

## Executive Summary

### ES.1 Type of Report

This environmental assessment (EA) evaluates the relevant environmental consequences of the proposed action on the transition of the Expeditionary electronic attack (VAQ) squadrons at Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island, Oak Harbor, Washington. This EA has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969; the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) guidance implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR], Parts 1500-1508); and the Department of the Navy regulations implementing NEPA (32 CFR, Part 775). The Navy is the lead agency for the proposed action.

### ES.2 Description of the Proposed Action

The Department of the Navy (DON) proposes to transition the Expeditionary VAQ squadrons at NAS Whidbey Island from the aging EA-6B Prowler to the newer EA-18G Growler in the 2012-2014 timeframe. This includes:

- Retaining the existing Expeditionary VAQ mission capabilities at NAS Whidbey Island
- In-place transitioning of three existing Expeditionary VAQ squadrons homebased at NAS Whidbey Island from the older EA-6B aircraft to the newer EA-18G aircraft
- Potentially relocating one reserve Expeditionary VAQ EA-6B squadron from Joint Base Andrews to NAS Whidbey Island and transitioning this reserve squadron from the older EA-6B aircraft to the newer EA-18G aircraft
- Adding up to 11 EA-18G aircraft to the Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) at NAS Whidbey Island to support the Expeditionary VAQ community
- Modifying certain facilities at Ault Field to provide facilities and functions to support the new aircraft type and an increase in personnel (up to 311 personnel, representing a 3.1% increase in the base population) to support the Expeditionary VAQ community.

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide deployable land-based Expeditionary electronic attack community assets to meet Department of Defense requirements. The proposed action is to retain the Expeditionary VAQ mission and capabilities. The Expeditionary VAQ squadrons are land-based squadrons so they do not conduct field carrier landing practice (FCLP) at Outlying Landing Field (OLF) Coupeville. Therefore, the study area is limited to the vicinity of Ault Field and no direct or indirect impacts would occur at the OLF.

### ES.3 Alternatives

This EA considers three action alternatives and a No Action Alternative:

**Alternative 1.** The three Expeditionary squadrons at the installation would be transitioned from EA-6B Prowler aircraft to EA-18G Growler aircraft, and six EA-18G Growler aircraft would be added to the FRS. Alternative 1 would result in the addition of 91 personnel at NAS Whidbey Island.

**Alternative 2.** The three Expeditionary squadrons at the installation would be transitioned from EA-6B Prowler aircraft to EA-18G Growler aircraft, a fourth Expeditionary squadron consisting of five EA-18G Growler aircraft would be added, and six EA-18G Growler aircraft would be added to the FRS. Alternative 2 would result in the addition of 311 personnel at NAS Whidbey Island.

**Alternative 3.** The three Expeditionary squadrons at the installation would be transitioned from EA-6B Prowler aircraft to EA-18G Growler aircraft, and 11 EA-18G Growler aircraft would be added to the FRS. Alternative 3 would result in the addition of 311 personnel at NAS Whidbey Island.

**No Action.** Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no modification of facilities, no increase in personnel, and no new EA-18G operations at NAS Whidbey Island. The No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need for the proposed action with regard to Department of Defense requirements; however, the No Action Alternative is carried forward in the EA to provide a baseline against which environmental consequences can be measured. The baseline in this case is primarily based upon the end state of the *Environmental Assessment for Replacement of EA-6B Aircraft with EA-18G Aircraft at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington*, published in 2005 (which transitions the Carrier Air Wing aircraft vs. the Expeditionary aircraft squadrons). The only exception is for impacts related to noise and air quality, where current conditions (defined as calendar year [CY] 2011) are used as the baseline in order to give the reader a better understanding and comparison of existing and potential future conditions.

For the three action alternatives, some modification of facilities would be necessary to provide capacity and proper configuration for the new EA-18G Growler squadrons and additional FRS aircraft. Additional aircrew simulator space and hangar modifications, including installation of aircraft power utilities and secure mission-planning brief and debrief spaces,

would be required. Additional hangar space would be necessary. Accordingly, the facility modifications that would occur under the three action alternatives are as follows:

**Common facility modifications.** All three action alternatives would require the following facilities modifications: An approximately 32,500-square-foot addition to Hangar 10 (Building 2699) would be constructed. Hangar 10's auxiliary buildings R-42, R-55, R-56, and 2705 would be demolished. Hangar 10's auxiliary buildings 2893 and 2894 would be relocated. An approximately 9,200-square-foot facility would be constructed for the flight simulator building (Building 2593).

**Alternative 1.** No additional facility modifications besides those mentioned above would occur.

**Alternative 2.** In addition to the modifications noted under "Common facility modifications" above, an approximately 25,200-square-foot addition to Hangar 12 (Building 2737) would be constructed.

**Alternative 3.** In addition to the modifications listed under "Common facility modifications" above, an approximately 4,300-square-foot addition to Hangar 12 (Building 2737) would be constructed.

**No Action Alternative.** No new personnel would be added to the installation, and no facility modifications would occur.

## **ES.4 Summary of Environmental Impacts**

This EA describes reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts on airspace and airfield operations, noise, land uses, threatened and endangered species and other biological resources, water resources, air quality, cultural resources, socioeconomics, and environmental management that could result from implementation of the proposed alternatives. Reasonably foreseeable cumulative impacts with other actions are also described. The potential environmental impacts may be summarized as follows:

**Airspace and Airfield Operations.** None of the three action alternatives would change the types of flight operations or flight tracks conducted by Expeditionary VAQ aircraft. Alternative 1 would result in a 2.7% increase in total annual operations, and Alternatives 2 and 3 would each result in a 3.1% increase in total annual operations. Therefore, all three action alternatives would have no significant impact on airspace and airfield operations. The No Action Alternative would result in no change to types of flight operations, flight tracks, or number of

annual air operations conducted by VAQ aircraft. Therefore, the No Action Alternative would have no significant impact on airspace and airfield operations.

