



# EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT FEBRUARY 21, 2024, CASE #24-01

## GEORGETOWN AIRPORT: A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN

*The County is operating Georgetown Airport out of compliance with federal and state regulations. The trees are widely known to be an aviation hazard, but until recently the County has been slow to react despite the documented risks and requirements from Caltrans and the FAA.*

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# SUMMARY

## Summary



*Figure 1 - Takeoffs from runway 17 to the south are an ominous task. Taken: 11/30/23.*

El Dorado County (“County”) owns and operates public airports in Placerville and Georgetown. The County Airports Division of the Planning and Building Department is responsible for keeping these airports safe. Each year hundreds of small planes use Georgetown Airport.

Over the past several years, the trees surrounding Georgetown Airport have seen significant overgrowth in the immediate areas of the runways. They are now a hazard to navigation, a potentially catastrophic risk to pilots and a significant liability risk to the County.

On March 19, 2022, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) issued a letter (Appendix 1) to the County requiring the removal or trimming of the overgrown trees by the

## SUMMARY

end of 2022. As of December 2023, the County has failed to remove these unsafe trees and recently Caltrans has closed the airport to night operations effective December 7, 2023.

The County has been aware of these unsafe airport conditions since at least 2013 when it received a service request to remove overgrown trees (Appendix 2), as well as frequent mentions at Airport Advisory Committee meetings for several years. The County **has been operating the airport out of compliance with applicable FAA regulations and the State Airport Permit issued by Caltrans, exposing the County to potential claims of gross negligence in the opinion of the Grand Jury.**



*Figure 2 - Aerial view of Georgetown Airport circa 2002.*

Up until December 2023, the County had no immediate plan to remedy the problem, citing budget issues, time required to get FAA or other funding, potential environmental impact study

## SUMMARY

requirements, and more. The County is, however, no longer ignoring the concerns and is taking preliminary steps to address the situation. Late in the drafting of this report we learned there was an initial plan to remove nearly 3 acres of the highest priority trees from the main approach path, and a longer-term plan to clear a remaining 3-4 acres to come completely into compliance with Caltrans and FAA guidelines that may happen by the second half of 2024.

Up to now, the County has failed to protect the safety of its citizens by not promptly addressing the airport's hazardous conditions. The County still faces an unnecessary exposure to lawsuits if someone is killed or injured because of this situation. It may only be partially covered for large liability losses through its airport insurance policy, putting general fund assets at risk.

Unfortunately, both County airports operate at a significant loss from business operations, drawing annually from the general fund. Up until at least November 2023, more focus has been placed on improving cost recovery metrics than on safety issues since a \$50,000 economic development plan was funded in 2023 ahead of funding the removal or trimming of any of the known tree hazards.

The County needs to follow through immediately to implement a plan to remove all navigation hazards and obstacles at the airport through a supplemental budget request and determine safe operating conditions for current use (e.g., only daylight operations) until remediation efforts are completed according to FAA and/or Caltrans guidelines.

# BACKGROUND

## Background

### SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

During a preliminary investigation into the operations and finances of the two County-operated airports, one in Placerville and the other in Georgetown, the Grand Jury became aware of a serious safety issue at the Georgetown Airport. When we attended a quarterly public meeting of the Airport Advisory Committee, several pilots and committee members expressed grave concern that the tall pine trees surrounding the airport have now grown to a height that creates a serious hazard to navigation. See Appendix 3 for changes from 2002 to 2020.

Very experienced pilots are already reporting that they have clipped the trees on approach to the airport as well as during takeoffs. Recently, in December 2023, Caltrans shut down night operations at the airport due to these hazards. The liability exposure the County is currently facing is unacceptable.

While the issue has been discussed for the past 15 years or more, it is now much worse due to the heavy rains in the winter of 2022-2023 adding to the tree growth. As of January 2024, there appears to be a tentative plan to address nearly three acres of the highest priority hazards, with a proposal to address another three to four acres of additional hazards in the second half of the year.

The County has been researching the issue, potential solutions, and funding sources for more than a year, but showed a general lack of urgency for the situation until the Grand Jury began investigating the issue. The following public comments were made at the Airport Advisory Committee meeting in November 2023 and demonstrate the frustration and fear from pilots with the County's failure to address their safety concerns (note: these comments were generally in response to a proposal at the time that would take at least two years to cut the trees):

*"I've been here for 25 years, and the trees have been talked about a lot, but now the trees are an endangerment to the pilots and to the houses near there. As a pilot in the*

## BACKGROUND

*winter; you have to land into the wind, which means you make a lot of landings on the 35 runway. You cannot make a stabilized approach, which is the preferred way to make a good landing, into [runway] 35. It's impossible... You have to do maneuvers that you don't want to do on a 3000-foot runway. I'm going to make a video of this, because that's what we do, but...*

*You cannot see these trees when you are starting to slow the plane down to get down to what is called the "over the fence" speed. I think I might have hit one the other day and I have flown into Georgetown probably more than anyone else in the history of the airport. I have 4000+ hours of flight time around Georgetown and the trees are really tall. I think the rain this year did this. We can't wait two years, which was estimated at the last meeting.*

*If there was a tree on a road that a school bus had to avoid this would be taken care of immediately, but for whatever reason, the way the government works, because it's an airplane, "we can wait two years". **But I'm telling you, we cannot wait two years to deal with these trees.**"*

