



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
(ENERGY, INSTALLATIONS AND ENVIRONMENT)
1000 NAVY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

OCT 4 2016

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

Dear Senator Murkowski:

Thank you for your letter of September 16, 2016 concerning Navy's participation in Northern Edge 2017 (NE17). I also appreciate you taking the time to meet with RDML Lou Cariello, my Navy environmental readiness lead, on September 29th to address the concerns raised in your letter. I want to assure you the Navy is working closely with Alaska Command (ALCOM) and the U.S. Pacific Command to improve our communication with the coastal communities of Southeast Alaska. We will work with local stakeholders to ensure they are fully aware of NE17 training activities and the measures that will be put in place to minimize environmental impacts.

The Navy is committed to protecting the environment while meeting our national security obligations. We are aware of and appreciate the unique environment in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA), including its critically important natural resources. As outlined in the recently released *Gulf of Alaska Navy Training Activities Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS/OEIS)* (July 2016), we take proactive steps to avoid harming marine species in the GOA through the use of protective measures and work to avoid conflicts with civilian activities (e.g. fishing) during training events.

I readily admit we could have done a much better job reaching out to potentially affected stakeholders leading up to NE15. The Navy shares your position that it is critical for us to engage early and often with potentially affected stakeholders leading up to NE17. As discussed during your September 29th meeting with RDML Cariello, ALCOM, supported by the Navy (Pacific Fleet) and other Services, is implementing an aggressive outreach plan that will include meetings with town councils in Kodiak, Homer, Cordova and Seward; and discussions with stakeholders at events such as the Alaska Federation of Natives, COMFISH, Alaska Maritime Symposium, and the Alaska Forum on the Environment. Additionally, we plan to attend other local, regional, and state-wide events with an aim to initiate a two-way dialogue with citizens in coastal communities, fishing interests, the scientific and environmental community, as well as local, state and Federal officials. It is important that we clearly convey the scope of NE17 activities and, together with the regulatory community and scientific experts, address concerns and, if needed, dispel misinformation related to the exercise and environmental impacts.

The Navy plans to build upon the lessons learned from NE15 and NE17 to expand public involvement opportunities and community engagement in the future for all training activities in the GOA. The Navy values the unique training opportunity and environment that exists in Alaska and we are committed to being open with the public about our activities and environmental impacts.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to meet with us and please do not hesitate to reach out with any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Dennis V. McGinn