

# Navy Trains for Mission, Protects Natural Environment on Oregon Range

## Navy & Partners Successfully Reduce Threats to Washington Ground Squirrel & Its Habitat

**EFFORTS BY THE** Navy and its partners from Washington State and Oregon fish and wildlife agencies have successfully protected the Washington ground squirrel (*Urocyon washingtoni*) and its habitat thereby avoiding federal listing of the species.

Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island aircrews along with the Oregon National Guard rely on Naval Weapon Systems Training Facility (NWSTF) Boardman to complete realistic mission critical training.

“Environmental programs at Boardman minimize adverse impacts and balance the Navy’s need for realistic combat training,” said Rear Adm. Gary Mayes, Navy Region Northwest commander. “This is critically important airspace. There is no more land for training coming available. In fact, land for training is becoming more and more valuable all the time.”

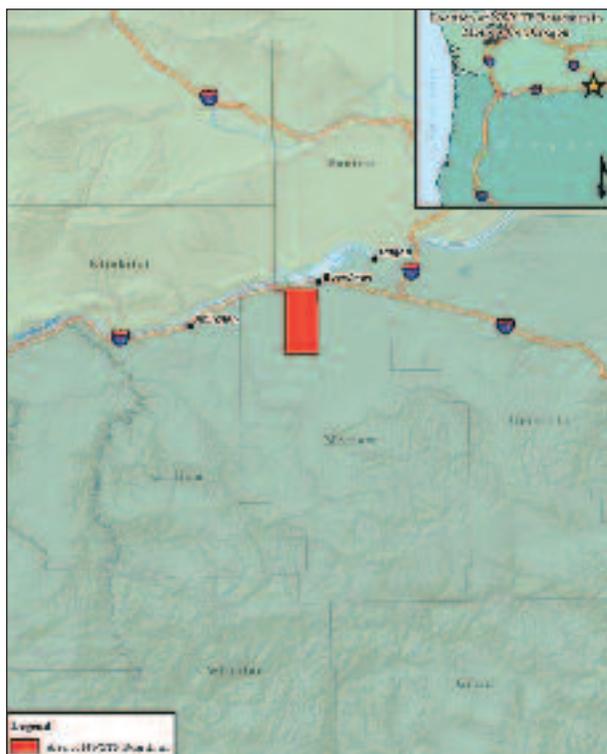
Boardman is the only range in the Pacific Northwest available to naval aviation squadrons to practice air-to-ground bombing, Low Altitude Tactical Training and Surface to Air Counter Tactics. Navy EA-18G Growler

aircrews routinely fly the 225 miles from Whidbey Island to Boardman. Growler aircraft are able to approach the target area unimpeded as low as 200 feet above the ground at 480 knots (around 550 miles per hour).

Current Air-to-Ground Bombing exercises at Boardman involve non-explosive practice bombs. These practice munitions do not contain a high-explosive charge.

Environmental programs at Boardman minimize adverse impacts and balance the Navy’s need for realistic combat training.

—Rear Admiral Gary Mayes





Navy EA-18G Growler aircrews routinely fly from Whidbey Island to Boardman to conduct critical training.

Concerted efforts by the Navy, Washington and Oregon fish and wildlife agencies, private landowners and others have been successful in balancing agriculture production, wind energy and military readiness with conservation.

—Paul Henson

Instead, practice munitions contain a small spotting charge that allows units to see the impact.

### The Evolution of the Boardman Range

In 1941, the Army Air Corps needed a bombing range in the Pacific Northwest, so the Army acquired 96,000 acres in Morrow County, OR for this purpose. Aircrews from Walla Walla Army Air Base used the 12-square-mile range for air-to-ground gunnery practice.

Due to the area's sparse population and because the land wasn't

conducive to agriculture, the Oregon range was an ideal location for bombing practice. In 1948, the Air Force took control of the range. The Navy began using the range in 1958 and assumed oversight from the Air Force in 1960. The Navy renamed the bombing range NWSTF Boardman, after the nearby town. The range now consists of 47,432 acres of land, a 12-by 6-mile rectangle.