- Pilot #1 at Airport Advisory Committee meeting

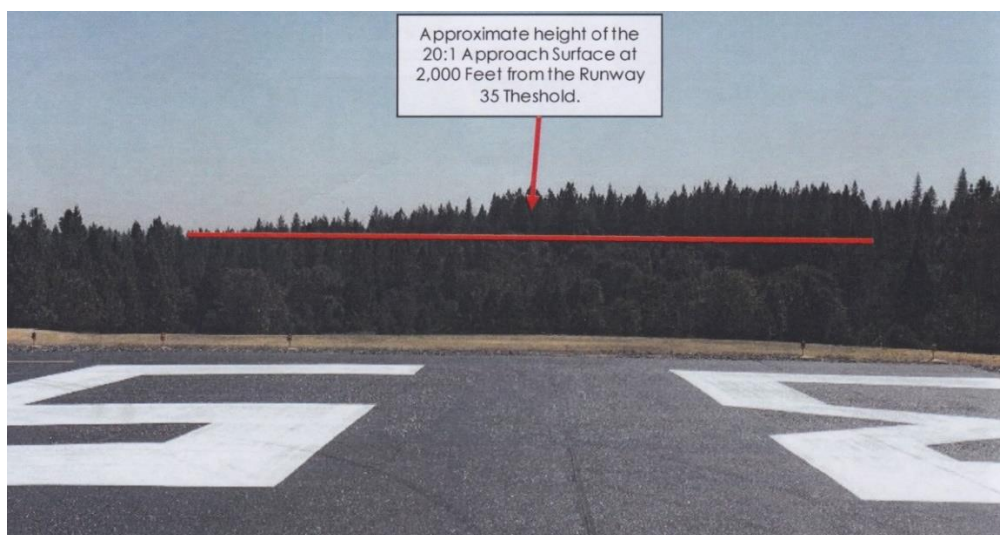
*"I really second what (Pilot #1) said [about the trees]. In fact, it was [Pilot #1] that I asked to take me up and train me on how to land on (runway) 35. I actually stopped flying my plane into Georgetown because I believe I clipped the trees on my last takeoff... and it is forking terrifying, and that can go on the record. And while I don't have 4000 hours like [Pilot #1] does, I've flown warbirds, multi-engine, and flown air races across three states, anyway, ... I've never experienced anything like Georgetown. **It has to be a priority** because I'm not bringing my plane back to Georgetown until it's fixed. **I can't risk my life for it...** Somebody needs to get out there in the middle of the night with a chainsaw and it's got to happen! And I heard that from a lot of people that were flying warbirds into Georgetown.*

## BACKGROUND

*And it's not just [runway] 35 where you have to slip your aircraft down and **hope** you can stop in time before going off the cliff, but it's also on takeoff on [runway] 17 on a high-density day when you are butt puckering to get over those trees, literally. So, we have to do something, because **someone's going to die and then we're really going to regret not doing something.**"*

- Pilot #2 at Airport Advisory Committee meeting

One incident that was reported to the Grand Jury was that within the last year a plane taking off from Georgetown did not clear the trees. The pilot was unaware that he had clipped the top of one of the trees, until he landed at Cameron Park Airport with a two-foot portion of a tree top entangled in the undercarriage of his aircraft!



*Figure 3 – An image from March 2022 taken by the State Department of Transportation showing the acceptable tree line in proximity to runway 35/17 at Georgetown Airport. Due to heavy rains in winter of 2023, the problem has increased measurably.*



## BACKGROUND

### FAILURE TO ADDRESS TRANSPORTATION AGENCY CONCERNS

Appendix 1 of this report is a letter from the California State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to the County, dated March 19, 2022, requiring an obstruction removal plan per FAA requirements by the end of 2022. It includes the following demand:

**The County of El Dorado must submit a detailed obstruction reduction plan by July 30, 2022, to clear both Part 77, 20:1 Approach Surfaces by December 31, 2022. Failure to provide a plan and clear both 20:1 Approach Surfaces by December 31, 2022, may result in the suspension of night operations at the airport.**

As of December 14, 2023, more than 12 months after the due date, no such obstruction reduction plan existed. Night operations were formally suspended by Caltrans on December 7, 2023, with the second letter shown in Appendix 1. The hazards are worse now with another year of growth.

Appendix 2 of this report, a County memo from 2013, shows that the County was aware that any trees or objects above the 7 to 1 slope are considered an obstruction to aircraft and must be removed or lighted. Continued non-compliance with FAA regulations for over a decade demonstrates an ongoing lackadaisical attitude to this issue. Appendices 2 and 5 also show that the trees to one side of the runway are an issue that needs to be continually addressed. Appendix 5, an outdated engineering sketch from 2022, shows about 1,500 trees would need to be cut or reduced. An updated survey would likely need to be conducted before beginning tree removal.

### COSTLY SOLUTIONS AMIDST AIRPORT LOSSES

Unfortunately, this is not a small or inexpensive problem. In fact, only preliminary cost estimates and planning have been considered. The most recent engineering report indicates that over 1500 trees across upwards of six to eight acres will need to be addressed. An early budget estimate was in the \$50,000 - \$100,000 range, according to airport staff. To understand the

## BACKGROUND

County's dilemma, it is important to look at the overall costs and financial situation that the airports are currently operating under.

Combined, the two County-operated airports are money-losing operations already, at least partially due to safety concerns. The most recent County annual financial report for the year ending June 2022 indicates the County airports operated at a loss of \$537,000 for the year, compared with a loss of \$471,000 in fiscal year 2021. The airports are accounted for under business-type activities since they are primarily fee-based operations from revenue generated by airport use rather than taxes. But operating at a continuing annual loss, the airports draw significantly from the general fund. There is an understandable reluctance to invest a significant additional operating cost in a money-losing venture.



*Figure 4 – Georgetown Airport usage has dropped dramatically in recent years due to safety concerns and other factors. The tie-downs shown above are completely empty (about 70% of the total available), and overall tie-down use during our site visit was less than 10%.*

The current revenue recovery metric for airport operations (before addressing the tree issue) is about 25%, meaning that they are only able to recover about 25% of operational overhead in terms of revenue. Most other business (fee-based) activities in the County are operating much closer to 100%. While this is a significant cost to the County, the loss is offset by intangible

## BACKGROUND

economic benefits from potential tourism, as well as emergency services support. There are revenue generating contracts in place with CalFire and both airports are essential to fighting wildfires.

In general, it is not uncommon for general aviation airports around the country to operate at a significant loss and rely on government subsidies and grants for continued operations. The County has contracted a consulting firm to explore various options for improving the economic viability for both airports. This economic development study was conducted at a cost of \$50,000, funded from Transient Occupancy Tax funds, and should be complete by mid-2024.

Figure 4 shows that aircraft storage at the airport is woefully underutilized. We compared tie-down and lease rates at other regional airports and found the costs at Georgetown were very much in line with area norms. Any decline in usage over the years is due to other factors, which include the safety concerns noted in this report.

