

Exclusive Navy Secretly Conducting Electromagnetic Warfare Training on Washington Roads

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By Dahr Jamail, Truthout | Report

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(Photo: **Olympic Park Road** via Shutterstock; Edited; LW / TO)

Without public notification of any kind, the US Navy has secretly been conducting electromagnetic warfare testing and training on public roads in western Washington State for more than five years.

An email thread between the Navy and the US Forest Service between 2010 and 2012, recently obtained via a **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request** filed by Oregon-based author and activist Carol Van Strum in November 2014, revealed that the Navy has likely been driving mobile electromagnetic warfare emitters and conducting electromagnetic warfare training in the Olympic National Forest and on public roads on Washington's Olympic Peninsula since 2010.

In one of the **2012 emails**, Navy contractor Gerald Sodano explained that the Navy "utilized EW [electronic warfare] ranges outside the local vicinity." But he went on to say that the aim of establishing an electromagnetic warfare range on the Olympic Peninsula would be to conduct all training locally on the Olympic Peninsula, rather than further afield. This means that rather than using expansive training areas the Navy already has access to in Yakima in eastern Washington State, the Navy aims to use the Olympic National Forest and areas adjacent to Olympic National Park instead.

"What the Navy is doing we have no idea because they don't tell us."

As **Truthout previously reported**, the Navy itself has produced a medical study showing that exposure to electromagnetic radiation causes a myriad of human health problems, including corneal damage, tubular degeneration of testicles, brain heating, sterility,

altered penile function, death, cranial nerve disorders, seizures, convulsions, depression, insomnia, chest pain, and even sparking between dental fillings.

Other reports by the US Air Force, NASA, medical doctors and scientific publications confirm these and other deleterious health effects that would result from the Navy's electromagnetic weaponry arsenal, in addition to large-scale negative impacts on birds, aquatic life and other biota.

As Truthout previously reported, the Navy intends to conduct widespread electromagnetic warfare training across much of the Olympic Peninsula, which would entail flying as many as 153 jets down to 1,200 feet above ground in some areas, in 2,900 training exercises lasting up to 16 hours per day, 260 days per year, with no end date in sight.

The Navy's plans also include setting up mobile units on the ground, with towers emitting electromagnetic radiation signals for the planes to locate as part of their exercises. According to an email from Naval Warfare Range Manager Kent Mathes, if the Navy gets its way, there will be 275 "events" per year, between the mobile emitters and ships at sea. (This information is not mentioned in any public documents.) The definition of "event" is not clear, but according to other Navy documents, a single event can last from a few minutes to several days. If combined, the total number of events for the Olympic, Okanogan-Wenatchee and Colville National Forests will be over 5,000.

Sodano also stated the Navy's intent to drive the mobile emitters "on existing roads and trails throughout the Olympic Peninsula," and "all through most of the region as well as outside the geographic confines of the MOAs (Military Operating Areas) to optimize and vary training scenarios."

This means that while the Navy has been under widespread and growing public pressure against its **proposed electromagnetic warfare training** on the Olympic Peninsula starting this year, it has in fact already been secretly conducting training for at least five years in the Olympic National Forest and on public roads across the entire Olympic Peninsula.

"Tested Well With Aircraft"

Further documentation obtained through FOIA requests makes it clear that the electromagnetic "games" have already been underway for some time. A **map** from a permit issued by the Forest Service to the Navy in 2011 is labeled "Results of Area Review 14-18 November In Support of Navy Electronic Warfare Training in the Northwest."

Further along in that document the same map is labeled "Proposed Areas of Review in support of Navy Electronic Warfare Training." The first shows mobile emitter sites in Olympic National Forest that "tested well with aircraft," and includes a photo of a truck-and-trailer mobile emitter parked at several sites and a campground area.

Both maps include Hood Canal Road and the entire length of Route 101 on the Olympic Peninsula, which is the most popular tourist route in the area. The public road leading to the world-renowned Hoh Rainforest is also shown as a mobile emitter route. The Hoh Tribe, which has lived there for centuries, was not consulted by the Navy. The tribe's only notification of the training has been a marked increase in low-flying jet traffic. These public roads are listed as "Areas in Support" in the electromagnetic warfare training maps.

Taken together, these documents are an apparent admission that the Navy has already been conducting electromagnetic warfare training in the area, despite their own claims to the contrary.