### Boardman Today

The Navy recently completed an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 2016 which assessed the impacts associated with current and

proposed Navy and Oregon National Guard training. The EIS now provides for the construction and operation of new range facilities, along with increased training and testing at Boardman.

During the EIS process, it was found that the greatest concentration of the Washington ground squirrel in Oregon is on Boardman—adjacent to the Boardman Conservation Area. The ground squirrel, though not a federally listed candidate species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), is considered endangered by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.



Washington ground squirrel.  
Jodie Delavan



Jodie Delavan

For more information about the Washington ground squirrel, visit [www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/articles.cfm?id=149489415](http://www.fws.gov/oregonfwo/articles.cfm?id=149489415).

In 1999, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the Washington ground squirrel as an ESA candidate species. The listing meant there were sufficient threats to the squirrel to propose the animal as either endangered or threatened.

Because of the work of several partners, the squirrel's future looks brighter than it has in two decades. Working with the USFWS, the Navy, and others, threats to the squirrel are reduced. This led the USFWS to conclude in 2016 that the species does not require federal protection.

## The Basics About Candidate Conservation Agreements

**CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS** are voluntary conservation agreements between USFWS and one or more public or private parties. USFWS works with its partners to identify threats to candidate species, plan the measures needed to address the threats and conserve these species, identify willing landowners, develop agreements and design and implement conservation measures and monitor their effectiveness.

For a fact sheet and more information about CCAs, visit [www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/cca.html](http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/cca.html).



“Concerted efforts by the Navy, Washington and Oregon fish and wildlife agencies, private landowners and others have been successful in balancing agriculture production, wind energy and military readiness with conservation,” said Paul Henson, the Service’s Oregon State Supervisor.

For many years, the Navy has worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop and implement conservation measures for the Washington ground squirrel while still being able to meet our mission-critical training needs.

—John Phillips

“This is what can happen when we work together and an example of how the ESA stimulates collaborative conservation and can avoid the need for a species to be listed.”

### Major Steps Toward Conservation

In 2004, the first major step in conservation was the Threemile Canyon Farms multi-species Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances. This action permanently protects 23,000 acres of Washington ground squirrel habitat from future land conversion. This agreement with local landowners also conserves the Ferruginous Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike and Sage Sparrow.

Proposed improvements encompass 586 acres of Boardman or just over one percent of the range. The EIS also adds a new 46-square-nautical-mile training airspace and airspace expansion adjoining the current Boardman airspace areas.

To implement the EIS, the Navy conducts surveys to identify Washington ground squirrel habitat prior to any construction. The Navy likewise directs construction outside the squirrel’s active above ground time from January to June. Mitigation goals include no net loss of habitat and habitat restoration and enhancement.

A monitoring program is initiated to assess the effects of increased training on the squirrel’s health. The Navy provides long-term monitoring for other sensitive species including burrowing owls, long billed curlews and Swainson’s and Ferruginous hawks.

The greatest test for the ground squirrel comes from lightning-ignited wildfires. Since 1998, wildfires have burned 85 percent of Boardman’s acreage. Because of the wildfire danger, the Navy has on-site personnel trained in wildland firefighting. Additionally, explosive demolition training is not normally planned during wildfire season from June to September.

“For many years the Navy, has worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop and implement conservation measures for the Washington ground squirrel while still being able to meet our mission-critical training needs,” said John Phillips, Natural Resources Manager, NAS Whidbey Island and NWSTF Boardman. “The Navy understands the need to conserve and protect these resources as part of maintaining a sustainable and realistic military training environment.”

Phil Guerrero  
Navy Region Northwest  
360-396-4955  
DSN: 744-4955  
phillip.guerrero@navy.mil

### For More Information

FOR MORE INFORMATION about Navy Region Northwest, call 360-396-1630 or visit the following sites:

- [www.homeportnorthwest.wordpress.com](http://www.homeportnorthwest.wordpress.com)
- [www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrnw.html](http://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrnw.html)
- [www.facebook.com/CNRNW](http://www.facebook.com/CNRNW)

