



Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance
(307) 733-9417 • www.jhalliance.org

June 15, 2009

Superintendent Mary Gibson Scott
Grand Teton National Park
P.O. Drawer 170
Moose, WY 83012

Re: Jackson Hole Airport Use Agreement Extension D-EIS
(Via: Electronic, FAX and Postal Service)

Dear Superintendent Scott,

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the nearly 2,000 members of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, I thank you for this opportunity to comment on the above referenced D-EIS. The Conservation Alliance has a long history of involvement with the management and operations of the Jackson Hole Airport. We fully appreciate its unique location entirely within Grand Teton National Park and the service it provides the citizens of the region as well as the many visitors to this valley. We are also aware of the Park's primary responsibility and authority to manage and regulate airports within national parks as granted to the Department of the Interior by Congress under the 1950 Airport Act. Because of the authority of this act, the airport's unique location within GTNP, and the National Park Service's mission "... to promote and regulate the use of the...national parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations[.]", we believe the Park is clearly and ultimately responsible to insure that the impacts resulting from airport operations are adequately mitigated or eliminated.

1983 USE AGREEMENT

We understand that the existing (1983) Use Agreement between the Department of the Interior and Jackson Hole Airport Board stems from the unsupported directive "...that the Jackson Hole Airport is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Department of the Interior" (April 27, 1983 letter from Sec. of Interior James Watt to Sec. of Transportation E. Dole). The D-EIS presents no review of or rationale for the continuance of this directive. **We believe this 1983 directive needs to be reviewed with detailed explanations provided to the public as to why or why not the JH Airport is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Department of the Interior.**

NEPA CONSIDERATION

The National Environmental Policy Act requires that a reasonable range of alternatives to be analyzed in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement (NEPA Guidelines, NPS-12, 1997, p.24). It is our opinion that the two alternatives examined in the D-EIS do not represent a reasonable range of alternatives. **We believe that a third alternative, to extend the use agreement for ten years needs to be included.** This would allow the Park and the community to reexamine the airport's operations a decade sooner (2043) than the Preferred Alternative with two-ten year extensions (2053) will allow.

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

Section 1508.25 of the CEQ Regulations for Implementing the Provisions of the NEPA outlines the types of actions that determine the scope of environmental impact statements. They include:

(a) Actions (other than unconnected single actions) which may be: (1) Connected actions, which means that they are closely related and therefore should be discussed in the same impact statement. Actions are connected if they: (i) Automatically trigger other actions which may require environmental impact statements."

The Conservation Alliance is aware of the JH Airport Board's on-going safety study and have reason to believe that this study, with its findings and recommendations may have direct, connected impact on the operations at the JH Airport and could likely "...trigger other actions that may require environmental impact statements." It is for this reason that the Conservation Alliance on May 28, 2009 made a request to the Superintendent of GTNP and the Regional Director of the NPS to extend the comment period for no less than 60 days after the release to the public of the Jackson Hole Airport Board's on-going safety audit. **We request again that the comment period be extended for no less than 60 days after the release to the public of the JH Airport Board's safety audit.** Denied this request, we submit these comments with grave reservations concerning the apparent disregard for the above mentioned Guidelines and in no way are the submission of these comments meant to acknowledge that we in any manner dismiss our May 28th request and associated concerns.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

The formulation of the Preferred Alternative is based largely on the need to meet annual FAA Part 138 certification that permits commercial aviation operations at airports. The argument is made (p.14-16 with supplemental information on p.148-149) that the JH Airport could not meet these standards without FAA funding and that FAA funding would be absent if the JH Airport did not have

“Title free and clear... or ... a lease of not less than 20 years granted to the sponsor by another public agency...” to the land upon which the airport operates (D-EIS p.16). Presented as it is, this argument would lead the reader to accept the Preferred Alternative.

The Conservation Alliance challenges this narrow analysis. The D-EIS (p. 14-15) states that *“...revenues from these sources minus operating expenses have produced annual surpluses of about \$600,000 that can be applied to facilities repair, refurbishing, and improvements.”* Absent from this D-EIS is any mention of other funding sources available to the JH Airport Board such as, but not limited to, various State of Wyoming economic development programs. We are confident that the JH Airport has a history of receiving funds from a variety of sources, however the discussion of Funding Sources and Airport Funding (D-EIS, p. 14-15 and 148-151) are lacking of any alternative revenue source(s) analysis, and any analysis of long-term budgeting based upon predicted revenue sources and surpluses and anticipated operational improvement needs. **Absent this information, the Conservation Alliance concludes that not all reasonable information has been made available nor has it been thoroughly analyzed, and we therefore find the choice of the Preferred Alternative inadequately supported.**

NATURAL SOUNDSCAPE

The Conservation Alliance strongly supports the Park Service mission to provide for the protection of the natural and cultural resources within the Park and to *“...preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the Natural Soundscapes of the parks.”* (p.75, D-EIS). The detailed presentation of the recent noise analysis is impressive. However, we take issue in the manner in which comparisons were conducted between Alternative 1 and Alternative 2. For example, page 245 of the D-EIS discusses results only to the year 2025, not 2033 or 2053. Even under this incomplete comparison, it is stated that more of the Park will be impacted by aircraft noise with Alternative 2 than Alternative 1. By not doing comparisons for the later dates (which we suspect would identify an even greater difference between the two Alternatives) phrases such as *“...The figures indicate that the percent of time aircraft were audible would increase slightly from Alternative 1 conditions.”* (Emphasis added).

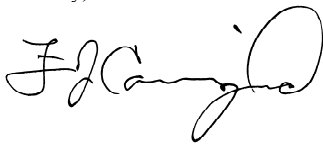
We firmly believe these conclusions are understated as is the overall concern shown for the amount of the park area and the percent of time that visitor enjoyment will be impacted by aircraft noise. A 60 dBA noise event is generally considered to be between “noisy” and “moderate”- for example, it is compared to “normal conversation” or a car traveling past at 30 feet and 30 miles per hour (BRC Acoustics & Technology Consulting. “Noise Descriptors” 2p).

We also believe that the overall noise analysis is woefully inadequate and skewed to understate actual aircraft noise levels. For example, during a recent hike to Hermitage Point, numerous commercial aircraft flew overhead and by my estimation sounded about like a car traveling past at 30 feet and 30 miles per hour. This is level of sound is not appropriate for this area of the Park (or unexplained reasons, Fig. F-7 and Fig. F-15 do not show this level of dBA at this site) and by most standards is not compatible with the Desired Conditions listed as part of the laws and NPS policies found on page 186 of the D-EIS. We firmly believe that Alternative 2 will result in a *“...degradation of the values and purposes for which Grand Teton National Park was established...”* (Page 186, D-EIS).

We fail to see where the Preferred Alternative incorporates any meaningful mitigation (as required by Sec. 1508.20 of the CEQ Regulations for Implementing the Provisions of the NEPA) such as strict enforcement of the Noise Abatement Plan, including but limited to preferential runway use and curfews. **Until proper mitigation is identified, put in place and procedures enforced, we believe this D-EIS is insufficient.**

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance has additional concerns with this D-EIS but have limited our comments to the above. We hope that the Final EIS will address these concerns. Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,



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