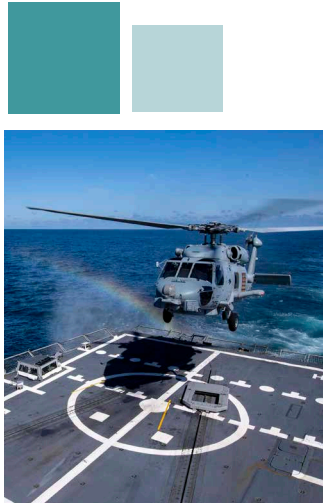
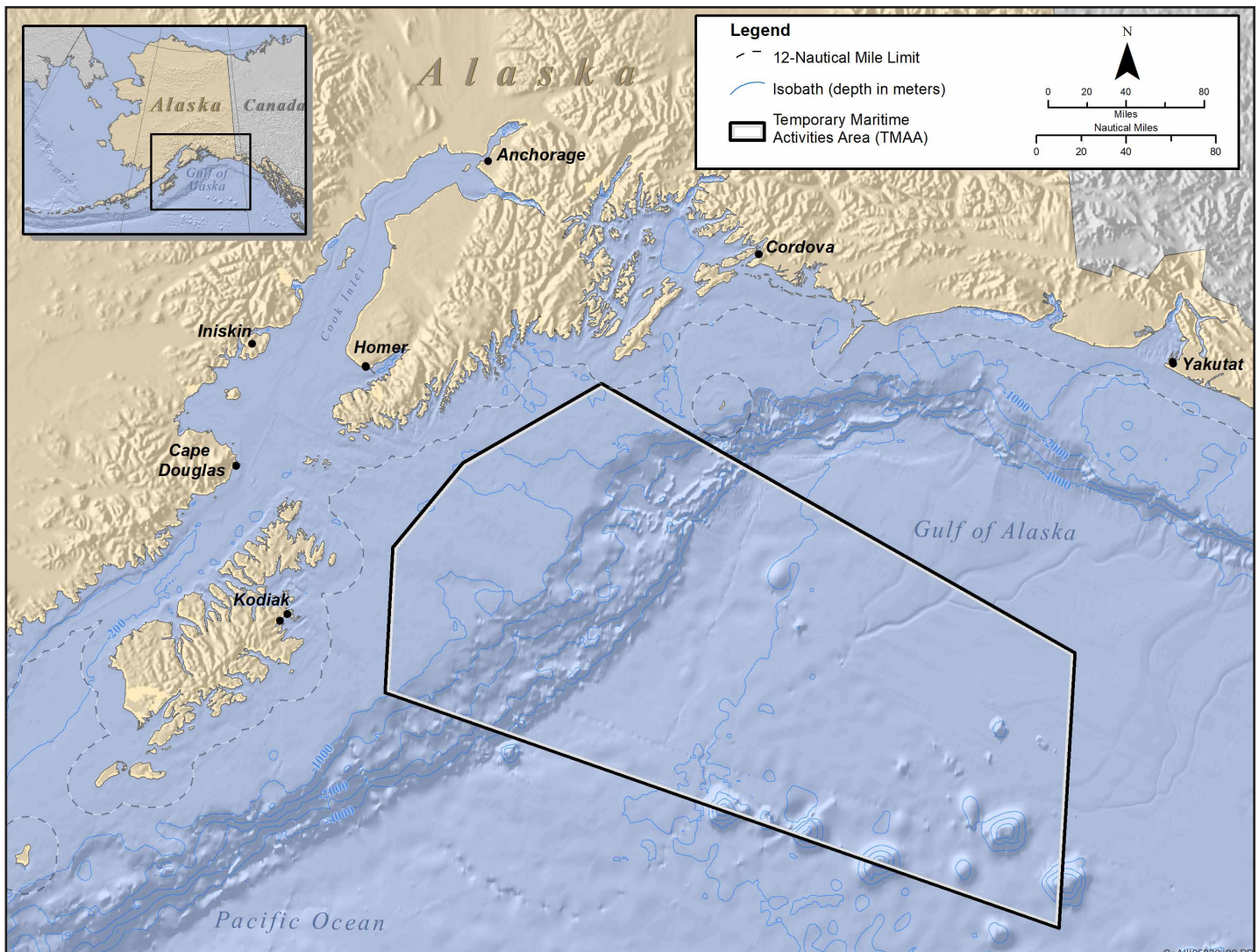


