

North Carolina Council of Churches Rural Life Committee

April 28, 2008

The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.

Proverbs 13:23, NRSV

For the past several years, the U.S. Navy has been trying to construct a “\$230 million airfield in a remote area for fighter pilots to simulate night landings on aircraft carriers.”¹ Known as an “Outlying Landing Field” (OLF), the operations of this airfield necessarily entail very loud noise, displacement of local residents, and severe damage to local ecosystems. Currently, the Navy operates an OLF near Virginia Beach, VA. According to Doris Morris, “a member of the residents group that has stalled the landing field in Washington County, Virginia Beach created the demand for the field by allowing its suburbs to spread out of control. She said no quiet, rural county in Virginia or North Carolina should have to pay for it.”²

Recently, the Navy declined to pursue its original plans to build the OLF in Washington County, NC, after meeting with staunch local and statewide opposition. The Navy, however, announced that it would study the viability of two sites in Northeastern North Carolina, one in Gates County and one in Camden and Currituck counties. Local residents and grassroots organizations have already voiced strong opposition to the proposed sites.

The Rural Life Committee of the North Carolina Council of Churches opposes the OLF because local residents believe that it will harm our state’s rural communities.³ And harm that befalls rural communities affects us all.

We are committed to a vision of thriving rural communities, and we stand in a long tradition of working for peace and justice across the state. As a faith-based organization whose motto is “Strength in Unity, Peace through Justice,” we are called to work for economic and ecological justice in our midst.

We believe that rural communities should not be forced against their will to carry the burden of government or military programs, particularly when such programs provide few economic benefits to outweigh their many costs.

We believe that the social and environmental costs of the OLF cannot be measured in dollars alone, but that every lost family farm and every paved-over acre of forest, field and wetland represents a deep and irretrievable loss.

We believe that the voices of family farmers, for example, working the cotton fields of Gates County should matter as much as those of wealthy vacationers enjoying suburban Virginia Beach.

For these reasons, we oppose the construction of the Navy’s OLF in rural North Carolina and we call on all North Carolinians to honor our state’s rural communities.

¹ *Raleigh News & Observer*, January 23, 2008, “Navy ditches Plan A for landing field site,” Wade Rawlins.

² *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 4, 2007, “No Place to Land,” Bill Geroux.

³ As of March 22, 2008, the grassroots organization Citizens Against OLF has both collected over 3000 signatures on a petition and delivered over 1300 individually signed letters to elected officials opposing the OLF.