**Noise.** All three action alternatives would result in minor positive impacts due to the reduced size of the day-night average sound level (DNL)<sup>1</sup> noise contours, which would result in at least 9% fewer people exposed to the greater than 65 decibel (dB) DNL contours for both Alternatives 2 and 3. The reduction in the DNL noise contours would occur mostly over water. Therefore, all three action alternatives would have no significant impact on the noise environment. The No Action Alternative would result in no change in and no significant impact on the noise environment.

**Land Use.** All three action alternatives and the No Action Alternative would have a minor impact on installation land use, regional land use, and land use controls. The Navy has determined that the proposed action is not reasonably likely to affect the use of natural resources of Washington's coastal zone under any of the three action alternatives. Therefore, all three action alternatives would have no significant impact on land use.

**Air Emissions.** Because NAS Whidbey Island is located in a region that is in attainment for all criteria emissions, the conformity rule does not apply to the implementation of this action. Projected emissions from temporary construction and ongoing annual operations would be below the 250 tons per year (tpy) Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) significance threshold established for stationary sources for all criteria emissions. Emissions from the action were also compared to total annual mobile emissions in the Northwest Clean Air Agency region, and emissions resulting from this action represent 0.25% to 0.65% of total annual emissions. Since the total regional emissions in the region have not resulted in exceedances of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), the anticipated changes in emissions under either Alternative 2 or Alternative 3 would be considered insignificant.

**Biological Resources.** The changes in flight operations and noise levels may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect, the marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) on the waters surrounding Whidbey Island. However, under all alternatives, there would be no effect on any other species listed under the Endangered Species Act. The operational changes would not significantly impact wildlife species of concern. The action would not result in reasonably foreseeable "takes" of marine mammal species or bald eagles. The predicted change in noise levels would have no adverse or disruptive impacts on local wildlife populations or migratory

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<sup>1</sup> The DNL is a noise metric based on the number of air operations that occur on an average annual day at an installation over a 24-hour period.

birds. There would be a negligible increase in bird/wildlife aircraft strike hazard risk due to the 3.1% increase in annual air operations. Under NEPA, all three action alternatives and the No Action Alternative would have no significant impact on biological resources.

**Cultural Resources.** There would be no effect on architectural or archaeological resources under any of the three action alternatives. Therefore, all three action alternatives would have no significant impact on cultural resources. Implementation of the No Action Alternative would result in no effect and no significant impact on architectural or archaeological resources.

**Water Resources.** Implementation of any of the three action alternatives is not expected to result in any short- or long-term impacts on surface waters. Any stormwater runoff from the addition of 0.20 acre of additional impervious surface is expected to be contained on-site in existing grassy swales and retention systems. No impact on groundwater is anticipated under any of the three action alternatives because best management practices (BMPs) would be employed to prevent potential spills and to clean up any spill, if one occurs, before it infiltrates the groundwater. There would be no significant impact on floodplains under any of the action alternatives. The No Action Alternative would result in no significant impact on surface water, groundwater, or floodplains.

**Socioeconomics.** Implementation of any of the three action alternatives would result in a short-term, beneficial impact on the regional economy from construction funds spent on labor and materials purchased in the region. The No Action Alternative would not result in a short-term impact on the regional economy. Implementation of Alternative 2 or Alternative 3 would result in a minor long-term beneficial impact on the regional economy due to a small increase in the number of personnel at the air station, which would result in a proportionate increase in payroll. Implementation of Alternative 1 or the No Action Alternative would have no additional long-term impact on the regional economy. Therefore, all three action alternatives and the No Action Alternative would have no significant impact on cultural resources.

**Environmental Management.** Under all three of the action alternatives, any hazardous materials such as asbestos, lead-based paint, mercury, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) associated with the facilities renovations would be handled and disposed of in accordance with environmental regulations. Therefore, all three action alternatives would have no significant impact on environmental management. No additional hazardous materials would be generated as a result of the No Action Alternative and therefore no significant impact. There would be no

significant impact on Installation Restoration Program sites under any of the three action alternatives or the No Action Alternative.

**Cumulative Impacts.** Potential cumulative impacts that could result from the transition of Expeditionary EA-6B Prowler squadrons to EA-18G Growler squadrons were analyzed. Research, literature reviews, and contacts with applicable government and non-government agencies were used to identify reasonably foreseeable actions, determine the geographic range and timeframe of implementation, and assess potential cumulative impacts by resources area.

Two federal present/ongoing and four federal reasonably foreseeable actions were examined. These U.S. Navy projects are as follows: Northwest Training and Testing at the Northwest Training Range Complex; construction of the NAS Whidbey Island petroleum, oil, and lubricants pipeline; introduction of the P-8A multi-mission maritime aircraft to the U.S. Fleet; fuel pier breakwater construction and finger pier demolition; replacement of the C-9 aircraft with the C-40 aircraft; and animal and vegetation control. Two City of Oak Harbor present/ongoing projects also were examined: the City of Oak Harbor water system improvements and clean water facilities planning. One private present/ongoing project was examined: Whidbey East Holdings, LLC's harvest of 28 acres of timber. (Section 5, Table 5-1 provides further details on these projects.)

Cumulative impacts on six resources areas were examined: airspace and airfield operations; noise; land use compatibility; air quality; biological resources (federally protected species, wildlife, migratory birds, and bird/aircraft strike hazard); and socioeconomics. Cumulative impacts on all these resources were determined not to be significant. (See Section 5 for more details on the cumulative impact analysis process and findings.)