

A6 TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2019 THE OREGONIAN

SEATTLE AREA

Island residents grumble over Navy jet noise

Gene Johnson Associated Press

When Marge Plecki and her husband built their retirement home on an island north of Seattle in 2002, they were aware the Navy conducted training flights at a small airstrip nearby.

The noise was bearable, though, and she planned around them by running errands or doing other chores while the jets roared. That changed dramatically in March, when the number of EA-18G Growlers in the skies vastly increased.

The noise has sent Plecki and more than three dozen other residents of Whidbey Island's Admiral's Cove neighborhood to court, filing a lawsuit filed last week, seeking compensation for what they say is their inability to use their property. The neighborhood is a small enclave less than one mile from the end of the landing strip, just beneath the final approach and takeoff path for the jets.

"I grew up in Chicago, in O'Hare's flight path," Plecki said. "It's nothing like that. It's impossible to live. Your body shakes. You can't be outside. You can't jog. You can't do what normal people do outside their homes."

She said that four days a week — for hours on weekday afternoons, evenings or even late at night, the jets scream relentlessly just 200 feet to 250 feet overhead as they practice "touch-and-go" landings akin to those used on aircraft carriers.

She and her neighbors can't hold conversations at their kitchen tables, the lawsuit says. Even indoors they wear earplugs inside of noise-canceling headphones and they still can't sleep.

Cracks from the noise vibrations have appeared in the walls and window seals, the lawsuit claims.

One of the plaintiffs, Vietnam veteran Paul Firnstahl, said in the lawsuit the noise has worsened his PTSD symptoms.

"Mr. Firnstahl is a Vietnam Veteran and a proud supporter of the military," the complaint said. "However, he cannot support this flight increase, which he believes has destroyed his neighborhood and is threatening community health."

The lawsuit, which was filed in the U.S Court of Federal

Claims, seeks compensation for the loss of the use of the residents' property. It's the second recent case challenging the Navy's operations; the state of Washington sued in July, saying the Navy failed to adequately consider the effect the expanded flight operations would have on people or wildlife.

The Navy's public affairs office cited a policy of not commenting on litigation.

The Navy in March authorized the expansion of its Growler program by up to three dozen jets, adding to the 82 already based on Whidbey Island, a 55-mile-long island north of Seattle. The island is a mix of forests, farmland and beachfront communities popular for fishing, crabbing and clamming, but it is also home to Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, and the military is a major employer on the island.

The Growlers, which conduct electronic warfare to jam enemy communications and launch systems, are louder than the earlier ones the Navy used, including the EA-6B Prowler, the lawsuit said.

When it approved the expansion plan, the Navy said the number of flights would be comparable to those that occurred from the 1970s through the 1990s. It also said it would continue to invest in technologies to reduce engine and aircraft noise. The small airstrip's geographic features approximate what it's like to land on an aircraft carrier, making it an asset for training, the Navy has said.

The strip was built during World War II and has been used for emergency and practice landings to varying degrees since then. In the 1990s, the Navy negotiated with the city of Coupeville and agreed not to conduct training flights after 10:30 p.m., not to fly touch-and-go missions more than two days in a row, and not to fly on weekends, according to the lawsuit. That changed in March.

Steve Morrissey, an attorney for the plaintiffs, said that if the operations continue, the Navy should buy out the properties of residents that could be most vulnerable to a crash, and pay damages to residents who have lost the use of their property because of the noise.



A photo from video provided by Whidbey Island resident Bradley Portin shows a Navy jet roaring above the home of his neighbors in Coupeville, Washington. He is among three dozen residents who filed a federal lawsuit against the Navy last week over incessant noise. Bradley Portin via AP

Dear Governor Brown,

The Portland City Council is writing to you in response to community livability and safety concerns brought to our attention by several neighborhood groups in North and Northeast Portland. The Air Guard's recent changes to the Overhead Continuous Descent landing approach of F-15 jets over residential neighborhoods in Portland is of great concern to the Council. We encourage the Air Guard to pursue an alternative landing option that does not involve low altitude flights over residents of Portland.

Portland City Council is aware that the Overhead Continuous Descent approach is generally used for training purposes to allow our pilots to maintain proficiency with this maneuver. In the past this maneuver had not been frequently used at PDX but in 2008 its use was increased and in 2018 the frequency has again increased. As the density of the City around the airport continues to grow the use of this maneuver creates a larger impact on more residents. With more operations comes greater risk of a dangerous mishap.

Additionally, the noise and vibration created by the approach results in excessive impacts on citizens and businesses. The Continuous Descent Approach does not have the same impact or a comparable noise to local road traffic. It has a different tonality, creates a feeling of pressure within residents' heads and chest, and carries noise deep into the community where none is found from a typical straight-in landing approach. Sound levels from the Continuous Descent Approach were measured in the upper 60's to the low 70's dBA range. This level of noise forces citizens to raise their voices to communicate effectively.

Portland City Council appreciates the need for the Air Guard to appropriately train their pilots, yet is concerned about the long term impacts of the noise pollution caused by the use of the OCDA at PDX. For these reasons and more, Portland City Council fully endorses the conclusions and recommendations found in a letter dated 6/17/19, which was written and sent to you by Gary Kunz, Chair of the East Columbia Neighborhood Association, and Andrew Pritchard, spokesperson of NoJetsPortland.com. Their well-researched letter diligently explains the history of the OCDA at PDX and the unfortunate series of events which permitted its use. As Commander of the Oregon Guard, you have the authority to enhance and maintain the quality of life of Portlanders for generations to come. City Council supports the recommendation to discontinue the use of the OCDA at PDX. As Kunz and Pritchard write, "ORANG can do what it did for several decades before: prepare to be mission-ready by practicing the OCDA elsewhere. To suggest that the ORANG can't be ready if it doesn't use the OCDA at PDX is to suggest that ORANG was not combat ready for the duration of the Cold War." The convenience of saving time and gas money is not an acceptable reason for polluting Portland communities.

We believe also that the safety of pilots and quality of life of citizens on the ground are of paramount importance. It is in this spirit that Portland City Council looks forward to finding a solution that affords necessary pilot training and maintains a safe and livable environment. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Thank you,

Mayor and Commissioners

From: [Gary Kunz](#)
To: [McClymont, Keelan](#)
Cc: [Andrew Pritchard](#)
Subject: City Council testimony
Date: Tuesday, July 9, 2019 8:48:02 AM

I would like to testify before the City Council.

25 September 2019

Gary M. Kunz

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Provide an update on community efforts dealing with the Oregon Air National Guard's Continuous Overhead Descent Landing Approach. This newly implemented approach directs F-15 aircraft over the residential areas at very low altitude.

Thank you,

Gary Kunz

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Request of Gary Kunz to address Council regarding community efforts to deal with the Oregon Air National Guard's continuous overhead descent landing approach (Communication)

SEP 25 2019

PLACED ON FILE

SEP 17 2019

Filed
MARY HULL CABALLERO
Auditor of the City of Portland

By *Keela*
Deputy

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Wheeler		