Finally, during our site visit to Georgetown Airport, we were made aware of another hazard in addition to the trees (Appendix 4). Lighted poles have been erected to the west side of the runway to assist nighttime operations and mark the additional tree hazards to the west side of the runway. At night, pilots know to stay above and inside the lights towards the runway. Unfortunately, the pole furthest to the end of the runway no longer serves this purpose. The trees at that end of the runway have been removed, and the light is currently not operational. But having an unnecessary pole adds to pilot risk because a cross wind could blow a plane into the pole causing a likely fatal crash. A pilot communicated to the Grand Jury an account of a twin-engine aircraft that departed during daylight, drifted to the left during a northeast wind of approximately 15 miles per hour nearly hitting this pole.

# METHODOLOGY

## Methodology

### SITE VISIT

We visited Georgetown Airport, touring the facility and surrounding area.

### INTERVIEWS

- Members of County staff at all levels in the Building and Planning Department for Airports and Cemeteries
- On-site Airport Manager and staff
- Director of Building and Planning
- Pilots at the Airport Advisory Committee meetings and on site at Georgetown airport
- The Supervisor for district IV which includes Georgetown Airport
- Head of HR Risk Management in El Dorado County

### DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

- Drone surveys provided to us by airport management from 2022
- Historical photographs of the airport from 2002 to 2022
- Caltrans and FAA correspondence related to safety hazards attached in the Appendix
- County auditor's financial report from fiscal year 2021 and 2022
- Minutes from Airport Advisory Committee meetings going back several years
- Engineering sketch of trees that needed to be removed as of 2022 attached as Appendix 5

# DISCUSSION

## Discussion

### THE FUNDING CONUNDRUM

As Pilot #2 stated at the Airport Advisory Committee meeting, “*Somebody needs to go out in the middle of the night and trim these trees.*” To anybody outside the government, the urgency of the situation and the need to cut through red tape seems obvious. To knowledgeable pilots operating under ideal weather conditions, the airport is rapidly becoming unusable. To pilots without local knowledge operating under less-than-ideal weather or night conditions, it’s a potential death trap.

On December 7, 2023, Caltrans did force the closure of the airport at night, not long after the Grand Jury had started to investigate the extent of the problem. That is not, however, a long-term solution and there is still significant risk during the day.

Although airport staff had been working on addressing the issue for two years, without any tangible progress, much of the delay stemmed from planning to rely on FAA funding, and a series of environmental impact studies required at both the national and state levels. A supplemental budget request to the County in the 22/23 budget cycle for \$116,000 for tree removal was rejected by the CAO office, so the decision was made to seek the FAA grant. In fairness to the CAO office in rejecting the request, there was little discussion at the time and little sense of urgency from the Airports Division.

The Grand Jury was encouraged by the County response, however, in December 2023 after the nighttime airport closure notice and the start of the Grand Jury investigation. The formality of the closure notice and the looming Grand Jury report created a much greater sense of urgency. On December 14, 2023, one week after the closure notice, a short-term plan was communicated to the Grand Jury that would allow the airport to fully reopen within the coming weeks.

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The plan included:

- The County's airport engineering consultant working with an environmental consultant had identified 3 acres of trees that if eliminated would free up the approach path to identified obstacles.
- The trees were quickly marked based on GPS location and the County will seek an exemption from CalFire timber operation planning requirements. CalFire is expected to review and approve the tree removal plan in January 2024.
- Airport staff is working with the Growlersburg Conservation Camp to perform the work in early 2024 and they appear to have availability over that timeframe. The hope is to complete the work in January or February about the time this final report is published.

The Grand Jury was told that airport staff will continue work with the County's engineering consultant on a Timber Harvest Plan and potential Environmental Assessment to gain access to federal funding for the remainder of necessary tree removal. This would be for trees not addressed in the initial three-acre plan above and would total an additional three to four acres. These latter trees do not pose the same imminent threat but still need to be removed to ensure compliance with FAA regulations. This phase of the plan would require more time and hopefully will be completed in the second half of 2024.

### AIRPORT MANAGEMENT

As we have alluded to, it is both frustrating and puzzling for the pilots who make frequent use of the airport, as well as the Grand Jury, that nobody in the Building and Planning Department had the authority to address this issue earlier, although there appears to be complete agreement now on the urgency of the situation and the need to prioritize it.

The Grand Jury found this Georgetown Airport issue is an example of county government failure to recognize and address emergency situations with proper urgency or complete communication. The Grand Jury interviewed every person up the chain of command in airport

## DISCUSSION

operations and found no one who could or would take responsibility for the lack of a risk mitigation plan prior to November 2023. The excuses were many, but mainly indicated the lack of understanding of the urgency of the problem, the amount of red tape involved in the process, the lack of available funds in the County budget, and the inability to secure FAA grants in a timely fashion.

The Grand Jury concluded there were several contributing factors to this problem:

- As mentioned earlier, airport management is combined with cemetery management in the Building and Planning Department. We understand that airport management has been moved around various county departments over the years, and aviation is a very different kind of business operation to manage than most county functions. Placing it in the Building and Planning Department seems like a particularly awkward fit for the skills and expertise required to oversee airport operational issues as a business. The Grand Jury believes this could limit the visibility of airport operational issues to the Board of Supervisors and to other County leaders.
- We are aware that at some point in the past the airports were managed by the Department of Transportation. In fact, the Airports Division has been moved around a few times in the last several years. The Grand Jury doesn't have the experience or the insight to recommend a move back to the Department of Transportation, but this could be worth revisiting as an option.
- The airport management team, based on its actions, seemed to be prioritizing economic development of the airport over operational safety, likely at least partially at the request of the Board of Supervisors. The clear message we heard in interviews and meetings is that the airports are operating at an unacceptable loss, and airport management is compelled to improve cost recovery metrics. This is an important initiative, but it's hard to argue that it should be the most important when a clear safety issue is widely known, putting *any* use of the airport at significant risk. For example, \$50,000 was allocated to create a plan for improving airport use (and revenue), without understanding any long-term investment

## DISCUSSION

required to achieve those results. Could that \$50,000 have been better spent on ensuring the airport is safe much earlier?

### LIABILITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Given that the tree hazards are a known risk, had been left unaddressed for several years, and that the airport was being closed for nighttime operations, the Grand Jury decided to investigate the role of risk management within the County. We found that although the risk management team is wholly within the HR department, they are generally interested in liability risk to the public, as well as employees, and can potentially be a resource to assess issues throughout the County. While we initially found this encouraging, the practical reality is that they are a small team with limited expertise in all areas of county operations, such as airports, and must rely on various departments, in this case the Building and Planning Department, to manage risk assessment and mitigation.

The HR Risk Management team is not proactive and primarily deals with liability claims after an accident or injury, seeking to manage damages from that point. They also manage insurance policies for all county operations and have a specific insurance policy in place for the County-managed airports. Liability insurance can typically cover the County for claims up to \$50 million. It is unlikely that any negligence on the part of County officials would reduce that coverage, fortunately. But it's also possible that a catastrophic injury due to gross negligence on the part of the County could exceed the \$50 million coverage.

We asked the airport management team if they knew of the risk management function within the County and if they had sought any counsel or insight from them as to how to manage this issue or help fund its resolution. They indicated that they did not know how to proceed or with who exactly, although it may have been considered at some point.



# FINDINGS

## Findings

**Finding 1** - Georgetown Airport is unsafe to operate due to overgrowth of trees. Because the County has known about this hazard and continued normal operations into at least December 2023, it may be subject to a claim of gross negligence if an accident happens.

**Finding 2** – Up until December 2023, the County had no immediate plan to address the issue until receiving a notice from Caltrans that the airport would be closed to night operations pending the tree hazards being removed.

**Finding 3** - The County has been putting its citizens, visitors, and employees at unnecessary risk of injury or death despite being advised of the issue for at least ten years.

**Finding 4** - The safety risks have been overshadowed by County efforts to improve the economic viability of the airports that are losing approximately a half million dollars a year, based on the County prioritizing a \$50,000 economic development study earlier than it funded a plan to reduce the tree hazards.

**Finding 5** - The County did not act in the required timeframe to a letter dated March 19, 2022, from the California State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for the County to submit an obstruction removal plan for the Georgetown Airport per FAA requirements, resulting in the airport being closed for night operations on December 7, 2023.

**Finding 6** – A pole that originally marked the tree line to the west side of the runway is no longer functioning for that purpose but serves as another potential hazard to pilots. Any contact with a rigid hazard like this pole would almost certainly cause a fatal accident.

## FINDINGS

**Finding 7** - General aviation airports don't get a lot of political attention because they benefit so few constituents and are only politically relevant as a revenue generator and/or emergency preparedness resource. This contributes to the lack of attention and visibility airport issues have had throughout the County in recent years, contributing to the severity of this issue.

**Finding 8** – The County's failure to mitigate this known hazard threatens the financial health of the County since they will face lawsuits if injury or death results from the unsafe airport. The \$50 million liability coverage from the airport insurance policy may be inadequate to cover losses from potential claims of gross negligence and may impact the general fund.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1** – The County needs to have a funded plan to address all tree hazards at the Georgetown Airport by the end of March 2024, completing removal of the tree and pole hazards by September 2024, to the satisfaction of Caltrans and meeting FAA regulations.

**Recommendation 2** – The Board of Supervisors should immediately identify a champion (or team) to lead this effort, considering local pilot volunteers with aviation experience as well as County employees. The champion will provide monthly reports to the Board of Supervisors as to progress against the specific and funded action plan towards removing the hazards.

**Recommendation 3** – Management of the two County-operated airports should be moved out of the Planning and Building Department by the end of 2024 to a department/agency that is better suited to managing a business of this nature and ensuring better visibility to issues at all levels of County government.

**Recommendation 4** – Prioritization must be focused on airport safety over economic growth. Although \$50,000 was spent on the economic development plan, no funding for any of the suggested improvements coming out of that plan should be allocated until the airport hazards are completely addressed.

**Recommendation 5** – Conduct annual safety inspections of both airports starting in 2025 and report the findings to the Board of Supervisors. Consider adding inspections of the airports to the required Grand Jury inspection of at least one detention facility annually by the 2024-2025 Grand Jury term.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 6** – County leadership should continue using the Growlersburg Conservation Camp crew to clear the trees when and where applicable subject to their availability.

# REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

## Request for Responses

The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code §933 and §933.05:

From the following governing body:

- El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
  - All Findings and Recommendations

For more information refer to *How to Respond to an El Dorado County Grand Jury Report* available on the El Dorado County Grand Jury webpage.

# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION


## Appendix and Related Information

### Appendix 1

### Department of Transportation Letter – March 19, 2022

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY Gavin Newsom, Governor

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**  
DIVISION OF AERONAUTICS – M.S. #40  
1120 N STREET, SUITE 3300  
P. O. BOX 942874  
SACRAMENTO, CA 94274-0001  
PHONE (916) 654-4959  
FAX (916) 653-9531  
TTY 711  
www.dot.ca.gov

  
Making Conservation  
a California Way of Life.

March 19, 2022

[REDACTED] Airport Manager  
Georgetown Airport  
2850 Fairlane Court  
Placerville, CA 95667-4100

Dear [REDACTED],

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Division of Aeronautics, conducted a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Airport Master Record (FAA Form 5010-1) update and State permit compliance inspection of the Georgetown Airport (FAA Site No. 01608.7\*A) on March 1, 2022. We appreciate the cooperation provided by you and Jeremy Guntenberger during the inspection. The updated information will be entered into our State and FAA Airport Master records.

The airport was evaluated using the current Airport Layout Plan (ALP), Airport Permit, and previous inspection letters. Our inspection revealed the following items, which we bring to your attention in order of priority:

1. Trees 1,600 to 2,500 feet south of the Runway 35 threshold and closer-in penetrate the Code of Federal Regulations Part 77 20:1 Approach by up to 50 feet. Trees penetrating the 20:1 Approach Surface must be removed or trimmed, as shown in Photograph 1, as soon as possible.
2. An obstruction pole, trees, and brush approximately 225 to 450 feet north of the Runway 17 Displaced Threshold penetrate the FAR Part 77, 20:1 Approach Surface (please see enclosed Photograph 2). Trees and brush penetrating the 20:1 Approach Surface must be removed or trimmed, as shown in Photograph 2, as soon as possible. Once the trees and brush are cleared, the northernmost obstruction light pole closest to the Runway 17 Threshold may be removed.

