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October 8, 2010

The Honorable Jackalyn Pfannenstiel  
Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment  
1000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

The Honorable Donald Schregardus  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Environment  
1000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Mrs. Kimberly Kler  
Naval Facilities Engineering Command Northwest  
1101 Tautog Circle, Suite 203  
Silverdale, WA 98315-1101

Dear Secretary Pfannenstiel, Secretary Schregardus, and Mrs. Kler,

I request that the Navy extend the public comment period on the final Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS) for the Northwest Training Range Complex (NWTRC) for an additional 30 days. The current 30-day period has not allowed me, or citizens in my district who may be affected, sufficient time to review and evaluate the EIS/OEIS. In particular, the current 30-day time window has not allowed interested parties enough time to determine whether this EIS/OEIS has adequately addressed important concerns they have raised, or to prepare additional input in cases where these issues have not been resolved.

While the public scoping process following the Notice of Intent, and the public comment period after release of the draft EIS/OEIS were each over two months long, the current 30-day period allowed for review and public comment on the final EIS/OEIS is the bare minimum required under NEPA. Given the complexity of the environmental issues involved in the NWTRC, the sheer size of the EIS/OEIS document, as well as the goals of openness, transparency, full disclosure, and public engagement intended by the NEPA process, a 60-day period for public comment would be more appropriate.

Among my greatest concerns about the final EIS/OEIS is its failure to address issues I raised in my formal comments on the draft EIS/OEIS from my letter dated April 13, 2009. In that letter I objected to the Navy's intention to proceed with the NEPA process while the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) was still in the process of conducting a comprehensive review of sonar impacts on marine mammals. This review found that "[p]rotecting important marine mammal habitat is generally recognized to be the most effective mitigation measure currently available." Yet without providing any specifics about why the Navy requires completely unrestricted flexibility to use any and all parts of the NWTRC, in the final EIS/OEIS the Navy has flatly rejected proposals to consider limiting its activities in specific areas to reduce the impact on marine mammals or other species or habitats. I find it unacceptable that the Navy will not even consider some restriction on its activities to reduce its potentially significant, but in many cases largely unknown, impact on marine resources – nor provide specific justification for its compelling need to avoid any restrictions. I will more fully address this issue and provide other formal comments on the final EIS/OEIS in a separate letter. Meanwhile, I urge the Navy to extend their public comment period deadline for this particular EIS/OEIS by at least 30 days to allow for more adequate public participation in this step of the NEPA process.

I look forward to your timely response to my request.

Sincerely,



MIKE THOMPSON  
Member of Congress