Figure 1. Northern Edge maritime training activities occur within a designated Temporary Maritime Activities Area in the Gulf of Alaska, which is within flight range of several Air Force and Army air and land training areas. Training in this area minimizes impacts on sensitive marine resources, and avoids or minimizes overlap with fishing management areas.



FUTURE TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

PROPOSED ACTION

The Navy proposes to continue periodic military readiness activities in the Gulf of Alaska. These military readiness activities include the use of active sound navigation and ranging, known as sonar, and weapon systems that may use non-explosive or explosive munitions at sea. These activities would be performed while employing marine species mitigation measures. Proposed training activities are similar to those that have occurred in the Gulf of Alaska for decades and are consistent with those analyzed in the 2011 and 2016 impact analyses.

This upcoming Supplemental EIS/OEIS will support naval training requirements to achieve and maintain fleet readiness as required by Title 10 of the U.S. Code.

The Temporary Maritime Activities Area and Proposed Action, including the location, number, and frequency of major training exercises, remain unchanged from the 2016 impact analysis.



TRAINING WITH SONAR

One of the Navy's top priorities is to defend against enemy submarine activity. To detect potential enemy submarines, the Navy uses both passive and active sonar.

Sonar uses sound energy waves to detect and locate submerged objects, such as submarines and in-water mines. Sonar proficiency is complex and requires regular, hands-on training in realistic and diverse conditions. The Navy uses simulators and other advanced technologies for some training; however, simulation cannot completely replace training in a live environment. Lack of realistic training will jeopardize the lives of Navy personnel in real-life combat situations. Active sonar is the most effective method of detecting underwater threats, such as torpedoes, in-water mines, and quieter submarines from potential enemies.

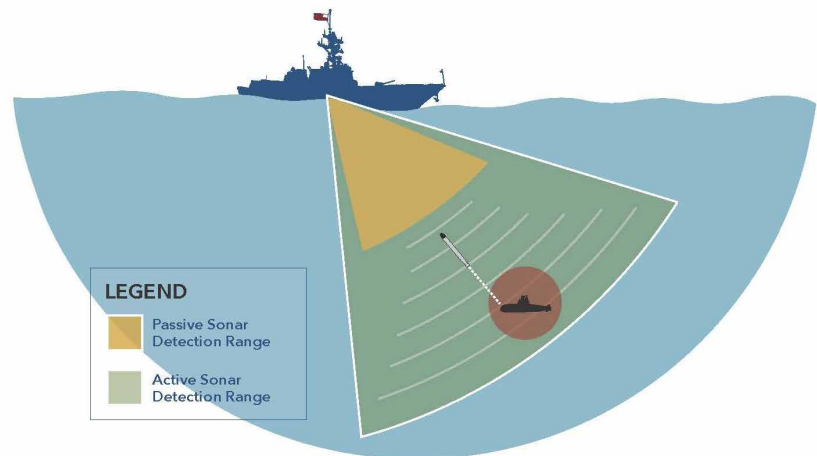


Figure 2. PASSIVE AND ACTIVE SONAR DETECTION RANGE

Previous generation submarines were noisy and could be detected with passive sonar before they came close enough to deploy short-range weapons against a vessel.

Extremely quiet, difficult-to-detect, diesel-electric submarines can approach close enough to deploy long-range weapons before entering a U.S. vessel's passive sonar detection range. Active sonar has a longer detection range that is needed to allow Navy Sailors to detect, identify, and track quieter, modern submarines before they are close enough to attack.