**The County of El Dorado must submit a detailed obstruction reduction plan by July 30, 2022, to clear both Part 77, 20:1 Approach Surfaces by December 31, 2022. Failure to provide a plan and clear both 20:1 Approach Surfaces by December 31, 2022, may result in the suspension of night operations at the airport.**

3. Many trees penetrate the FAR Part 77, 7:1 Transitional Surface east of the runway centerline and north of the ramp area to the Runway 17 Displaced Threshold (please see enclosed Photograph 3). These trees should be removed or trimmed (below the height shown in enclosed Photograph 4) in the near future.

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to enhance California's economy and livability"

# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

March 19, 2022

4. Many trees have grown above a series of obstruction-lighted poles along the entire west side of the airport and now penetrate the CFR Part 77, 7:1 Transitional Surface (please see enclosed Photograph 4). All trees surrounding the lighted poles should be removed or trimmed at or below the height of the red obstruction lights.
5. The runway magnetic designation markings were changed in 2018 to 17/35 due to a change in declination. However, the Airport Permit, the ALP, and the Airport Master Record all state the current runway magnetic designation as 16/34. Please submit an FAA Form 7480-1 Notice for Construction, Alteration and Deactivation of Airports along with supporting survey data on the FAA's Obstruction Evaluation / Airport Airspace Analysis (OE/AAA) website or to the FAA Airports District Office. In addition, please complete, sign, and return the enclosed Caltrans Form DOA-0103 to correct the airport permit and submit the designation markings change to the FAA on the OE/AAA website (<https://oeaaa.faa.gov/oeaaa/external/portal.jsp>) to update the 5010-1 as soon as possible.

It is Caltrans' objective to ensure that airports and heliports meet all applicable FAA minimum design safety standards and Advisory Circular (AC) criteria, FAR, the PUC, section 21001 et seq., the CCR, Title 21, sections 3525-3560, and all required conditions depicted in your State Airport Permit issued by Caltrans. All referenced publications in this letter, including many FAA ACs, may be found on our website at [www.dot.ca.gov/aeronautics](http://www.dot.ca.gov/aeronautics).

We are pleased to support and assist you in enhancing safety and utility at your airport and look forward to continuing a cooperative relationship with El Dorado County. Please submit an obstruction reduction plan by July 30, 2022, and notify us of your intended or completed actions concerning the above items. If you have questions or require further assistance, please contact me at (916) 639-6297 or email [christopher.brooks@dot.ca.gov](mailto:christopher.brooks@dot.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

*Original signed by*

CHRISTOPHER BROOKS  
Aviation Safety Officer

Enclosures

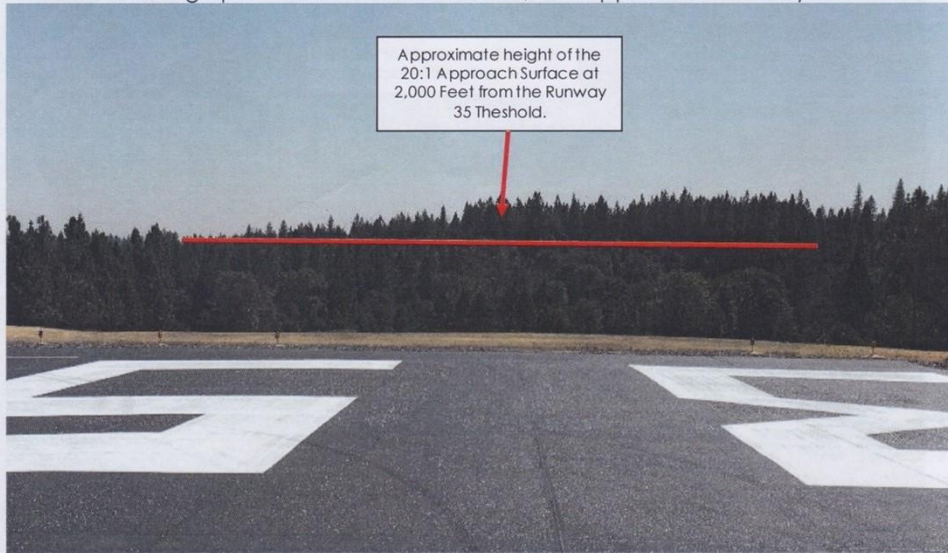
c: Ms. Laurie Suttmeier, ADO Manager, SFO ADO, [laurie.suttmeier@faa.gov](mailto:laurie.suttmeier@faa.gov)  
Mr. Lemuel Del Castillo, Lead Engineer, SFO ADO, [lemuel.del.castillo@faa.gov](mailto:lemuel.del.castillo@faa.gov)

*"Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system  
to enhance California's economy and livability"*

# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

March 19, 2022

Photograph 1 - Trees in the FAR Part 77, 20:1 Approach to Runway 35



Photograph 2 - Trees penetrate the Runway 17 FAR Part 77 Approach and Transitional Surfaces.



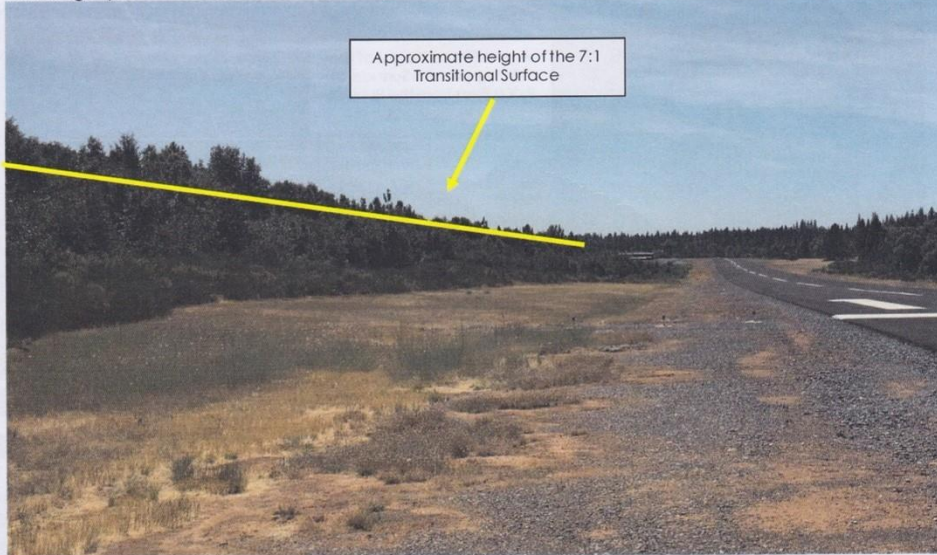
"Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability"



