



CALIFORNIA PILOTS ASSOCIATION

#25

“The Airplane became the first World Wide Web, bringing people, languages, ideas, and values together”

Bill Gates

Document packet for the February 10, 2026
El Dorado County
Board of Supervisors Board meeting

Presented by

J. Gill Wright
VP Region 2
California Pilots Association

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject:Bishop et. al. v. PVF Section 13.2 Complaint

Date:Mon, 5 Jan 2026 19:56:06 +0000

From:Cohen, David M (FAA) <david.m.cohen@faa.gov>

To:don@mcbishop.com <don@mcbishop.com>, don@linsonic.com <don@linsonic.com>, mark@skywagons.com <mark@skywagons.com>, juan.delazar@gmail.com <juan.delazar@gmail.com>, todd@pcavionics.com <todd@pcavionics.com>

CC:Cohen, David M (FAA) <david.m.cohen@faa.gov>, Mahns, Gabriel (FAA) <gabriel.mahns@faa.gov>

Good afternoon,

Just FYI please see the questions I have asked the airport below. I will also be sending each of you a recap of the discussion we just had.

Sincerely,

David M. Cohen
Compliance Program Manager
Eastern Region Airports Division
1 Aviation Plaza
Jamaica NY 11434
718-553-3347

From: Cohen, David M (FAA) <david.m.cohen@faa.gov>

Sent: Monday, January 5, 2026 2:51 PM

To: jennifer.franich@edcgov.us; laura.schwartz@edcgov.us

Cc: Mahns, Gabriel (FAA) <gabriel.mahns@faa.gov>; Cohen, David M (FAA) <david.m.cohen@faa.gov>

Subject: Bishop et. al. v. PVF Section 13.2 Complaint

Dear Ms. Franich and Ms. Schwartz,

To assist us in completing our investigation in this matter please provide response to the following within 60 days:

1. The dates upon which the following hangars at PVF were constructed:
 - a. Hangar Space #SP-25 (Neithinger)
 - b. Hangar Space #SP-30 (Sprague)
 - c. Hangar Space #SP-24 (Bishop)
 - d. Hangar Space #TP-17 (Del Azar)
 - e. Hangar Space #H-7 (Pilkington)
2. The lease and/or rental rates the County is charging, and/or is proposing to charge, the tenant of each hangar space listed in the preceding paragraph between 2026 through the end of the lease term.

3. Please explain why the lease and/or rental rates the County is charging, and/or is proposing to charge, the tenant of each hangar space listed in the preceding paragraph should not be considered nominal rental rates as that term is used in Section VI (B)(9) of the FAA's Policy and Procedures Concerning the Use of Airport Revenue.
4. To the extent that (at any time between April and December 2025) the County asked hangar tenants of PVF seeking new leases to sign leases that did not provide specificity as to what rental rates would be charged throughout the lease term please explain the County's position as to whether the County acted reasonably, as required by Grant Assurance 22a, *Economic Nondiscrimination*, in doing so.
5. For hangars that were constructed more than 30 years ago does the County intend to charge rent as if it owned the hangar or does the County intend to charge rent as if it does not own the hangar?
6. If the County does not intend to charge rent to tenants owning hangars on airport property that were constructed more than 30 years ago, as if the County owns the hangars, please explain all reasons why and how this decision comports with the financially self-sustaining requirements of Grant Assurance 24, *Fee and Rental Structure*.
7. Is it the County's view that it lacks the rights and powers to enter into leases with existing hangar owners at the airport that contain reversionary clauses whereby the hangars become the property of the County after a certain period of time? If not, why doesn't the County enter into leases with existing hangar owners that have reversionary clauses?
8. The County has indicated that on March 24, 2025, it provided the Complainants with notice that if they did not initiate the lease application process by April 23, 2025, the Access Agreement via which they had vehicular access to their hangars would be revoked. In order to initiate the lease application process were Complainants required to first pay \$711? Relatedly, would Complainants be allowed to have vehicular access to their hangars subsequent to April 23, 2025, without first paying the \$711 and/or without entering into a new lease?
9. Is the County prohibiting vehicular access to hangar owners that have paid the \$711 application fee but haven't yet signed a lease agreement? If so, why?
10. Please identify all parties that entered into a new personal use ground lease for a hangar at PVF subsequent to February 9, 2026.
11. With respect to each party identified in the preceding paragraph please indicate if the party paid a \$711 lease application fee.
12. Please provide documentation evidencing the County's receipt of the \$711 application fee for each party identified in response to paragraph 7.
13. At any time between May 2025 and the present has the County allowed any party that does not have a current lease for hangar space at the airport to nonetheless have vehicular access to a hangar? If so, please identify each such party granted vehicular access as well as the County's justification for taking this action.
14. Via Ordinance No. 5238, passed in August 2025, El Dorado County updated its Planning Department and Building Fee Schedule. Within this schedule the application fee for road encroachments is \$167, Solar Permits is \$288 plus, Permit Application Fee-Vacation Home Rental is \$564, Permit Application Fee-Hosted Home Rental is \$282, Permit Renewal Fee is \$282. Given that these application fees

tend to be lower than the \$711 lease application fee being charged at the airport please explain why airport lease application fee of \$711 is reasonable. In so doing, please specify why the lease applications for hangars at the airport take more time and resources to review than the other application reviews contemplated in the Fee Schedule discussed in this paragraph.

