



News Release

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Draft press release in the event the Department of Ecology renders an approval decision for the Port of Seattle's 401 Permit application to construct a third runway at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Aug. 9, 2001
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Ecology approves Port of Seattle permit for new airport runway

BELLEVUE – The Department of Ecology (Ecology) has approved the Port of Seattle's environmental permit to construct a third runway and related projects at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

Ecology has also outlined several conditions in the permit that the Port will have to meet to satisfy state and federal environmental regulations. These items include requiring additional wetland protection, retrofitting existing stormwater management systems and carefully monitoring fill materials.

“The environmental footprint for this project is huge. Our permit specifies what the Port will have to do to build a third runway and protect the surrounding environment,” said Ecology Director Tom Fitzsimmons.

A third Sea-Tac runway is proposed to be located parallel and to the west of the airport's two existing runways. More than 20 million cubic yards of fill will be brought in to construct the massive 8,500-foot-long project — the equivalent of 40 football fields, each stacked 300 feet-high with material.

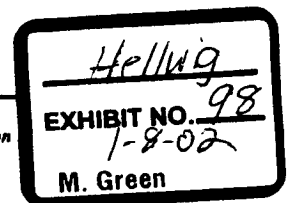
Three salmon-bearing creeks — Des Moines, Miller and Walker — are contiguous to the planned runway site. In addition, nearly 20 acres of wetlands will be filled but the Port will be required to replace or enhance wetland functions in each creek basin and create a new 60-acre wetland next to the Green River in Auburn.

“This project is unprecedented,” said Gov. Gary Locke. “While a new Sea-Tac runway is vital to our state's economic health, we have to be sure that the environment will be protected before it can be built. I support the Department of Ecology's decision and I am confident that the right balance between environmental protection and economic benefit has been achieved.”

This is the third time the Port has sought Ecology water-quality certification under the federal Clean Water Act. In 1998, the agency issued a permit for the runway proposal but the Port declined the permit. In September 2000, the Port withdrew a second permit application rather than have Ecology deny it.

While Ecology has been reviewing a wide array of issues, there have been four primary environmental concerns surrounding the runway proposal. These include making sure the Port has adequate plans to:

- more - **AR 017830**



- **Manage stormwater to avoid adverse water-quality effects on Des Moines, Miller and Walker creeks.** Under the permit, the Port will construct 15 major stormwater ponds and vault facilities. One of the underground vaults will detain up to 88 acre-feet of stormwater, equal to nearly 30 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Several other ponds will hold as much as 20 to 40 acre-feet. The Port will also need to incrementally retrofit its existing stormwater facilities to bring the entire airport property into compliance with state stormwater regulations.
- **Protect and restore wetland habitat.** Ecology will require the Port to create or enhance a total of 201 acres of wetlands, including creating a new 60-acre wetland near the Green River in Auburn. In addition, nearly 6,500 linear feet of Miller Creek will be enhanced to provide better fish and other aquatic wildlife habitat.
- **Mitigate low flows in the three creeks, especially during low rainfall months.** The Port will be required to capture and store stormwater during wet months, then return the water to the creeks to maintain adequate creek flows during dry months. The Port's stormwater and low-flow plans are closely linked. Ecology has set additional conditions regarding how flows will be maintained in Walker Creek.
- **Screen fill to avoid bringing in contaminants.** Ecology will require the Port to screen the 20 million cubic yards of fill to ensure no toxic materials in toxic amounts are placed at the runway site. The agency has developed stringent criteria to make sure that surface and ground water will not be contaminated by all the fill needed to construct the runway. This is the first time the state has placed such strict conditions on project applicant regarding fill.

"We have never had to review a proposal so large in scope or one that's had so many different environmental issues that need to be considered," said Ray Hellwig, Ecology's Regional Director for Northwest Washington. "I am confident that Ecology has reached a decision that is scientifically sound, technically feasible and legally defensible."

Hellwig said that Ecology's current approval of the permit does not rule out the possibility of future amendments or conditions based on new information or further evaluation of the existing plan.

The Port has also agreed to fund three to five Ecology staff positions that will oversee how the Port is complying with the terms of their permit. Failure to meet Ecology's terms could result in penalty action or revocation of the permit.

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Ecology's Web site: <http://www.ecv.wa.gov>

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