



Successful Partnership Between the Makah Tribe and DoD's Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program

In 1998, the Makah Tribe of the Makah Indian Reservation (Neah Bay, Washington) became a sponsored partner with the Department of Defense (DoD) Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program (NALEMP) when entering into its first Cooperative Agreement (CA) with DoD.

A Navy Lifesaving Station was established on Wa'adah Island in 1877. In 1910, the Lifesaving Station was expanded to the mainland, and the facility was known as the Navy Lifeboat Station. The area of the Waadah Island Quonset Huts and Bunkers – Navy Lifeboat Station was set aside and

taken out of the Makah Indian Reservation by an Administrative Order in 1923 for "coast guard purposes." A later 1925 Executive Order placed a portion of the area (the Navy section) under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). The area was transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) in 1946, and USCG leased the area to Crown Zellerbach Corporation in 1948. The site was designated surplus in 1956 and transferred back into the Makah Indian Reservation in 1958.



Photo 1: Conditions at the Navy Lifeboat Station in 2004 before removal and clean-up activities (looking northeast.) Source: MERT



Photo 2: Conditions at the Navy Lifeboat Station in 2021 after completing removal and clean-up activities. Source: MERT

To address military impacts and potential hazards from former military facilities and operations, the Makah Tribe formed the Makah Environmental Restoration Team (MERT). From 2002 through 2020, the MERT conducted a series of site investigations to characterize contamination, removal actions, and remediation at the Navy Lifeboat Station. This work was conducted under NALEMP.

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For Open Publication**

Sep 27, 2022

Department of Defense
OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND SECURITY REVIEW

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Photo 3: Conditions at the Navy Lifeboat Station in 2004 before removal and clean-up activities (looking south.) Source: MERT

Prior to NALEMP removal actions, this 3.1-acre abandoned compound consisted of several dilapidated buildings, concrete foundations, construction debris, drums, aboveground storage tanks (ASTs), and underground storage tanks (USTs). Fuel oil from leaking ASTs and USTs impacted adjacent soils. As the buildings deteriorated over their nearly 100-year lifespan, they became dangerous structures, and the materials used in the construction of these buildings contained hazardous materials (asbestos-containing materials and lead-based paint).

Funding provided through NALEMP in 2002 allowed the MERT to conduct site characterization at the Navy Lifeboat Station. This characterization included asbestos inspections and lead-based paint (LBP) inspections of the barracks, garage, and gymnasium buildings, testing of soils for diesel and oil contamination, and detecting and locating remaining USTs. In May 2005, asbestos, abandoned buildings, and several 55-gallon barrels were removed from the Site. Several ASTs and USTs and 30 cubic yards (cy) of associated petroleum-contaminated soil (PCS) were removed in March 2006. Additional PCS and an AST were removed in June 2007. In 2010, soil sampling was conducted to determine the extent of PCS associated with two former USTs. In 2012 and 2014 the remaining PCS associated with the USTs was removed. Additional soil sampling to determine the extent of PCS associated with a heating oil AST was conducted prior to building removals in 2020.

In October 2020, the last of the former Navy buildings and approximately 24 cy of PCS were removed and transported to an off-site disposal facility. Once the PCS was removed, confirmation soil samples were collected. Analysis of these samples confirmed that petroleum concentrations in remaining soils are less than the site-specific cleanup levels; test results confirmed that the PCS associated with the former heating oil AST was removed, and mitigation of this impact was complete. Restoration of this former military site was necessary to protect and restore the Makah Tribe's subsistence and cultural uses of the impacted area. Restoration was also necessary to support the Tribe's efforts to create opportunities for economic development, including tourism and ecotourism. The Makah Tribe has conducted mitigation of military impacts and restoration of the former military site in a manner that enhances the ecology of the area and respects the culture of the Makah people. Cleanup of the former military site is a vital step toward restoring the site for safe use by the Tribal community and the public and is of highest priority to the Makah Tribe.



Photo 4: Conditions at the Navy Lifeboat Station in 2021 after completing removal and clean-up activities. Source: MERT