15. Please describe the current requirements the County is imposing on hangar tenants with respect to automobile insurance.
16. To the extent that the County's automobile insurance requirements for tenants exceed the minimum requirements imposed by the State of California please explain why the County is imposing automobile insurance requirements at these levels.
17. Please provide any relevant state law, local law, or case precedent to support the County's position that an indemnification clause that requires lessees to indemnify the County regardless of the degree of fault or negligence on the part of the County is legal.
18. Are tenants of County owned hangars, and/or hangar tenants with leases that have reversionary clauses at PVF, also required to pay to retrofit their hangars to meet current building requirements, and/or to pay for inspections of their hangars, at their own expense? If not, why not?
19. Please indicate if it is illegal for buildings in the County to not meet the current state or local building requirements if those requirements did not exist at the time the buildings and/or hangars were constructed.
20. If in response to the preceding question you indicate it is not illegal please identify why you are requiring tenants to meet the current building requirements.
21. Please address the allegation in Mr. Bishop's complaint that some hangar owners have been allowed to stay in their hangars for years without a lease and without paying their annual fees. Specifically, please identify if any hangar owner has failed to pay their rent and/or annual fees between June 8, 2019, and June 8, 2025, and for each such instance please identify what action the County took to remedy the matter and explain how the matter was resolved.
22. Please address the allegation in Mr. Sprague's complaint that the County indicated it could only accept \$10,000 from Cal Fire. Specifically, please provide information as to:
 - a. whether the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL Fire) offered to pay the County \$350,000, or any other amount, for the use of PVF at any time between June 8, 2019 and June 8, 2025;
 - b. whether CAL Fire used the airport for the purposes of conducting its activities at any time between June 8, 2019, and June 8, 2025;
 - c. how much CAL Fire paid the County for any use it made of the airport between June 8, 2019 and June 8, 2025.
23. Between May 1, 2025, and the present, has the County entered into any hangar leases in which the tenant was provided a 10 year lease plus two 10 year options?
24. If the answer to the question in the preceding paragraph is "yes" please describe each instance in which this occurred and provide a justification for the County entering into each lease.
25. Is the County taking the position that if a party seeks to build a new hangar at PVF that the County will not enter into a lease term with that party that is longer than 10 years? If so, please explain if the County has determined that such position is consistent with the requirements of Grant Assurance 38, *Hangar Construction*?

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

David M. Cohen
Compliance Program Manager
Eastern Region Airports
Division
1 Aviation Plaza
Jamaica NY 11434
718-553-3347



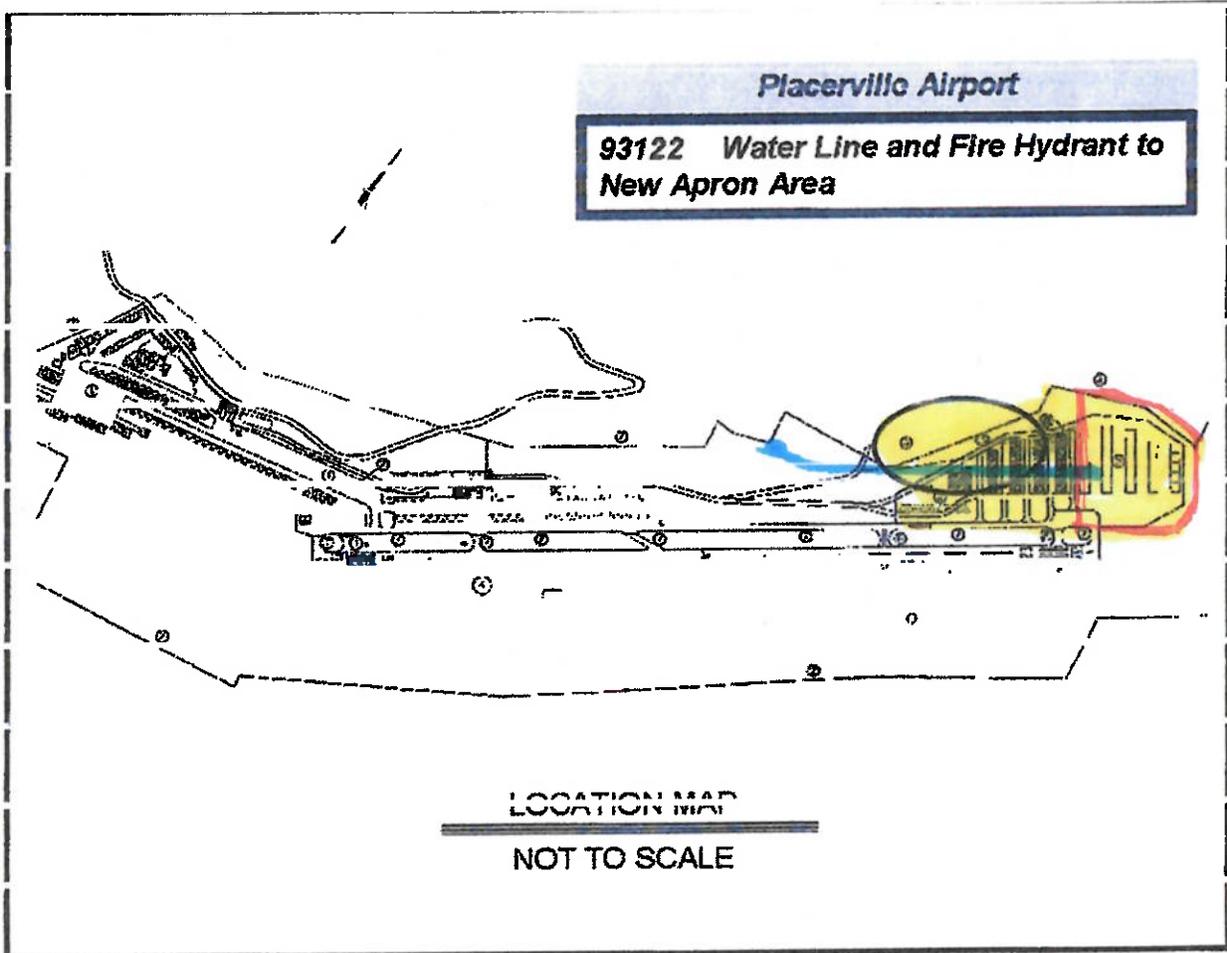
Water Line and Fire Hydrant to New Apron Area
CIP Project Summary



Project No: 93122

Type: Airports

Supervisor District(s) 3



Project Description:

Placerville Airport - The Airport Layout Plan for this airport forecasts a need for additional hangars in the future (See Project No. 93128). Fire protection is required be able to develop the northeast ramp area of the airport to add new hangars. This project includes construction of a new 10-inch water line running 1200 feet from existing facilities plus three new fire hydrants. These fire hydrants will be located along the south end of the new hangar development area. Provisions will be made to be able to add more hydrants along the edge of the aircraft parking apron in the future when they are needed.

Original Budget: \$165,000

Expenses to Date: \$0

Project Initiation Date: 05/05/09

Details

File #: 121531 Version: 1
 Type: Agenda Item
 Title: 12/18/2012 DOT Airport Water Line
 Mover: James R. Sweeney Seconded: Ron Briggs
 Result: Pass
 Agenda note:
 Minutes note:
 Action: Approved
 Action text: A motion was made by Supervisor Sweeney, seconded by Supervisor Briggs, to approve this matter.