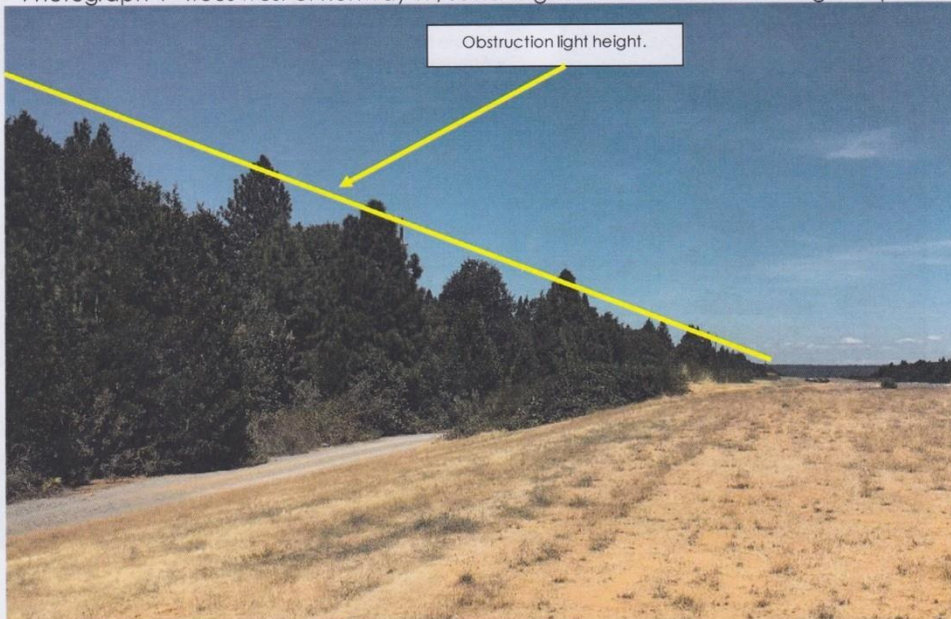
# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

March 19, 2022

Photograph 3 - Trees east of Runway 17/35 penetrate FAR Part 77, 7:1 Transitional Surface.



Photograph 4 - Trees west of Runway 17/35 have grown above obstruction lighted poles.



"Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability"

# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

OMB CONTROL NUMBER: 2120-0036  
EXPIRATION DATE: 4/30/2017

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Aviation Administration

## NOTICE FOR CONSTRUCTION, ALTERATION AND DEACTIVATION OF AIRPORTS

<b>A. Airport Owner</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Check if this is also the Property Owner		<b>B. Airport Manager</b> (Complete if different than the Airport Owner)		
1. Name and Address <input type="checkbox"/> Check if this is the Airport's Physical Address COUNTY OF EL DORADO 3561 AIRPORT ROAD PLACERVILLE, CA 95667		1. Name and Address <input type="checkbox"/> Check if this is the Airport's Physical Address [REDACTED] 2850 FAIRLANE COURT PLACERVILLE, CA 95667		
2. Phone [REDACTED]	3. Email [REDACTED]	2. Phone [REDACTED]	3. Email [REDACTED]	
<b>C. Purpose of Notification</b> (Answer all questions that apply)				
1. Construct or Establish an: <input type="checkbox"/> Airport <input type="checkbox"/> Ultralight Flightpark <input type="checkbox"/> Balloonport <input type="checkbox"/> Helipad <input type="checkbox"/> Seaplane Base <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other				
2. Construct, Alter or Realign a: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Runway <input type="checkbox"/> Helipad(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> Taxiway (Public Use Airports only)				
3. Change Status From/To: <input type="checkbox"/> VFR to IFR <input type="checkbox"/> Private Use to Public Use <input type="checkbox"/> IFR to VFR <input type="checkbox"/> Public Use to Other				
4. Change Traffic Pattern: <input type="checkbox"/> Direction _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Altitude _____ Other (Describe Below) _____				
5. Deactivate: <input type="checkbox"/> Airport <input type="checkbox"/> RWY _____ <input type="checkbox"/> TWY _____				
6. Description: Change of runway declination from 16/34 to 17/35.				
<b>D. Name, Location, Use and Type of Landing Area</b>				
1. Name of Landing Area Georgetown Airport		2. Loc ID (for existing) E36		
3. Associated City and State Georgetown, CA		4. Distance from City 2 (nm)		
5. County (Physical Location) El Dorado		6. Direction from City NW		
7. Latitude 38° 55' 15.5000"		8. Longitude 120° 15' 53.4000"		
9. Elevation 2,623		10. Current Use: <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private Use of Public Lands		
11. Ownership: <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Military (Branch)		12. Airport Type: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Airport <input type="checkbox"/> Ultralight Flightpark <input type="checkbox"/> Balloonport <input type="checkbox"/> Helipad <input type="checkbox"/> Seaplane Base <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
<b>E. Landing Area Data</b> (List any Proposed, New or Unregistered Runways, Helipads etc.)				
1. Airport, Seaplane Base or Ultralight Flightpark (use second page if needed)		2. Helipad, Balloonport or other Landing Area (use second page if needed)		
RWY ID	17 / 35	Helipad ID	/	
Lat. & Long.	Show on attachment(s)	Lat. & Long.	Show on attachment(s)	
Surface Type	ASPH	Surface Type		
Length (feet)	2,980	TLOF Dimensions		
Width (feet)	60	FATO Dimensions		
Lighting (if any)	MED	Lighting (if any)		
Right Traffic (Y/N)	N / N	Ingress/Egress (Degrees)		
Elevation (AMSL)	Show on attachment(s)	Elevation (AMSL)	Show on attachment(s)	
VFR or IFR	VFR / VFR	Elevated Height (AGL)		
<b>F. Operational Data</b> (Indicate if the number provided is Actual or Estimated)				
	1. Number of Based Aircraft		2. Average Number of Monthly Landings	
	Present or Estimated	Estimated in 5 Years	Present or Estimated	Estimated in 5 Years
Single Engine				
Multi Engine				
Jet				
Helicopter				
Glider				
Military				
Ultralight				
3. What is the Most Demanding Aircraft that operates or will operate at the Airport? (Provide approach speed, rotor diameter, etc. if known)				
4. Are IFR Procedures for the Airport Anticipated? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No if Yes, Within _____ Years				
<b>G. CERTIFICATION:</b> I hereby certify that all of the above statements made by me are true and complete to the best of my knowledge.				
1. Name, title of person filing this notice (type or print)		2. Signature (in ink):		
3. Date		4. Phone	5. Email	

