

Navy gets OK for exercises, says little effect on orcas

November 12 2015, byPhuong Le



In this Jan. 18, 2014 photo, an endangered female orca leaps from the water while breaching in Puget Sound west of Seattle, as seen from a federal research vessel that had been tracking the whales. The orca is from the J pod, one of three groups of southern resident killer whales that frequent the inland waters of Washington state. NOAA is issuing permits to the U.S. Navy, which wants to expand sonar and other training exercises off the West Coast but needs authorization because of the potential to harm marine mammals. Critics say more sonar-emitting buoys would harm whales and other marine creatures. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

The U.S. Navy has received authorization from federal biologists to expand sonar testing and other warfare training off the coast of

Washington, Oregon and Northern California.

The National Marine Fisheries Service said Thursday it renewed the Navy's five-year permit after concluding underwater explosions, sonar activity and other exercises would cause mostly short-term, low-level effects to marine mammals such as orcas and [humpback whales](#) protected under [federal law](#).

The Navy says it needs to ensure its forces are well prepared and has trained for decades in the area without significant impacts on marine mammals.

Critics say sonar can disrupt the ability of those mammals to forage for food and communicate with one another, while causing injuries at close distances.

They want the Navy to limit the areas and times when it conducts training.



In this Dec. 14, 2012 file photo provided by the U.S. Navy, sailors unload sonobuoys from an MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter aboard the guided-missile cruiser USS Mobile Bay in the Arabian Sea. NOAA is issuing permits to the U.S. Navy, which wants to expand sonar and other training exercises off the West Coast but needs authorization because of the potential to harm marine mammals. Critics say more sonar-emitting buoys would harm whales and other marine creatures. (Spc. 2nd Class Armando Gonzales/U.S. Navy via AP, File)

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