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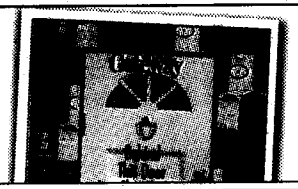

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APRIL 24, 2002 ▸ VOLUME LXXIV, NUMBER 17 ▸ 5 SECTIONS, 86 PGS. ▸ GIG HARBOR, WA

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Fox Island residents express fear, concern

Navy, neighbors meet to discuss eroded beaches

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Fox Island residents told U.S. Navy representatives that they are angry that they are losing their beach, their bulkheads and their property to a breakwater formed by Fox Island Laboratory's current barge and pier and that they are discouraged that the Navy intends to expand its size and research scope on Fox Island at a scoping meeting last Wednesday, April 17.

"You guys have destroyed someone's property, and that's mine," said Peter Johnson, who lives west of the lab.

The scoping meeting is a mandatory part of any improvements the Navy might make to its facility. Right now the Navy wants to replace rotting and damaged moorings, but is also considering expanding the size of the offshore facility.

"We owe it to address actions that affect communities," said Capt. Steve Petri, a division commander with the Naval Service Warfare Center, who traveled from Bethesda, Md., for the meeting.

"You're our neighbor, we're your neighbors, we want to be a good one."

The Fox Island Laboratory, Petri explained, has to be a neighborhood fixture. When residents asked if the lab could be relocated anywhere in the United States, Petri answered with an emphatic no.

"There's nothing anywhere else in the country that has anything like it," said Petri of the island, which has a deep, still body of water in Carr Inlet and plentiful air and sea access with nearby military bases and the Port of Tacoma.

"Do we close up shop and move? There's nowhere else to move to," Petri said.

But that's what the lab's closest neighbors wish would happen.

Johnson and his neighbors, including Matt Corsi and John Blaser, who live in the properties immediately west of the lab, brought a slide presentation with land and aerial photography showing the state of their beachfront.

The aerial pictures, which were taken over a period of about 50 years, showed that sand has piled up around the pier from the east, creating a point. In the meantime, the western portion has gradually been scoured by the east-west action of the water, creating a shallow and rocky beach.

The neighbors showed pictures of their crumbling bulkheads and sagging lawns as well.

"Sometimes I can't sleep because I worry what I'll find when I wake up — what damage will be done today?" said Chris Corsi, a resident and Matt Corsi's brother.

"We built a new bulkhead three years ago," said Larry Pederson, a seven-year resident.

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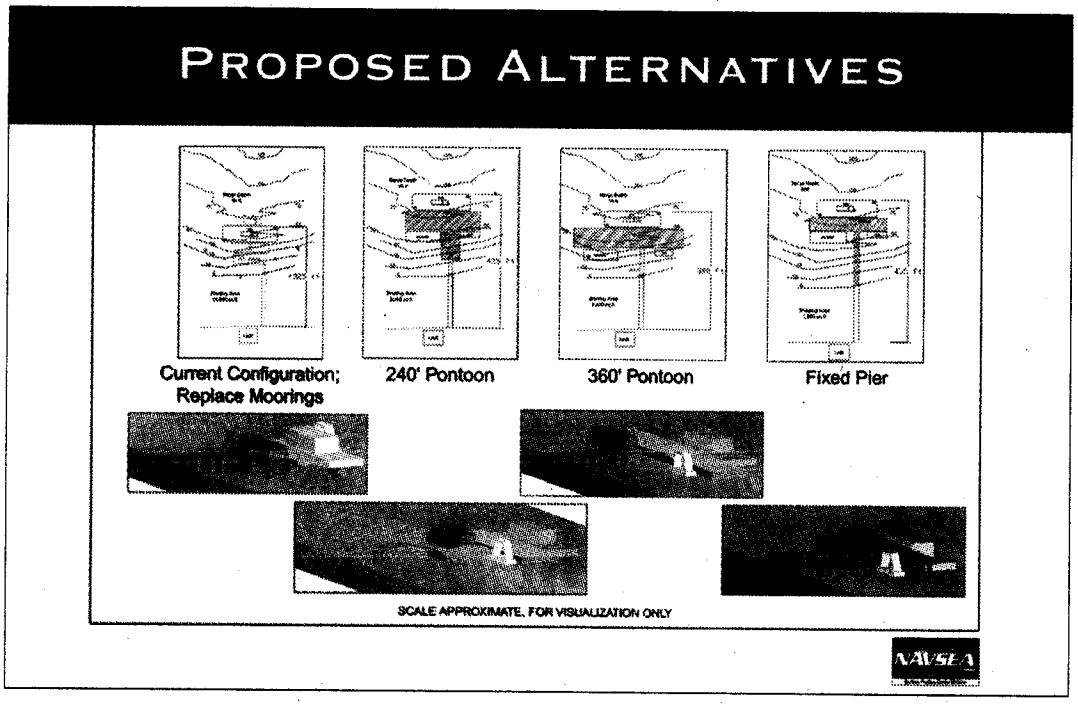

Graphic courtesy the U.S. Navy

This illustration shows different ways the U.S. Navy is looking at reworking their Fox Island research facility.

"Sometimes I can't sleep because I worry what I'll find when I wake up — what damage will be done today?"

Chris Corsi,
Fox Island property owner

Fox Island: Navy officials say island is unique; they're not leaving

from page 1A

Furthermore, there is "sloughing of property in the front yard, and the back is barely walkable," he said.

Dave Maddoc, who said he lived about two miles from the lab for 25 years, said he was beginning to notice piles of bricks poking out of the beach that had been buried since the turn of the century. He said he was concerned that the erosion was beginning to work its way farther up the shoreline.

Neighbors were horrified that one of the Navy's proposals calls for floating a 360-foot long pontoon 380 feet off the shore.

"Does it have to take up the whole front of my property before I complain?" asked Johnson.

The other options proffered by the Navy, like a fixed pier and a 240-foot section of pontoon, were also poorly received by residents, who complained that the current, smaller structure was already enough of an "eyesore."

Residents also said that they felt powerless against the Navy's size and money. Blaser even said that Michael Bass, the lab's site director, showed him a commissioned painting of the large pontoon in Carr Inlet in April 2001.

"He told me it was too late, that it was coming in three weeks," Blaser said.

Dismayingly, Blaser said, it was painted as if from the perspective of his yard.

Bass replied that when the pontoon was purchased, it could be used "for a multitude of purposes," including on Fox Island.

The painting was commissioned to illustrate how the pontoon could be used at the lab, he said. "I had to create my view so everyone could see it."

"I was expressing a personal point of view, not a professional one," Bass said.

Naval representatives insist that the meeting was fruitful, and that the comments were a part of the listening process of scoping meetings. Representatives also said that they are not limited to selecting only from the current batch of proposals.

However, Fox Island is very important to the Navy, and there is no chance that the lab will move.

"There's unique characteristics of the inlet that are very well defined," said Bob Kollars, director of Naval Service Warfare Center, Bremerton detachment. "We do very, very unique testing there."