

April 19, 2004

Governor Mike Easley
Office of the Governor
Raleigh, NC 27611

Dear Governor Easley,

The Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of North Carolina voted unanimously on April 3, 2004, to oppose the U.S. Navy's plan to place an outlying landing field (OLF) in Washington and Beaufort Counties near the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

In taking this position, the League is acting in solidarity with a host of state and national civic and public interest organizations, at least thirty-six North Carolina councils of government, such agencies as the N.C. Department of Environmental and Natural Resources, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, the U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Canadian Wildlife Directors in Atlantic Flyway Council.

The League's opposition is based on the significant and irreparable environmental damage this plan would do the Pocosin refuge and the area, vital components of the Atlantic Flyway the main migration route of the eastern United States. We specifically challenge the lack of rigor in the Environmental Impact Statement and its cumulative effect on eastern NC.

More than 30,000 rural acres, much of it prime farmland, would be purchased or managed for the proposed landing strip, which would be located within five miles of the Pugo Lake unit of the Pocosin Lakes NWR, a National Heritage Area under our state's Nature Preserves Act. The eastern holding pattern for flight activity is two-tenths of a mile from the Pocosin lakes NWR itself, a "public interest area" according to the Navy's own environmental screening criteria. The OLF is anticipated to bring some 31,650 low-level military flights of Super Hornet aircraft through this area each year, disrupting the feeding and resting grounds for the thousands of migratory birds in the area. The management plan for the forty-five square mile tract calls for "lethal and non lethal" purging of these birds from the vicinity, further threatening their safety.

More than 100,000 tundra swans and snow geese winter in the area, along with thousands of Canadian geese and it is home to approximately twenty-five percent of the entire country's eastern population of tundra swans each winter. In an era when so much of the migratory flyway for these flocks of large waterfowl has been lost, this situation would create havoc with a globally significant bird refuge. The Pocosin Lakes NWR area is refuge to a reintroduced population of red wolves, bear, deer and other nonmigratory birds, all of which will be effected.

The choice of placing the Navy's aircraft and pilots at risk of collision with the large swans, geese and other waterfowl in this area is rated by the Navy as "severe" for fifty percent of the year, a risk considered unacceptable for human life and the \$45 million machinery. The potential environmental consequences of a crash or a fuel dump from a damaged plane in such a high risk site was also ignored in the environmental assessment.

The League's national consensus position calls for the protection and wise management of natural resources, conformance of federal land resources activities with approved state programs and full review of environmental, social and economic impact of major public developments and review of federally funded projects at all levels of government. The process followed by the Navy falls far short of those expectations.

There were other locations originally considered in NC with lower levels of threat to the environment and the pilots. We urge your assistance in advocating vigorously against the Navy's current plan and ask for an immediate and thorough reconsideration of locations which offer much lower environmental impact and risk. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Warmest wishes,

Mary Klenz, Co-president

Peg Chapin, Co-president

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