Votes (5:0)

5 records	Group	Export
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Person Name	Vote
<u>John R. Knight</u>	Yes
<u>Ray Nutting</u>	Yes
<u>James R. Sweeney</u>	Yes
<u>Ron Briggs</u>	Yes
<u>Norma Santiago</u>	Yes

NOTE: It is my understanding, after 3 years of this approval for the waterline and fire Hydrant improvement on the East side of Placerville Airport, the costs had increase to over \$380,000+.

Given this project was initiated on 05/05/2009. One has to wonder how much staff time was expended on this critical infrastructure over 5+ years until the costs had reached \$380,000+, when this important improvement to the airport was dropped from implementation

J Gill Wright
 VP Region 2
 California Pilots Association
 July 2025

Table 1

**El Dorado County State
Comptroller 2023 report Numbers**

2023 Actual Income

Placerville (PVF)	\$582,772.00	
Georgetown (E36)	\$66,199.00	
Total Income	\$648,971	\$648,971

2023 Actual Expenses

Placerville (PVF)	\$ 1,0883,831	
Georgetown (E36)	\$323,211.00	
Total Expenses	\$1,407,042.00	< \$1,407,042.00 >

Depreciation 2023

Placerville (PVF)	\$. 241,054	
Georgetown (E36)	\$. 102,501	
Total Depreciation	\$343,555.00	\$343,555.00

< 758,071 >

< 414,516 >

**Federal Payments to El Dorado
County for Airport uses**

PVF uses by USFS	10,958	
PVF other Federal Payments	\$45,220.00	
E36 other Federal Payments	\$22,000.00	
Total Federal Payments to EDC	\$78,178.00	\$78,178.00

**2023 ACTUAL NET LOSS FROM
PVF/E36**

< 336,338 >

This was from "Daily Tie down" FEES FROM THE CALDOR FIRE FOR 30 DAYS BY CAL FIRE/USFS. THERE WAS A SIGNIFICANT LOSS OF OTHER REVENUES BY EDC

County of El Dorado
 UNSECURED TRA ROLLOVER
 TAX YEAR 2024

	PARCEL CNT	LAND & IMPS	PERS PROP	NET VALUE	HOX AMT 1	OTHER AMT 1
T T - Unsec Aircraft						
002-002	15	0	8,471,082	8,375,082	0	96,000
054-064	1	0	579,150	579,150	0	0
054-124	1	0	22,292	22,292	0	0
072-005	1	0	18,006	18,006	0	0
072-040	1	0	74,000	74,000	0	0
075-041	1	0	123,600	123,600	0	0
083-064	11	0	971,372	202,342	0	769,030
090-012	15	0	967,900	157,160	0	810,740
090-022	88	0	13,140,424	10,970,804	0	2,169,620
100-035	1	0	32,000	32,000	0	0
100-110	100	0	11,517,382	6,178,227	0	3,339,155
100-174	1	0	270,000	270,000	0	0
100-190	2	0	188,600	173,000	0	15,600
TOTALS T - Unsec Aircraft						
	238	0	36,375,908	29,175,663	0	7,200,145



Advanced Air Mobility Aircraft Emerge as Contested Logistics Enablers

- > AAM CAN FILL CRITICAL NEEDS ACROSS THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION
- > SMALLER, LOWER-COST AIRCRAFT OFFER HUGE EFFICIENCY GAINS OVER LARGE AIRLIFTERS

Ben Goldstein Boston

While commercial passenger services are taking longer than expected to materialize for advanced air mobility companies, the defense sector is shaping up to be a more immediate market.

As advanced air mobility (AAM) developers confront that slower-than-expected rollout, more are turning to the military as an early customer and revenue source. The growing trend is driven by the realities of contested logistics, particularly across the vast Indo-Pacific region, which has opened up new requirements for lower-cost, runway-independent platforms. As a result, hybrid-electric and autonomous vertical-takeoff-and-landing (VTOL) aircraft are becoming a pragmatic, increasingly viable option for the U.S. Armed Forces.

What began under exploratory initiatives such as the U.S. Air Force's AFWerx Agility Prime program has evolved into a clearer demand signal favoring the range, autonomy and flexibility offered by AAM aircraft. Created in 2020 to help advance development and commercialization of AAM vehicles, Agility Prime helped expose the gap between early electric vertical-takeoff-and-landing (eVTOL) concepts and military requirements. While the initiative has ended, indus-

try executives say it clarified what the Defense Department wants from AAM: chiefly range, enabled by hybrid-electric propulsion.

For most military missions, the Pentagon has concluded that battery-only propulsion is too range-limited to be viable. Hybrid systems combining elec-

Beta Technologies has partnered with GE to develop a turbogenerator for its Alia VTOL.



tric propulsion with an onboard generator offer a way to preserve electric advantages like lower operating costs while extending range and endurance.

As such, a host of AAM companies—eVTOL startups like Joby, Beta, Archer and Vertical Aerospace as well as fixed-wing aircraft designers like Electra.aero and makers of amphib-

ous options like Regent Craft—are pursuing hybrid-electric variants of their commercial platforms.

"At the very highest level, we are addressing a need for a lower-cost, attritable and high-performance aircraft," says Kyle Clark, founder and CEO of Beta Technologies. "Speed and range are the key performance parameters, and that's what we've designed our aircraft around."

"It also costs less to operate because they use less fuel and because they need less maintenance," Clark adds. "Both of those reduce the logistics tail required for the aircraft, and that is a really big driver for this."

Hybrid architectures also enable operational flexibility. Clark notes that Beta has demonstrated the ability to use its aircraft as a mobile power source. "The aircraft flies to where it's going, becomes a short-term generator or power supply, and then flies away," he says. "That's not something existing platforms can do."

At Joby Aviation, which is developing an autonomous, turbine-electric version of its S4 eVTOL in partnership with L3Harris, Chairman Paul Sciarra tells Aviation Week that pairing hybrid-electric propulsion with autonomy provides critical capabilities for defense customers.

"Each of the branches that field traditional rotorcraft are thinking about what the future of that platform looks

like," Sciarra says. "If you can build an aircraft that has similar capabilities, longer range, lower acoustic signature, lower radar signature and is capable of autonomous operation—that's a platform that is applicable for a bunch of different mission types."

The same logic underpins Vertical Aerospace's effort to equip its VX4 air

taxi with a hybrid-electric powertrain that is now being ground-tested ahead of integration onto a flying prototype this year. Thanks to the VX4's larger cabin size, the UK startup says it can integrate hybrid propulsion with minimal airframe rework.