TRAINING WITH WEAPON SYSTEMS

Sailors must train in a variety of high-stress environments, including scenarios that involve the use of and exposure to explosive ordnance, to be ready to respond to emergencies and national security threats.

Sailors train using non-explosive munitions as often as possible. Non-explosives, however, cannot completely replace training in a live environment. Limited training with in-water explosives occurs only in established operating areas. The Navy ensures public safety by establishing safety buffers around activity sites when in use and notifying mariners and pilots.

MARINE PROTECTIVE MITIGATION MEASURES

MARINE SPECIES POPULATION MONITORING

The Navy works closely with NMFS as part of its Integrated Comprehensive Monitoring Program to coordinate monitoring efforts across all ocean regions where training occurs. In the Gulf of Alaska, the Navy funds data collection from five passive acoustic monitoring sites. Data from these sites are used for characterizing ambient sound levels and detecting the presence of vocalizing marine species. The Navy provides reports on its training activities in the Gulf of Alaska, and findings from passive acoustic monitoring, to NMFS. These reports are available to the public.

Scientific research indicates Navy training activities are unlikely to have long-term consequences on marine mammal populations. Although some species may display short-term behavioral responses, observations indicate Navy activity is compatible with the long-term survival of marine mammals. These observations include:

- » Increased number of species present in the Study Area.
- » Continued presence of species and long-term residence by individual animals, including species thought to be sensitive to sound, in areas highly used by the Navy.
- » Recorded use of training areas for marine mammal breeding, birthing, and nursing.
- » Lack of observable negative effects on marine mammal stocks or populations with more than 14 years of comprehensive monitoring and data collection.

Visit www.navymarinespeciesmonitoring.us for more information on the Navy's Marine Species Monitoring Program.

NAVY-WIDE MITIGATION MEASURES AT SEA

OBSERVE THE AREA PRIOR TO ACTIVITIES

Marine mammals and sea turtles can be detected visually only while at the surface, and marine mammals can be detected acoustically only while vocalizing underwater. Therefore, before certain activities are conducted, the area is visually scanned and, when possible, acoustically monitored.

POST QUALIFIED LOOKOUTS

Navy personnel must successfully complete the Marine Species Awareness Training approved by NMFS to qualify as Lookouts, in accordance with the Navy's Lookout Training Handbook. Navy Lookouts visually observe for the presence of marine species within mitigation zones.

Visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKo3r1yVBBA for more information.

ESTABLISH MITIGATION ZONES FOR MARINE SPECIES

A mitigation zone is designed to reduce potential impacts on marine species and sensitive habitats from certain training activities. The size of a mitigation zone is unique for each specific activity. Navy personnel visually observe each zone. If signs are detected within the mitigation zone indicating marine mammal, sea turtle, or seabird activity, the training would cease until the animal exits the zone.

IMPLEMENT GEOGRAPHIC MITIGATION MEASURES

The Navy restricts some types of training activities in specific geographic locations to further avoid impacts on marine mammals.

NAVIGATE SAFELY

Navy vessel operators are alert and watch for objects in their path at all times while in transit. Operators follow U.S. Coast Guard navigation rules, operate at a speed consistent with mission and safety, and take proper action if there is a risk of collision. This action includes observing for and maneuvering to maintain distance from marine mammals and sea turtles while underway.

KEY UPDATES TO BE MADE IN THE DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL EIS/OEIS:

Proposed training activities are similar to those that have occurred in the Gulf of Alaska for decades and are consistent with those analyzed in the 2011 and 2016 impact analyses. In the upcoming Supplemental EIS/OEIS, the Navy will:

- » Include a No Action Alternative in which NMFS would not issue Marine Mammal Protection Act authorization; therefore, proposed training activities would not occur.
- » Reanalyze Alternative 1 from the 2016 GOA Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS; training activities would not increase from current authorized levels in the Gulf of Alaska.
- » Include improved acoustic models, updated marine mammal densities, and updated marine species criteria and thresholds.
- » Use the most current and best available science and analytical methods.
- » Review procedural mitigation measures, where appropriate, and consider additional geographic and/or temporal mitigation measures, where applicable.