The general public remained unaware of the establishment of an electromagnetic warfare range over any portion of the Olympic Peninsula until late September 2014, about six weeks after the Navy's 15-day comment period on an environmental assessment (EA) closed. The Navy issued a "finding of no significant impact." A few days later, the subject was closed and no further opportunity for public comment was allowed, despite the fact that no comments had ever been received by the Navy from elected officials, Native American tribes or individual residents - because nobody knew about it.

Meanwhile, within the government, the Navy's plans were not meeting even minimum standards. A little over a month before the short time the Navy's EA was open for public comment, a Forest Service employee, in a [document obtained by Truthout](#), commented, "This document [the EA] does not meet minimum Forest Service standards for completeness and based on this document the Forest Service could not prepare a Decision that would need to be signed by the Deciding Official prior to issuing a permit." Another employee comment said, "USFWS [US Fish and Wildlife Service] and USFS will require review of a DRAFT Wildlife Biological Assessment prior to submittal for informal or formal consultation."

But the Navy replied that it would not do a biological assessment, and instead would "expand the discussion" on threatened and endangered species in the EA itself.

One of the frontline opponents of the Navy's plans in Washington State is Karen Sullivan, who herself worked for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, in the Division of Endangered Species and External Affairs, for 15 and a half years. Her experience ranges across many locations, from Delaware, to Washington, DC, to Alaska, and she now resides in Port Townsend, on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State.

"Anyone who reads the EA will see that expanded discussion is 100 percent boilerplate and contains no specific information on impacts," Sullivan told Truthout.

In that EA and at subsequent public information meetings requested by Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-Washington), the Navy stressed that establishing a 100-foot perimeter around each mobile emitter and marking it with hazard tape was sufficient to protect humans and wildlife from any harm. It claimed that any humans or large mammals entering the hazard area would cause the emitter equipment to be shut down for safety reasons.

"Effects on small mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians were completely ignored, despite the fact that all 15 Olympic National Forest and state-owned sites selected by the Navy for the mobile emitters are in critical habitat for endangered species," Sullivan said. "They even said that amphibians were unlikely to be found at the sites they'd chosen, and the Forest Service did not dispute this. Do they not realize it's a rainforest?"

Her concerns - and those of a broad swath of the public across the Olympic Peninsula where the Navy's war games are to occur - are well founded, by the Navy's own admission. In an interview with the [Peninsula Daily News](#), Sodano admitted that 15 minutes of exposure to the radiation emitted by the Navy's electromagnetic warfare trucks could damage the liquid tissue of the eye.

Despite all the public outcry, and all the scientific evidence that backs it up, the Forest Service has indicated that it will issue the Navy a permit later this year, to use its forest roads.

Given that the Navy has admitted in emails and other documents that it has already been running its mobile emitters on public roads unbeknownst to the public (with no "hazard zone" in place), how can it possibly propose to safely operate said emitters within a 100-foot hazard exclusion zone?

The Navy's First Public Admission?

The first hint that the Navy was already conducting electromagnetic warfare training in Olympic National Forest appeared on November 6, 2014, when high levels of public outrage forced Representative Kilmer to urge the Navy to hold public briefings.

Much of the public was **already outraged** at the Navy's proposed plans for electromagnetic warfare training, and more than 100 people packed the Port Angeles City Council chambers for a **public presentation** by Naval Warfare Range Manager Kent Mathes, Forest Service District Ranger Dean Millett and the Navy's John Mosher.

At this time, the public had no hint that the Navy was already doing this training on public roads.

During the presentation, however, Mathes announced, "The Navy has been doing this sort of training for years."

Perhaps because no one in the audience knew the Navy was already conducting this training, no one understood what Mathes meant by his overt admission.

An audience member who identified himself as a 24-year veteran of the Army took the microphone during the meeting **and told the audience**, "He [Forest Service District Ranger Millett] told me he's issued permits for a few years and that they have these mobile emitter units out there, and I want to know, have they been out there, and if they have, how'd you get consent to do that?"

In response, the Navy's John **Mosher provided** a long, obfuscated response:

So no, they're not out there currently, as a conceptual test prior to environmental assessment we did apply for temporary permits, this was a one-time use to go to those particular sites to determine if they're feasible for what we're proposing. So we went there with the equipment, to be able to do the electromagnetic environmental safety surveys that I mentioned so we could conduct those tests, so we went out there with a piece of equipment, with the proper approvals and permits to do it, and we basically used these meters to determine what the distance of effects would be, if it in fact was consistent with the modeling that was done, the industry standards that we mentioned. Unsatisfied, the Army veteran **asked**, "Well how long have you been doing that, though, you said about three years at least?"