FAA Form 7460-1 (4/14) SUPERSEDES PREVIOUS EDITION

*"Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability"*

# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

Follow-up letter dated December 7, 2023, requiring closure of the airport for night operations:

CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM, GOVERNOR

## California Department of Transportation

AERONAUTICS PROGRAM  
DIVISION OF TRANSPORTATION PLANNING  
P.O. BOX 942873, MS-40 | SACRAMENTO, CA 94273-0001  
(916) 654-4959  
[www.dot.ca.gov](http://www.dot.ca.gov)



December 7, 2023

[REDACTED]  
Georgetown Airport  
2850 Fairlane Court  
Placerville, CA 95667-4100

Dear [REDACTED]

Our inspection letter dated March 19, 2022, provided notice of your responsibility to remove trees that are obstruction hazards and to comply with California Public Utilities Code (PUC), section 21659, Hazards to Navigable Airspace. We recognize your efforts toward future obstruction clearing, however, the risk to persons and property requires Caltrans Aeronautics Programs to initiate airport permit action.

**Consequently, Caltrans is suspending night operations at the Georgetown Airport (E36) in accordance with the PUC, section 21668.2, Suspension of Operations.**

This suspension shall remain in effect until Caltrans determines that the conditions detailed in items 1 and 2 of our March 19, 2022, inspection letter (attached) no longer exist.

Please ensure that the following actions are completed immediately:

- De-energized the runway edge lighting and the airport rotating beacon.
- A NOTAM is posted with the Flight Standards District Office stating that the airport is closed from sunset to sunrise and the airport lights are deactivated.
- Ensure that all aircraft operators at the airport are aware of the night closure.

Please notify Caltrans as soon as all actions to de-energize airport lighting and notifications are made. If you have questions or require further assistance, please contact me at (916) 639-6297 or email at [christopher.brooks@dot.ca.gov](mailto:christopher.brooks@dot.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

*Christopher Brooks*

CHRISTOPHER BROOKS  
Aviation Safety Officer

Enclosures

c: San Francisco Airports District Office

\*Provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment\*

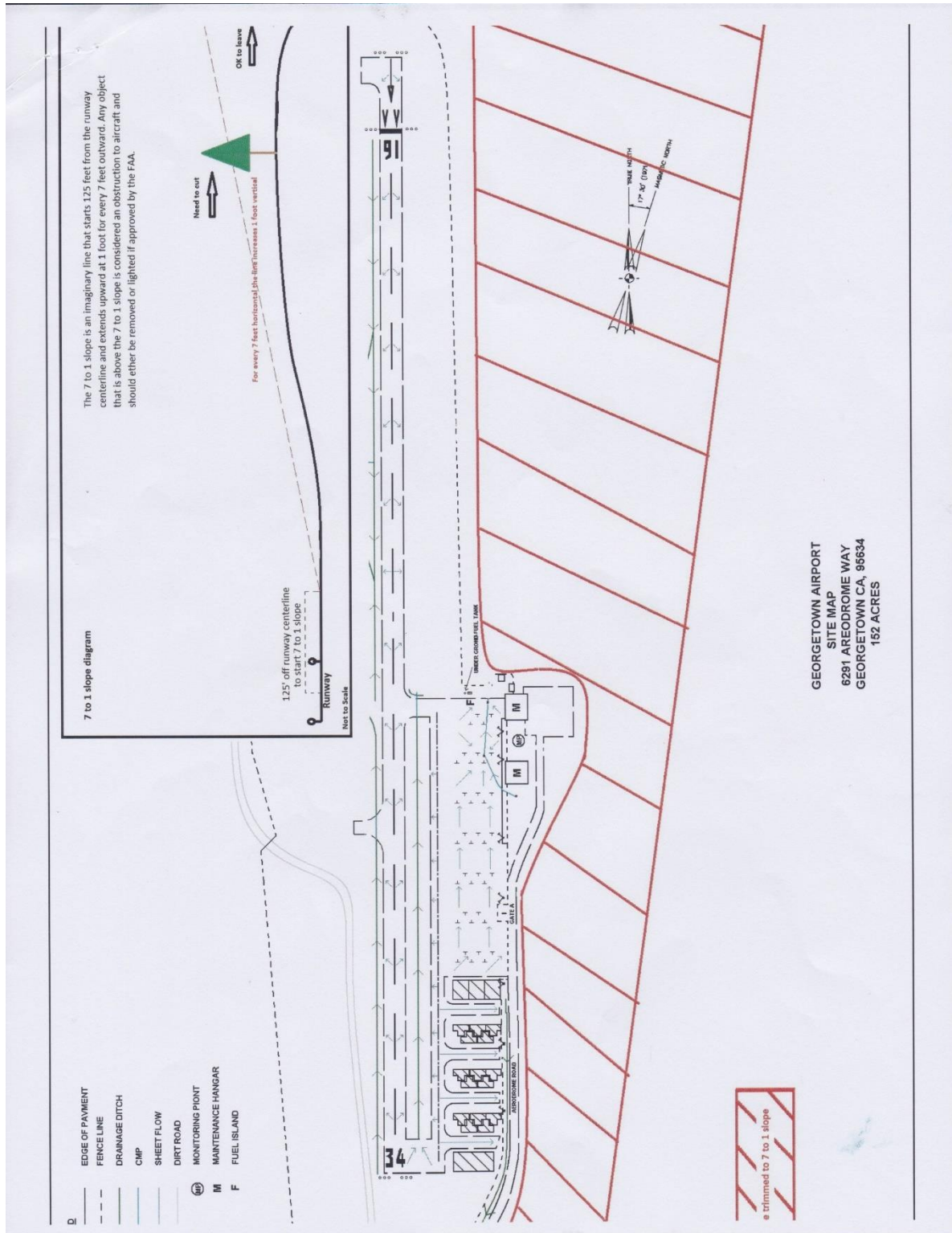
# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

## Appendix 2

### Community Development Agency Letter – December 19, 2013



# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION



## APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

### Appendix 3

#### Historical images of the approach path to runway 35

Image 1 – From 2002 shows a relatively clear and open area before runway 34 (now 35), a safe place for an emergency landing.



## APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

Image 2 – Same view from 2022 shows many tree hazards:



# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

## Appendix 4

### Pole Hazard



*Photo taken January 31, 2024. It may not reflect the conditions at the time the email below was written.*

**From:** [REDACTED]

**Sent:** Friday, March 26, 2021 8:54 AM

**To:** [REDACTED]

**Subject:** RE: E36 - HAZARD TO SAFE NAVIGATION

Greetings All,

This pole has been mentioned as a safety hazard by pilots for at least 10 years at every advisory meeting that I can recall.

This pole is unserviceable and is NOT currently lighted.



## APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

Recently a twin-engine aircraft departed RWY 35 during daylight - drifted to the left during a north east wind of approx. 15 mph nearly colliding with this pole.

The trees that this pole is supposed to protect us from are no longer present.

Our non-pilot airport manager insist this pole will not be removed due to CalTrans regulations.

Last year EDC risk management team visited our airport and expressed concern this pole was a hazard.

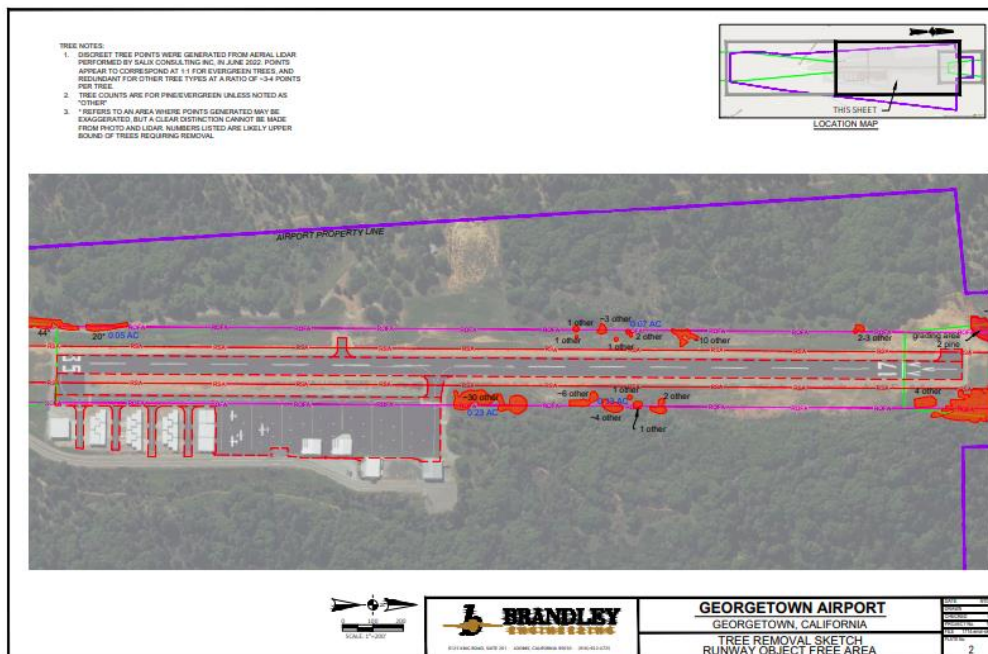
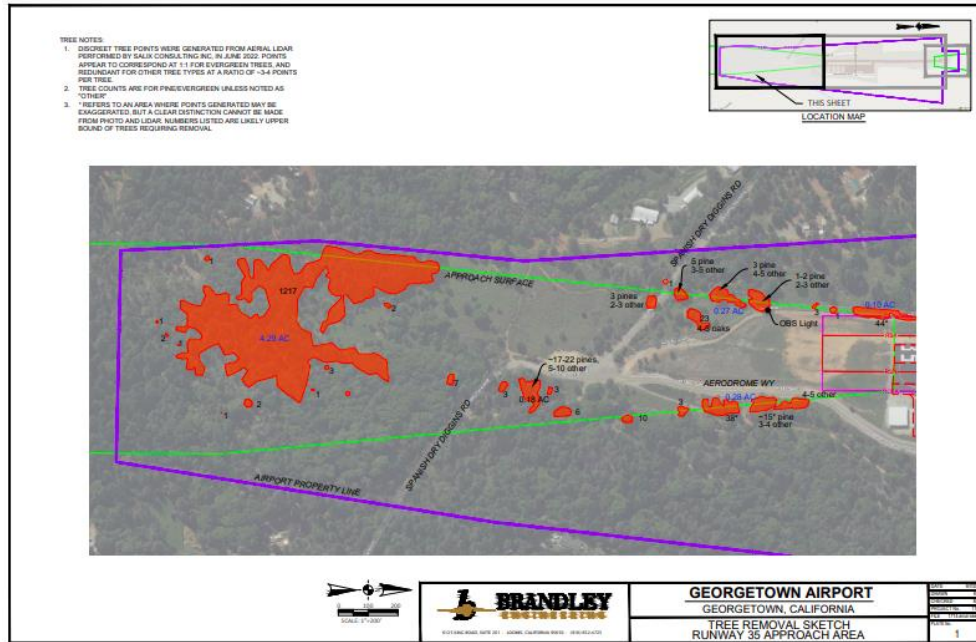
I hope it's apparent that hitting a bush would have a better outcome than a wing being ripped off.

Thank You

# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

## Appendix 5

Environmental Sketch from 2022 showing which trees should be removed based on a drone survey.



# APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