"We have the ability to go 1,000-mi. range, 1,200-kilo payload, silent takeoff and landing and no heat signature," Vertical CEO Stuart Simpson says. "Militaries spend a fortune just doing ship-to-shore logistics on helicopters that spend eight months of the year being repaired because they're really old. They can buy one of our aircraft super cheap, and it can do logistics runs 24 hr. a day, 365 days a year."

If hybrid propulsion addresses range, autonomy can help scale fleets while reducing crew burden, cost and risk—particularly for contested logistics missions. "In contested logistics, it is a remotely supervised autonomous aircraft, because you're doing a really simple mission," Clark says. "You're sending water, medicine or bullets over a hill to resupply our troops and get out of there. . . . The autonomous portion can operate in a lost-comms, lost-GPS environment, deliver that mission and return home without remote interference."

For the U.S. military, interest in autonomy is largely driven by a desire to enable new logistics concepts that are inefficient to execute with existing crewed platforms. That logic underpins the Air Force's growing engagement with Reliable Robotics, which is preparing to deploy its autonomous flight system on a modified Cessna Caravan under a government-funded operational contract.

Reliable cofounder and CEO Robert Rose says the Caravan is particularly suited to the Air Force's push toward Agile Combat Employment (ACE), a strategy that emphasizes deploying forces across a wider area and operating logistics in a hub-and-spoke model. "ACE is about further distributing the force and being much more responsive to needs as they arise," Rose says. "The Caravan fits this really unique gap they have today for smaller aircraft that can fly at much higher frequencies."

Autonomy is central to that model, he adds, because it reduces risk to personnel and enables sustained, high-tempo operations using a relatively simple platform. "We can provide that capability with the Caravan,

and we can do it uncrewed, so you're not putting personnel at risk," Rose says. "Because it's uncrewed, you can fly even higher frequencies."

Sergio Cecutta, founder and partner at SMG Consulting, notes that AAM aircraft can enhance efficiency across cargo, logistics and other missions, since the military often uses large and expensive platforms for relatively modest logistics tasks.

"It's a little bit like having all steak knives," Cecutta says. "If you really need to cut butter, you can use a steak knife, but that doesn't mean it's the right tool. The smallest fixed-wing aircraft we use is the [Lockheed] C-130, which isn't small at all. On the helicopter side, the [Sikorsky] UH-60 is already large, and it's being replaced by the [Bell] MV-75, which is even bigger.

its 12-passenger Viceroy seaglider. "The military has to move people and cargo across long distances in the Pacific without relying on runways. If you can use the ocean as your infrastructure, that changes the equation."

Regent's seaglider concept is designed to carry large payloads over hundreds of miles at speeds far exceeding conventional maritime transport while avoiding the infrastructure demands of traditional aircraft. Huntley says the vehicle's appeal lies in its ability to support distributed operations without competing for airspace or runways.

"It's not about VTOL versus fixed-wing," he says. "It's about how you get capability where it's needed, quickly and reliably, in environments where traditional options are constrained."



Reliable Robotics says its autonomous Caravans can be more efficient for logistics than large airlifters like the Lockheed C-130 or Boeing C-17.

RELIABLE ROBOTICS

"So these [AAM] vehicles come in with the capability of carrying smaller loads over longer distances without a pilot," he adds. "It can help with this whole idea of expeditionary warfighting, where you can never have a permanent location because the enemy can wipe it out very easily."

Several sources emphasized that military interest in AAM is broader than vertical flight. What matters operationally is not the takeoff mode but the ability to operate without fixed runways or vulnerable infrastructure. That underpins the military's growing interest in seagliders—wing-in-ground-effect vehicles that skim just above the water at high speed while carrying significant payloads.

"We're solving the same logistics problem, just from a different angle," says Tom Huntley, vice president of government affairs and defense at Regent Craft, which is developing autonomous and hybrid-electric versions of

A similar logic is driving interest in ultra-short-takeoff-and-landing aircraft, such as the hybrid-electric EL9 from Electra.aero, which is designed to operate from spaces as short as 150 ft. The company argues that such aircraft could relieve pressure on larger airlifters by handling smaller missions, generating expeditionary electrical power and accessing austere or dispersed locations central to ACE concepts.

While AAM offers defense planners a way to move cargo across vast distances with lower risk, it offers something equally valuable: early revenue. Commercial operations take longer to reach scale and profitability.

"This is a lifeline," Cecutta says. "Revenue from air taxi operations is not going to materialize anytime soon. Companies need other use cases to survive between now and then. Investors want to see revenue. Defense helps companies become self-sustaining—not just keep raising capital." ●



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

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!

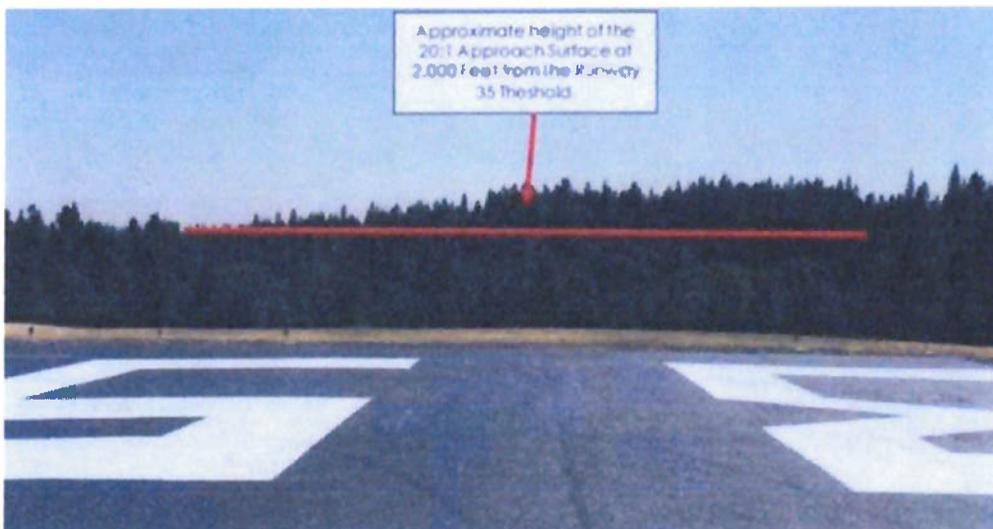


Figure 3 – An image from March 2022 taken by the State Department of Transportation showing the acceptable tree line in proximity to runway 35/17 at Georgetown Airport. Due to heavy rains in winter of 2023, the problem has increased measurably.

