

CITY OF TENAKEE SPRINGS

John Wisenbaugh
MAYOR
citytke@gmail.com

P.O. Box 52
Tenakee Springs, Alaska 99841
Phone 907-736-2207
Fax 907-736-2249

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-0203

March 7, 2017

Dear Senator Murkowski,

We appreciate this opportunity to share our views regarding the U.S. Navy's planned training event known as Northern Edge. Our community voiced concerns regarding the timing and location of the Northern Edge and the U.S. Navy's pre-selection of training dates from 1 to 12 May 2017. Recorded public testimony at meetings and forums since September 2016 highlights undue risks to our commercial fisheries and the well-being of our local businesses. As such, I am writing to request your engagement with the U.S. Navy to address our concerns. The U.S. Navy has not adequately engaged our community nor responded to our public comments in its proposed mitigation package.

We united with six other Alaskan coastal communities in passing a Resolution requesting that the U.S. Navy move its training to Fall/Winter months, thereby, reducing impacts on our resources. The Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) failed to use best available science when evaluating the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on social, biological, and physical resources. It concluded no adverse impacts despite statements regarding unknown behavioral and distribution shifts in fish due to explosions; mortality of fish due to noise, chemicals, and sonar; and direct contradictions from National Marine Fisheries Service.

The U.S. Navy has not followed up with my community. In December, they indicated they would revisit in Spring 2017 to further engage Alaskan communities. They are scheduled to return for an "informal discussion rather than presentation" with Native Village of Eyak and Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak in late March 2017, a mere four weeks before the scheduled training¹. This Government to Government Consultation follow up does not include the general public of Tenakee Springs.

While the U.S. Navy stated they are hardly using any explosives in Northern Edge 2017, they have not made a legal commitment to using less than the amount for which they are seeking authorization. The U.S. Navy confirmed the Record of Decision (ROD) will not limit the amount of ordnance and sonar requested for use in these exercises. Further, there is no legal commitment from the U.S. Navy to actually expend what it is "planning" for 2017. In the recent presentations, the U.S. Navy cited far less ordnance is "planned" for 2017; but, they are not beholden to those numbers. Moreover, future exercises in 2019 and 2021 may change in scope and the use of weaponry, munitions, and sonar as long as it does not exceed the limits in the EIS.

On 29 December 2016, my community's Council passed a Resolution requesting that the U.S. Navy move its training to Fall/Winter months. The support stemmed from the following economic benefits for our community during the summer months.

We rely on visitors who partake in fishing charters, marine mammal watching tours, bird outings, and recreate in our waters. Tenakee Springs and its inlet provide extremely vital habitats for migrating shorebirds, fish, and marine mammals. The EIS states:

- Shorebirds, fish, and marine mammals would have the potential to be affected by vessel movement, aircraft overflights, weapons firing/non-explosive ordnance use, explosive ordnance, and expended materials. Furthermore, no assessment was conducted on the effects of sonar on seabirds.

¹ Email correspondence from ANASTASIA D. SCHMIDT, Capt, USAF Director, Public Affairs on 28 February 2017 to Summer is for Salmon Staff member, Christina Hendrickson

CITY OF TENAKEE SPRINGS

- Shorebirds, fish, and marine mammals exposed to explosions could suffer temporary effects, sublethal injury or mortality and those in relatively close proximity to these activities could be disturbed and relocate, or be injured or killed.
- It is possible that persistent expended ordnance could be colonized by benthic organisms (such as clams and oysters) and then mistaken by birds for prey, or that expended ordnance could be accidentally ingested by birds while they were foraging for natural prey items.
- Expended material such as parachutes from sonobuoys, associated parachute lines, or shrouds may be encountered by shorebirds, fish, and marine mammals in the waters of the training area. There is a potential for shorebirds, fish, and marine mammals to become entangled in expended materials that are on or near the surface.

May is an extremely busy time in Tenakee Springs. In addition to the return of wild salmon and migrating wildlife, commercial fishermen are readying their boats for the first commercial opener of the season in mid-May.

Our Resolution indicated that the following mitigation measures to ensure there are no negative impacts on our community.

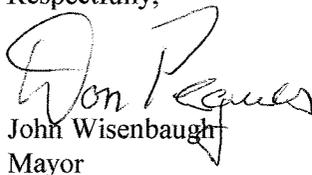
- The U.S. Navy refrain from using live ordnance or sonar in any Marine Protected Area, including NOAA Fisheries Marine Protected Areas, State Marine Protected Areas and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern;
- The U.S. Navy relocate its training area to the far southeast corner of the current designated training area, off the Continental Shelf areas of the Gulf of Alaska, and away from seamounts; and
- The U.S. Navy to conduct its training exercises after the middle of September and before the Spring, so as not to impact migrating salmon and other species.

Tenakee Springs depends on healthy salmon runs and wildlife. Therefore, as your constituents we ask that you make a direct request to the U.S. Navy to postpone the on-water portion of Northern Edge 2017 and all future training exercises in the Gulf of Alaska to occur only after mid-September and before mid-March.

Now is the time to engage the U.S. Navy, who selected these dates in advance of receiving a Letter of Authorization from the National Marine Fisheries Service and publishing a ROD. It troubles me, personally, and my community that the U.S. Navy presented 1-12 May 2017 as firm during their limited engagement with our community.

Thank you, Senator, for your response and involvement on this issue.

Respectfully,

 - Vice Mayor
for John Wisenbaugh
Mayor

CC: Summer is for Salmon
Media Outlets