"No no," **Mosher replied**. "I'm not sure what you're referring to now, the training, the electronic warfare training, that Kent just mentioned, so we've been doing that training ..."

"You've been doing that through the permits," the **veteran asked**. "Weren't you guys?"

"... On the ground ... no," **Mosher said**. "We have not been doing it for three years, we had that one-time, special-use permit..."

At this point, the **audience demanded** that Millett comment on having granted the Navy a special-use permit to conduct electromagnetic warfare training.

"As you said, as Mr. Mosher (unintelligible) we did issue a short-term temporary, uh, special-use permit for the, uh, proof of concept," **Millett replied** awkwardly. "I can't remember exactly how many years it ... I might have said three years at the time but if it was less than that ..."

Mathes interjected at this point in the discussion to tell Millett that the permit was granted in 2011.

"So it was 2011," Millett said.

After the meeting, Sullivan wrote to the Forest Service asking about the 2011 permit, and the agency replied that it had issued four short-term permits to the Navy for "feasibility tests of the Integrated Air Defense System."

The letter, of which Sullivan provided a copy to Truthout, continued, "The first of the four temporary permits was authorized in 2010 and the last of the four was authorized at the beginning of 2014."

FOIA materials revealed that Millett had signed every one of them.

One clear implication of the above remarks by Millett, Mathes and Mosher is that such lies by federal officials are illegal. Under 18 US Code § 1515, "misleading conduct" is described as:

- (A) knowingly making a false statement;
 - (B) intentionally omitting information from a statement and thereby causing a portion of such statement to be misleading, or intentionally concealing a material fact, and thereby creating a false impression by such statement;
 - (C) with intent to mislead, knowingly submitting or inviting reliance on a writing or recording that is false, forged, altered, or otherwise lacking in authenticity.
 - (D) with intent to mislead, knowingly submitting or inviting reliance on a sample, specimen, map, photograph, boundary mark, or other object that is misleading in a material respect; or
 - (E) knowingly using a trick, scheme or device, with intent to mislead.
- The officials' comments and obfuscations fall under several of these categories. The Navy and federal government were plainly denying Washingtonians access to the facts about what was really taking place in their state.

Washington State in the Dark?

Apparently, it was not only the general public that was unaware the Navy had already been conducting electromagnetic warfare on state roads; officials within the state government were also kept in the dark.

In March 2015, Sullivan contacted the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) asking for any records indicating that the Navy had applied for a permit to conduct electromagnetic warfare on public roads. WSDOT responded immediately, and a phone conversation between Sullivan and WSDOT's Joni Higgins revealed that WSDOT was shocked that such activity might have been happening on public roads.

Higgins confirmed that no such permit category even existed.

Another WSDOT employee, speaking on condition of anonymity, verified for Truthout that WSDOT had not been consulted or notified by the Navy regarding any electromagnetic warfare training involving roads or highways in the state.

Truthout's request for comment from Washington Gov. Jay Inslee's office was not replied to at the time of this writing.

Overwhelming Evidence of Harm

How invasive - or downright harmful - are the mobile emitters the Navy is using? The Navy regularly compares these emitters to cellphone towers, but in the aforementioned email thread, Navy representative Sodano said, "This system is the same as, or similar to, civilian navigational aids and radars at local airports and television weather stations throughout the United States."

If that is true, it contradicts the cell tower analogy: Exposure to radar of any strength is still considered by the radar and electromagnetic radiation equipment manufacturing industry to be harmful, while exposure to cellphones or cell towers is supposedly not.

Yet even if we accept the cell tower comparison, the emitters aren't off the hook. Any claim that cell towers are completely safe is contradicted by many peer-reviewed studies, as well as a **2014 letter** from the US Department of the Interior to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), on its inadequate standards for cellphone towers.

None of the public documents on the Navy's war games has ever discussed any potential impacts from the downward-directed electromagnetic radiation coming from jets overhead, which are **equipped** with weaponized lasers and microwaves, as well as a **powerful type of radar** known as active electronically scanned array.