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

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

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.

DISCUSSION

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

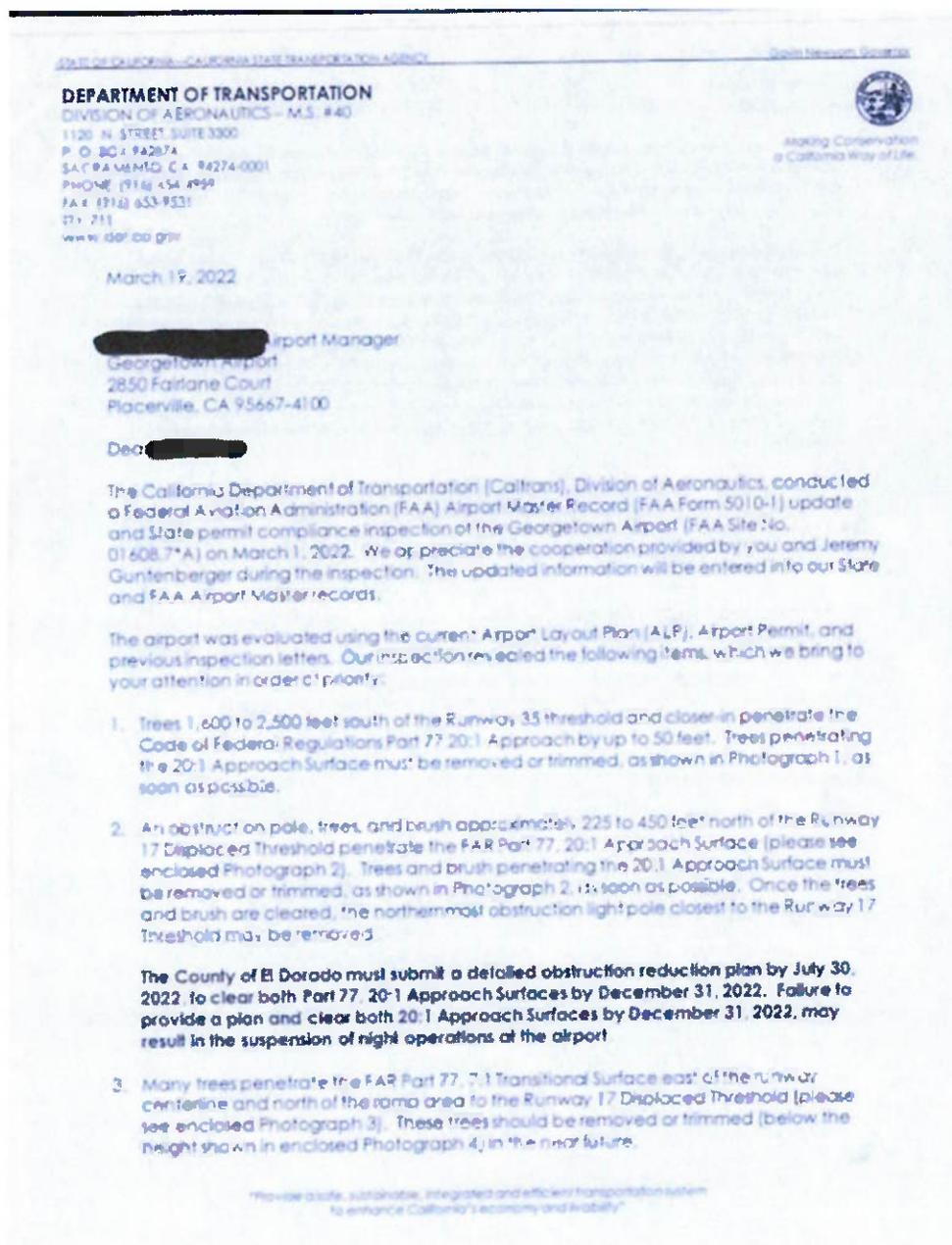
For more information refer to *How to Respond to an El Dorado County Grand Jury Report* available on the El Dorado County Grand Jury webpage.

APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

Appendix and Related Information

Appendix 1

Department of Transportation Letter – March 19, 2022



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.

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.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

CHRISTOPHER BROOKS
Aviation Safety Officer

Enclosures

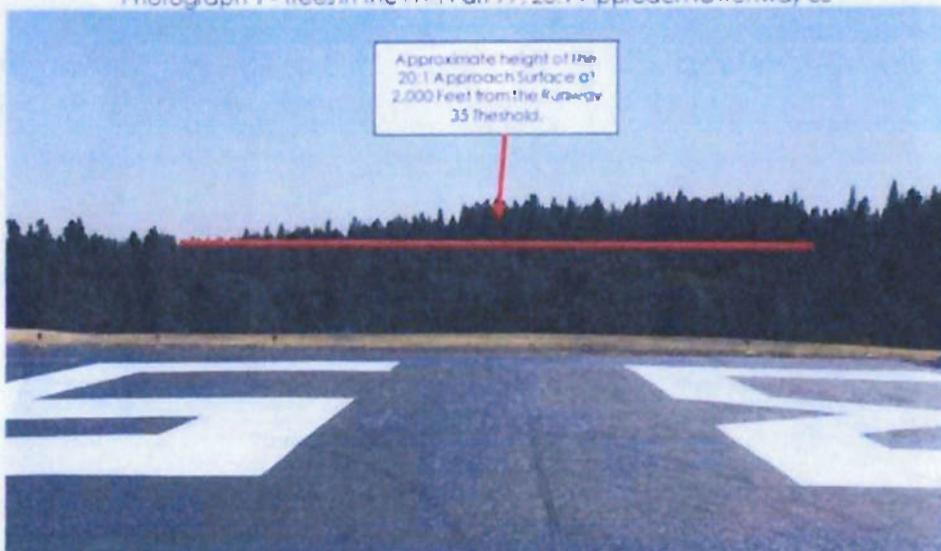
c: Ms. Laurie Suttmeier, ADO Manager, SFO ADO, laurie.suttmeier@faa.gov
Mr. Lemuel Del Castillo, Lead Engineer, SFO ADO, lemuel.del.castillo@faa.gov