PROTECTION OF MARINE SPECIES AND THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

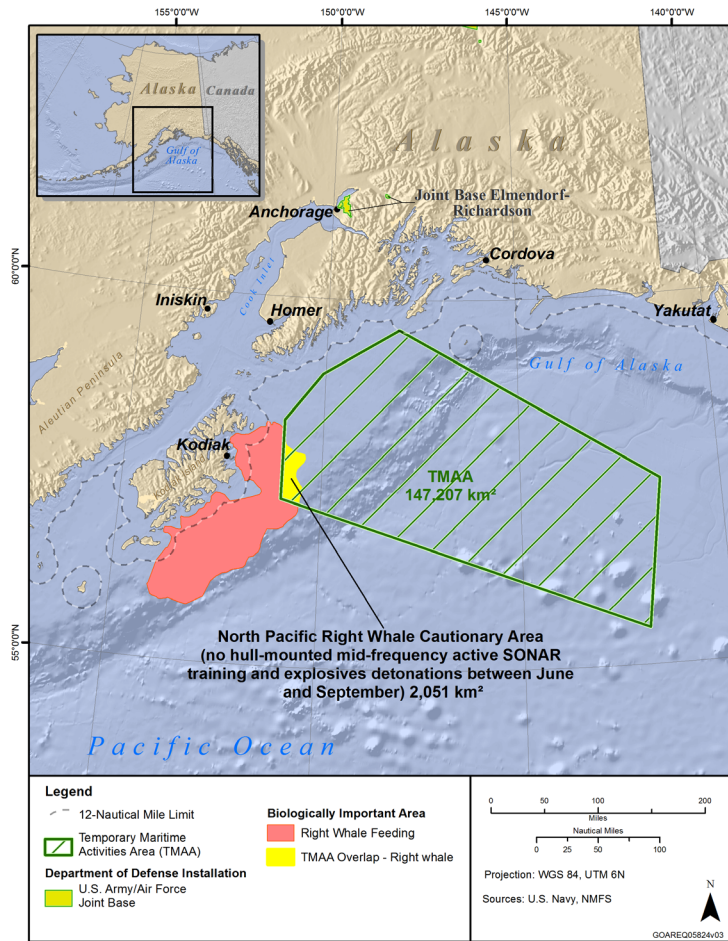
ADDITIONAL CAUTIONARY MEASURES IN THE GULF OF ALASKA

The Navy applies the best available science when analyzing the potential environmental impacts and developing measures to protect or mitigate effects on the environment. In addition to the Navy-wide measures in place, additional cautionary measures were developed for the TMAA.

ESTABLISH A NORTH PACIFIC RIGHT WHALE CAUTIONARY AREA

The Navy established a cautionary area for the North Pacific right whale (see Figure 3) during exercises occurring during the whales' feeding time between June and September. The Navy will not use surface ship hull-mounted mid-frequency sonar or explosives during training events in the cautionary area within those feeding months.

Figure 3. North Pacific right whale cautionary area.



