

State Seeks Public Comments on Proposed Navy SEAL Trainings

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Navy SEAL training could expand on Kodiak Island. The state is currently taking public comment through the end of May on a permit application to use state-owned lands as part of a U.S. Navy winter weather training program.

Clark Cox is a natural resource manager for the State Department of Natural Resources and said the Navy didn't provide any specific dates, but rather wanted the ability to use the land when needed for trainings. According to the application submitted to the state, Navy SEAL trainings occur about six times per year and typically involve groups of up to 12 people for two days.

Cox said a portion of the state land in question is located in Chiniak and Pasagshak.

"There's lots of things out there. So, you know public lands are generally open for use. So we've got hunting that takes place, whether it's personal or subsistence or commercial. We've got agricultural grazing leases in and around the area. We've got the rocket launch facility, obviously. We've got the roads, we've got private residences there, we've got material sites, and we've got all kinds of activities taking place," Cox said.

The state isn't the only entity the Navy has contacted. Duane Dvorak works in the community development department for the Kodiak Island Borough and said the borough land is also part of the area the Navy is looking at for training.

"They are looking at a fairly large area, that encompasses quite a few different ownerships. Quite a few Native corporation owners, along with the state of Alaska. The borough is probably one of the lesser land owners in this scenario," he said. "I don't think they're identifying a particular place. I think they are looking kind of for a blanket approval so they can go wherever the conditions seem to be right for the training."

Borough land is open to public use as long as the natural area isn't

disturbed, and Dvorak said Navy SEALs use a "leave no trace" when conducting trainings.

On the state side of things, Cox said land agreements with various military groups aren't uncommon.

"We've had agreements with the military in the past to conduct glacier activities, you know high altitude rescue training, things like that. So this isn't unusual," Cox said. "I don't know if we've done one in and around Kodiak to my memory. But it's not unusual. State land is open to lots for activities so this is just one of the many activities that take place out there."

Public comment periods are required before the state issues a permit. Cox said people can call the department or visit its website. Comments will be accepted through May 31.