"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"

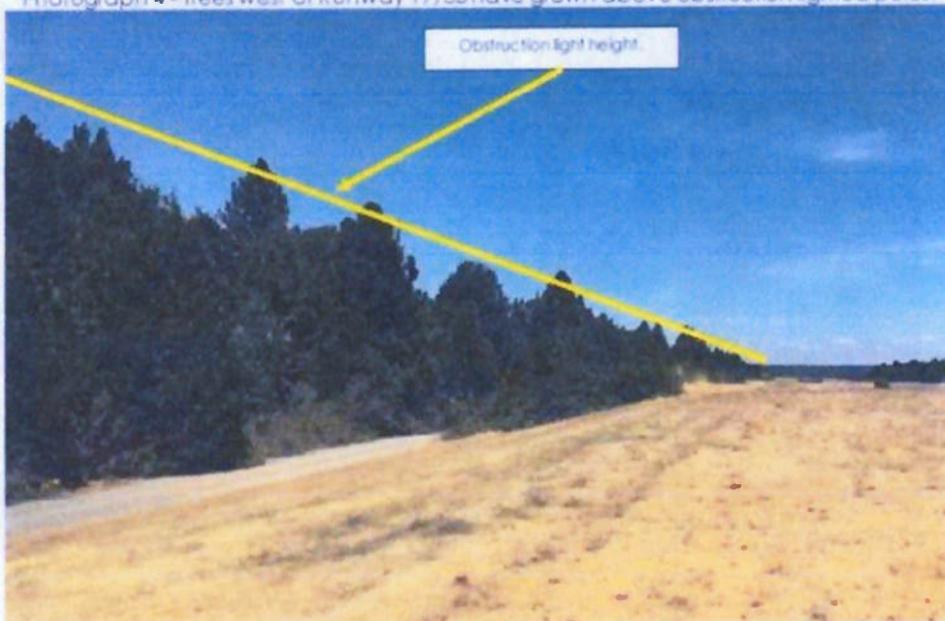
APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

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

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Aviation Administration

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

NOTICE FOR CONSTRUCTION, ALTERATION AND DEACTIVATION OF AIRPORTS

A. Airport Owner <input type="checkbox"/> Check if this is also the Property Owner		B. Airport Manager (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 2550 FAIRLANE COURT PLACERVILLE, CA 95667		
2. Phone	3. Email	2. Phone	3. Email	
C. Purpose of Notification (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		1. Name of Landing Area: Georgetown Airport		
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)		2. Lat. ID for routing: E36		
3. Change Status From/To: <input type="checkbox"/> VFR to IFR <input type="checkbox"/> IFR to VFR <input type="checkbox"/> Private Use to Public Use <input type="checkbox"/> Public Use to Other		3. Associated City and State: Georgetown, CA		
4. Change Traffic Pattern: <input type="checkbox"/> Direction <input type="checkbox"/> Altitude <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Describe Below)		4. Distance from City: 2 (M)		
5. Deact. r/s: <input type="checkbox"/> Airport <input type="checkbox"/> RWY <input type="checkbox"/> TWY		5. County (Physical Location): Dorado		
6. Description: Change of runway declination from 16/34 to 17/35		6. Direction from City: NW		
		7. Latitude: 38° 55' 15.000"		
		8. Longitude: 120° 15' 53.400"		
		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 <input type="checkbox"/> State		
		12. Airport Type: <input 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		
E. Landing Area Data (List any Proposed, New or Unimproved 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)		
Runway ID: 17 / 35	Helipad ID: /			
Lat. & Long. (Show on attachments):	Lat. & Long. (Show on attachments):			
Surface Type: ASPH	Surface Type:			
Length (feet): 2,980	TLOF Dimensions:			
Width (feet): 60	Taxi Dimensions:			
Lighting (if any): MED	Lighting (if any):			
Right Traffic (N): N / N	Ingress/Egress (Degree):			
Elevation (AMSL): (Show on attachments):	Elevation (AMSL): (Show on attachments):			
VFR or IFR: VFR / VFR	Elevated height (AGL):			
F. Operational Data (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				
Other				
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				
G. CERTIFICATION: 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

FAX 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 942575 945-45 | SACRAMENTO, CA 94273-0001
(916) 654-4939
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) 639-4297 or email at christopher.brooks@dot.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Christopher Brooks

CHRISTOPHER BROOKS
Aviation Safety Officer

Enclosures

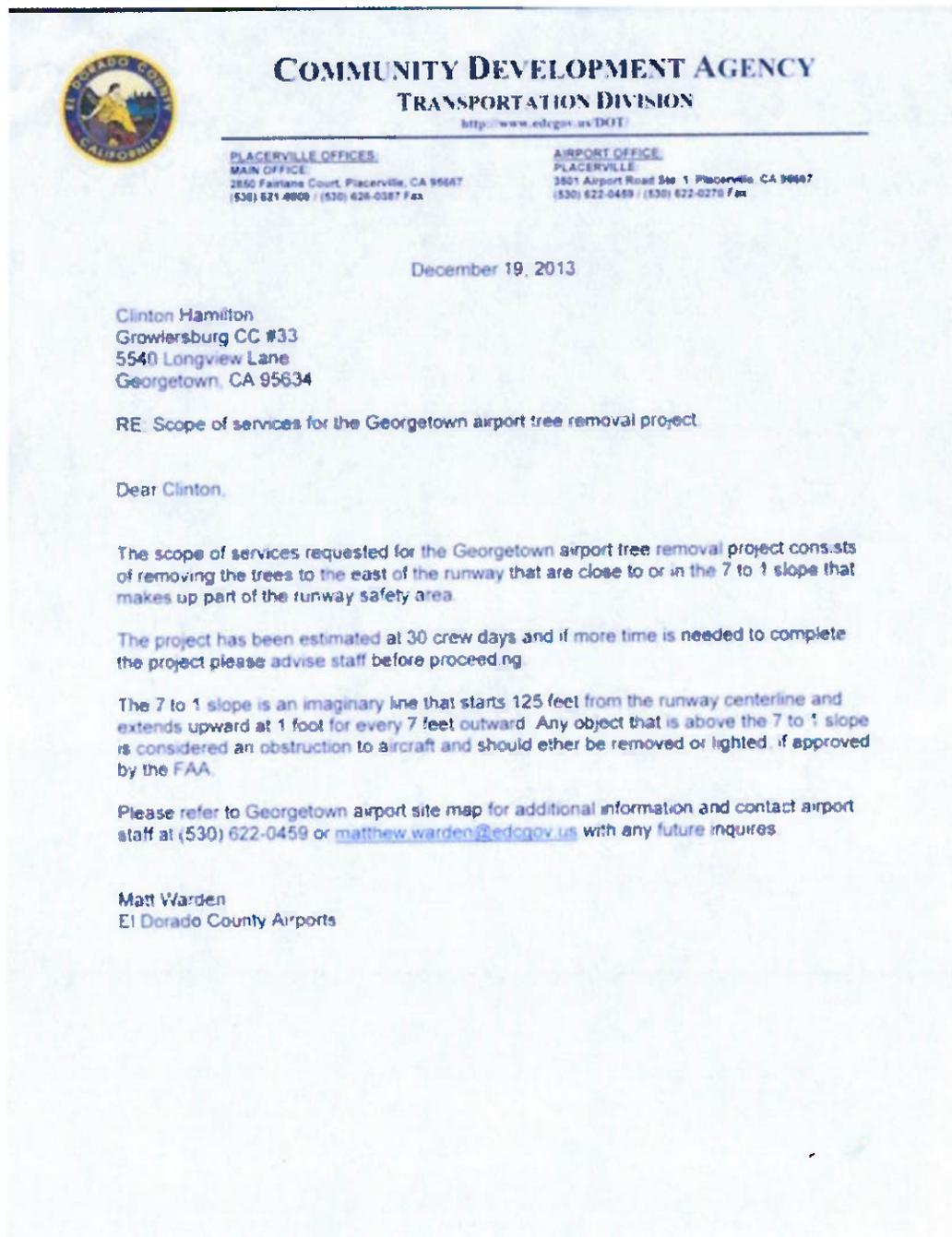
c: San Francisco Airports District Office

"Provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and improves the environment."

APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

Appendix 2

Community Development Agency Letter – December 19, 2013



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.

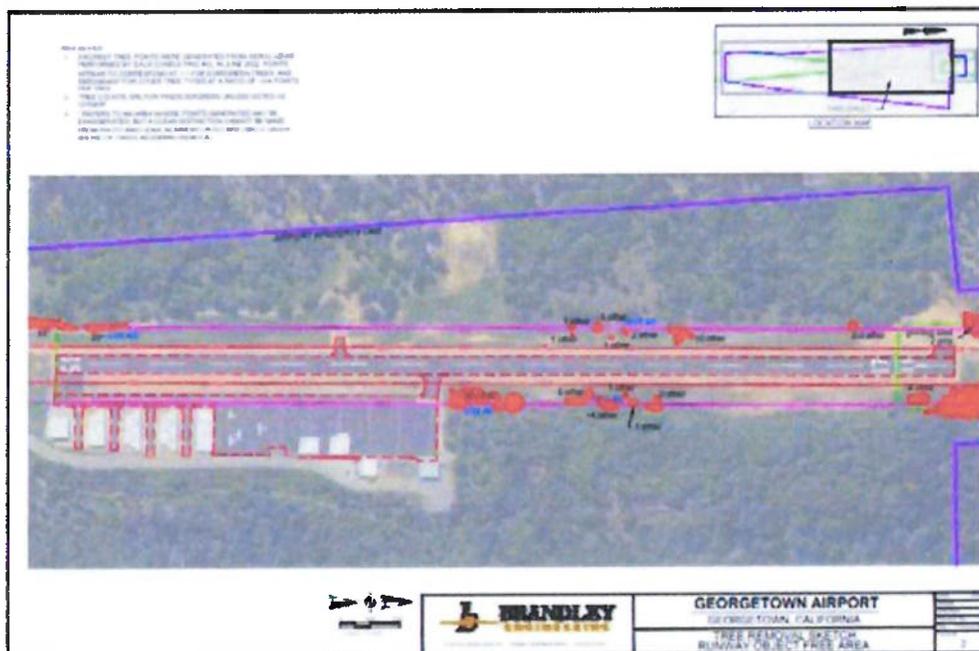
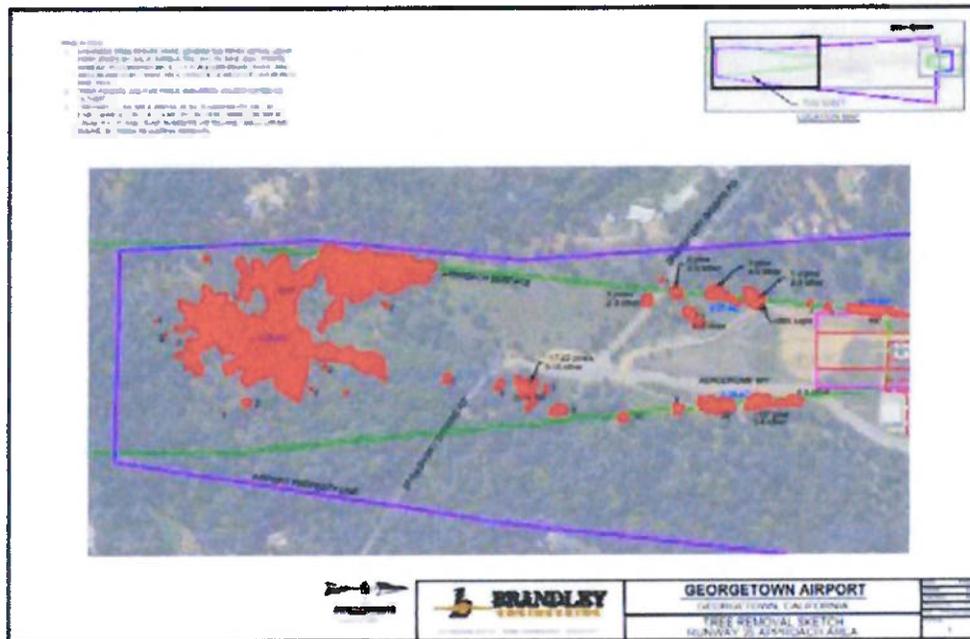
I hope it's apparent that hitting a bush would have a better outcome than a wing being ripped off.