PROHIBIT EXPLOSIVES TRAINING OVER PORTLOCK BANK

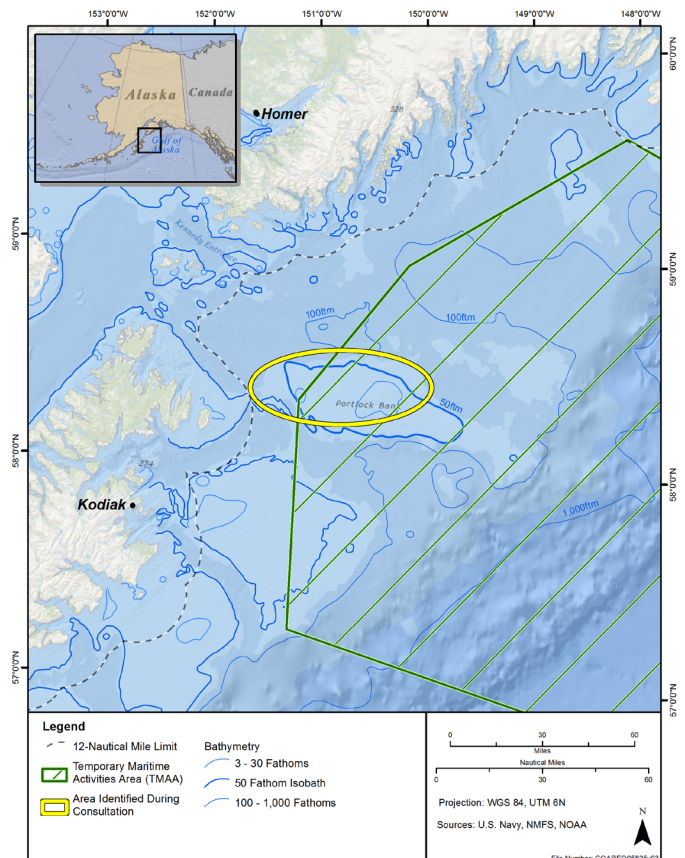
Alaska Native tribes and fishermen identified Portlock Bank (see Figure 4) as an area of concern during consultations with the Navy. As a result of discussions, the Navy will not train with explosives in this area.

PROHIBIT SINKING EXERCISES IN THE TEMPORARY MARITIME ACTIVITIES AREA

The Navy will not conduct sinking exercises on decommissioned naval warships in the TMAA.



Figure 4. The Portlock Bank area.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PROCESS

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a U.S. law that requires federal agencies to identify and analyze the potential environmental impacts of a proposed action before deciding whether to proceed with that action. The law encourages and facilitates public involvement to inform decision makers on actions that may affect the community or the environment.

Public involvement is an important part of the NEPA process, and a number of opportunities are available for the public to participate throughout the development of the Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

Public and agency input allows decision makers to consider community concerns and benefit from local knowledge. The public participates in the NEPA process during the following stages:

- » **Scoping Period:** Help to identify the scope of the analysis, including potential environmental issues and viable alternatives.
- » **Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS Public Review and Comment Period:** Evaluate and provide substantive comments on the draft analysis.
- » **Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS Wait Period:** Review the Final Supplemental EIS/OEIS and Navy responses to substantive comments received on the Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

SUBMITTING COMMENTS

The Navy encourages the public, government agencies, elected officials, and organizations to participate and comment in any of the following ways:

- » Submit comments via the project website at:
www.GOAEIS.com.
- » Mail comments to:
Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest
Attention: GOA Supplemental EIS/OEIS Project Manager
1101 Tautog Circle, Suite 203
Silverdale, WA 98315-1101

Comments must be postmarked or received online by 11:59 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on **March 11, 2020**, for consideration in the development of the Draft Supplemental EIS/OEIS.

Public involvement is a fundamental aspect of the environmental analysis process.



NAVY OUTREACH EFFORTS IN ALASKA

For several years, the Navy has engaged in NEPA-related public involvement efforts and extensive outreach activities in Alaska. Navy outreach teams have:

- » Participated in environmental conventions and expositions, including:
 - Alaska Forum on the Environment.
 - Alaska Federation of Natives.
 - Alaska Civil-Military Aviation Council.
 - Alaska Marine Science Symposium.
 - ComFish Alaska.
 - North Pacific Fisheries Management Council.
 - Pacific Marine Expo.
- » Staffed outreach booths.
- » Hosted port visits and ship tours.

Ongoing outreach efforts promote meaningful and sustained communication, foster a greater understanding of the Navy mission and training requirements, and provide timely updates about Northern Edge exercises to those closest to the TMAA.

