



## Are Daily Sonic Booms in Our Future?

Update of 02-16-16

When asked whether sonic booms would be an impact of the Pacific Northwest Electronic Warfare Range, the Navy says no. When asked why sonic booms are often heard over the Olympic Peninsula, the Navy claims the sonic booms are accidents or denies that its jets are responsible for the sonic booms. The "noise analysis" for the Electronic Warfare Range contained in the Northwest Training and Testing FEIS, has no mention of supersonic flight or sonic booms.

When asked how large the mobile emitters to be used in the EWR would be, and what they would look like, the Navy describes them as being similar in size and appearance to pickup truck mounted campers.

Because Save the Olympic Peninsula (STOP) repeatedly receives reports of sonic booms occurring in the area, we wonder whether the Navy is fully disclosing the impacts of the EWR. This recent report from a Lake Quinault resident was particularly disturbing:

"Sent: Thursday, January 07, 2016 10:27 AM

We just had a sonic boom from [their] jets that shook up everyone at 9:16am this morning. It was so loud we thought a propane tank blew up. This is happening every week but this time was the worst. All the birds [flew] off the lake at once."

From facts discovered while investigating the possibility that these sonic booms are not accidents, and that those would be an associated impact of the EWR, STOP also wonders whether the Navy is underestimating the size of the mobile emitters by a factor of 18. A lawsuit entitled *Shoshone-Paiute Tribe v. United States*, 889 F. Supp. 1297 (D. Idaho 1994) gives ample reason for concern in this regard. That lawsuit eventually decided that the Air Force illegally segmented a study of Mountain Home Air Force Base (MHAFB) training ranges into two proceedings. One of those proceedings involved the establishment of a "Composite Wing" to train at the MHAFB training ranges. A "Composite Wing" was described as:

"[A]mixture of aircraft types: fighters, bombers, **electronic combat and reconnaissance aircraft, aircraft support, and air refuelling tankers.**

"To provide more realistic combat, the Composite Wing "require[s] a large amount of air space for establishing orbits in at least **two geographically separated target areas with multiple targets** that can be attacked simultaneously from different directions." Id. at p. 2-11. The

Composite Wing also requires "electronic threat emitters" that simulate enemy radar and air defense systems. AR at p. 1678:15. These threat emitters are mobile units, weighing up to 18.5 tons....

"The Composite Wing will also increase the number of supersonic flights from present levels of about two a month to about two a day. The supersonic ceiling would need to be lowered from 30,000 to 10,000 feet. Id. at pp. 2-26; 3-62....

"In summary, the Composite Wing would require increased air space, increased supersonic flight capabilities, more challenging targets spread over a greater geographic area, and an increased use of threat emitters and defensive countermeasures like chaff and flares."

That this sounds almost identical to the EWR is not coincidental. The purpose of the EWR is to transfer the electronic warfare training from MHAFB to the Olympic Peninsula. The training that occurred at MHAFB can reasonably be expected to occur here. Since the training there required two supersonic flights per day, the question must be asked, and the Navy must explain, whether the training here will require supersonic flights each day, and how many.

The comment that the threat emitters at MHAFB weigh up to 18.5 tons certainly raises questions about the mobile emitters pictured as small pickup truck mounted campers in the EWR Environmental Assessment. Are we talking 1 ton pickups or 18.5 ton monsters? The impacts of the threat emitters, and the likelihood that the area in which they are operated would be closed to public use, certainly increases with increasing size. Here again, the Navy must explain the discrepancy between its picture of the EWR and the reality of the MHAFB training ranges.

That sonic booms pose a significant concern is evident from January 29 news reports that one fighter jet caused a series of sonic booms that resulted in earthquake-like tremors in several Northeast states. Even residents of the area that could not hear the sonic booms, experienced 15 to 20 seconds of shaking during each one.

Consider two supersonic flights a day creating sonic booms. Would tourists to the sixth most popular National Park in the country really appreciate that? Will the historic Lake Quinault Lodge remain an appealing tourist destination? Will the park lose its world renowned status as a World Heritage Site and an International Biosphere Reserve? Especially because the mobile emitter sites are squarely centered in the middle of marbled murrelet and the spotted owl critical habitat, would this have an extremely adverse impact on the populations of those threatened and endangered birds? Would that lead to even more stringent regulations on our timber industry? Just how large a negative effect would these impacts have on the Olympic Peninsula's economy and environment?

It's past the time for the Navy to explain exactly what its proposed training will involve.