The **Navy's own web page** on radio-frequency hazard avoidance concerns only heat effects, but has a strong requirement that aircraft radars be turned away from personnel areas.

However, the Navy's response to public concerns about deleterious health effects from its war games has been to point people toward its own inadequate environmental assessment (EA). The military branch continues to claim that "no significant impacts" will result from its electromagnetic war games.

Dr. Martin Pall, a professor emeritus of Washington State University, has written several peer-reviewed papers on how electromagnetic radiation of various levels impacts human beings, and has given international lectures on the subject.

Pall told Truthout that the Navy's claims of safety are "untrue," and provided reams of evidence, including his own scientific reports, which document the extremely dangerous impacts of even very low levels of the microwave and electromagnetic radiation that the Navy would be emitting during its war games.

According to Pall, there is ample evidence of biological effects from EMF radiation that are "extremely worrisome." These include cellular DNA damage that causes cancer and infertility, and, Pall said, "both of these have been repeatedly reported to occur with low-level exposures."

"What the Navy is doing we have no idea because they don't tell us," Pall told Truthout. "But from what little they have told us, they are using a lot of pulse fields in wavelengths that are damaging to us, to biological organisms. They give us not one iota of evidence of what biological effects are produced by those fields, and don't even tell us what fields they are using. You only find empty statements of 'don't worry about these things.'"

An April 1981 NASA study titled "Electromagnetic Field Interactions with the Human Body: Observed Effects and Theories" revealed the significant damage that EMF radiation causes to humans.

As for adverse effects from EMF radiation, the NASA report states, "Some result in death and persistent disease," with other impacts including "ventricular fibrillation and sudden infant death syndrome," "cataracts" and "accelerated aging." It notes that electromagnetic fields "may promote cancer" and cause a "decrease in sex function."

In fact, the Navy itself has published a medical study warning of the extremely harmful health effects of exposure to even low levels of electromagnetic radiation. The Navy has known about these effects since at least 1971, when the Naval Medical Research Institute published a research report written by Dr. Zorach Glaser, of which Truthout acquired a copy. The title of the report is "Bibliography of Reported Biological Phenomena ('Effects') and Clinical Manifestations Attributed to Microwave and Radio-Frequency Radiation."

Given that the Navy continues to claim that its electromagnetic warfare training exercises will have "no significant impact" on humans, it is interesting to note that its own research paper's abstract states:

More than 2,000 references on the biological responses to [microwave and] radio frequency and microwave radiation, published up to June 1971, are included in the bibliography. (Three supplementary listings bring the number of citations to more than 2,300.) Particular attention has been paid to the effects on man of non-ionizing radiation at these frequencies.

The Navy's paper lists well over 100 negative biological effects caused by microwave and radio frequency radiations, including: corneal damage, tubular degeneration of testicles, brain heating, alteration of the diameter of blood vessels, liver enlargement, altered sex ratio of births, decreased fertility, sterility, altered fetal development, decreased lactation in nursing mothers, altered penal function, death, cranial nerve disorders, seizures, convulsions, depression, insomnia, hand tremors, chest pain, thrombosis, alteration in the rate of cellular division, anorexia, constipation, altered adrenal cortex activity, chromosome aberrations, tumors, altered orientation of animals, birds and fish, loss of hair and sparking between dental fillings.

Given all of these severe health impacts, it is clear why so many people in Washington State are now concerned about the fact that the Navy has been secretly conducting electromagnetic warfare training on state roads as well as in the Olympic, Okanogan-Wenatchee and Colville National Forests.

"Chances are that for several years, motorists could have unknowingly encountered mobile emitters while driving, or could have parked near them at campgrounds or roadside pullouts," Sullivan concluded. "If the mobile emitters are conducting electronic warfare without hazard zones and with jets overhead sending down their own EM radiation, how is that not considered a public health hazard?"

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Dahr Jamail, a Truthout staff reporter, is the author of *The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan*, (Haymarket Books, 2009), and *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches From an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq*, (Haymarket Books, 2007). Jamail reported from Iraq for more than a year, as well as from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Turkey over the last 10 years, and has won the Martha Gellhorn Award for Investigative Journalism, among other awards.

His third book, *The Mass Destruction of Iraq: Why It Is Happening, and Who Is Responsible*, co-written with William Rivers Pitt, is available now on Amazon. He lives and works in Washington State.

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