Thank You

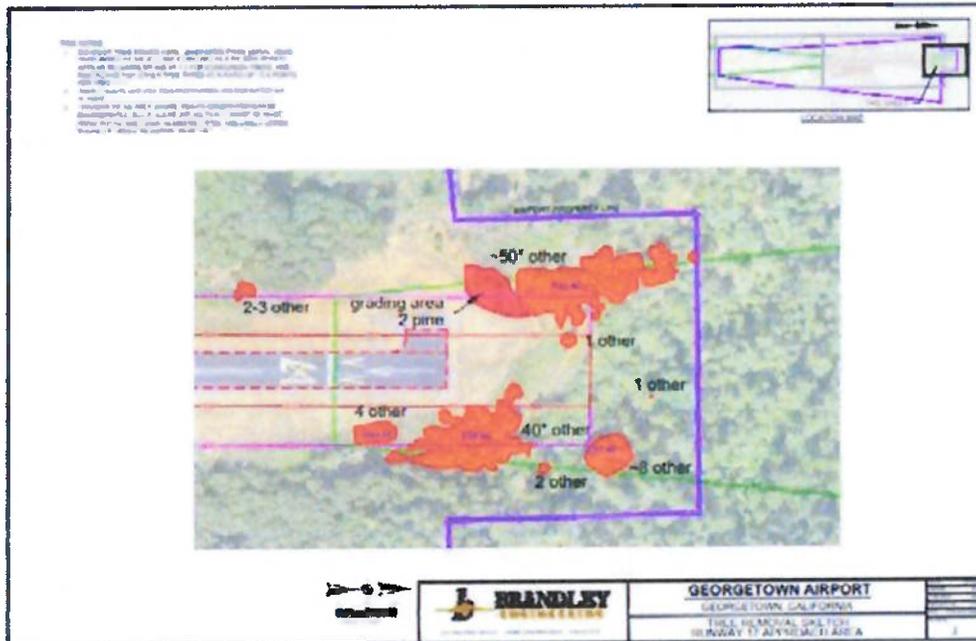
APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION

Appendix 5

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



APPENDIX AND RELATED INFORMATION



COUNTY OF EL DORADO

330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667
(530) 621-5390
(530) 622-3645 Fax

KIM DAWSON
Clerk of the Board



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

JOHN HIDAHL
District I
GEORGE TURNBOO
District II
WENDY THOMAS
District III
LORI PARLIN
District IV
BROOKE LAINE
District V

April 23, 2024

The Honorable Vicki Ashworth, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of El Dorado County
459 Main Street
Placerville, CA 95667

Dear Judge Ashworth:

Pursuant to Section 933(b) of the California Penal Code, enclosed is the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors' response to the applicable findings and recommendations, as set forth by the El Dorado County Grand Jury in its 2023-24 Report 24-01 issued on February 21, 2024, and Report 24-04 issued on March 4, 2024. The attached responses were approved by the Board of Supervisors and are being submitted to the courts via email.

The Board of Supervisors thanks the Grand Jury for its efforts in reviewing the various aspects of County government and operations and commends each member for their investment of time.

Sincerely,

Wendy Thomas, Chair
El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

Enclosures: County Responses to 2023-24 Reports 24-01 and 24-04

c: Grand Jury Foreperson

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
Response to the
2023-24 El Dorado County Grand Jury Report
(Case 24-01: Georgetown Airport: A Disaster Waiting to Happen)

Case 24-01: Georgetown Airport: A Disaster Waiting to Happen

The Grand Jury has requested responses from the Board of Supervisors to All Findings and Recommendations.

Consistent with previous practice and pursuant to Board Policy A-11, the Chief Administrative Office is responsible for coordinating the County's response to the Grand Jury. Responses to the Grand Jury Report are directed by Board Policy A-11 and Penal Code 933.05. Accordingly, the Chief Administrative Office has reviewed and compiled the responses from all non-elected department heads into this Initial Draft Response for the Board's consideration.

FINDINGS

- F1. 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.

The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding.

Caltrans has determined night operations are potentially unsafe but is allowing the airport to continue daytime operations. The Board of Supervisors cannot agree with the speculation that the County may be subject to a claim of gross negligence.

- F2. 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.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding.

- F3. 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.

The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding.

Though some airport users had expressed opinions about the hazards to Airports staff, the inspection report from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) that noted the hazards was dated March 19, 2022.

- F4. 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.

The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding.

There was no conscious decision by the Board of Supervisors to prioritize the economic study over the airport hazard mitigation. The Board was not made aware of the Caltrans inspection report until December 2023, when Caltrans suspended night operations. Had the Board been aware of the hazards earlier, the mitigation of the hazards would have been prioritized.

- F5. 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.

The Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding.

- F6. 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.

The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding.

The Airports Division has relocated the pole and installed a light on top to reduce the potential hazard, but the pole should be relocated, which is planned for early 2025. The Board cannot agree with the speculation about the potential result of contact with the pole.

- F7. 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.

The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding.

While it is true that the airports benefit a very small segment of the County population, the General Fund contribution to both airports has increased for each of the last three years.

- F8. 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.

The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with finding.

The County agrees the failure to timely mitigate the hazards could pose a liability; however, the County cannot agree with the speculation regarding potential lawsuits, and whether the current liability coverage would be adequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. 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.

The recommendation has not been implemented but will be implemented in the future.

The County has executed a contract with a licensed timber operator to remove the three acres of trees that pose the most imminent threat. This work is estimated to be completed by June 30, 2024. Relocation of the obstruction pole is estimated to take place in early 2025.

- R2. 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.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

As stated in the response to Recommendation 1, a plan is in place to address the hazards.

- R3. 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.

The recommendation has been implemented. On January 23, 2024, the Board of Supervisors conceptually approved the reassignment of the Airports and Cemeteries functions from the Planning and Building Department to the Chief Administrative Office. This change will be effective July 1, 2024.

- R4. 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.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

The Board is committed to mitigating the hazards at the airport. The Board approved a budget transfer for the tree removal in the amount of \$50,000 on March 19, 2024. There is no need to preclude the possibility of funding other improvements concurrently with the hazard mitigation.

- R5. 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.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

Caltrans staff inspect both airports annually. The Board of Supervisors has no authority to require the Grand Jury to inspect airports.

- R6. County leadership should continue using the Growlersburg Conservation Camp crew to clear the trees when and where applicable subject to their availability.

Recommendation has been implemented.

At the time of this writing, the County is in the process of finalizing a new contract with the State of California, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for the use of the Growlersburg Conservation Camp crew. This contract will be used for work on County property when appropriate and allowed by law.