

What Killed The Fish?

Starting on October 31, and continuing into December, dozens of seemingly-healthy adult Coho salmon have died in Miller Creek, before spawning. Stream-side residents have watched (and filmed) Coho struggling to breathe. Preliminary laboratory exams have not revealed any obvious causes of death, although suspicion naturally falls on pollutants that might come from a sewage-treatment plant nearby or from Sea-Tac Airport, at the headwaters of the creek. Shortly before the first kills, the Airport experienced an overflow from its settling ponds upstream. Locals strongly suspect Airport-related pollution as the cause of the unusual fish kill.

This winter's run of returning salmon was one of the strongest in recent memory (bearing out the contention that Miller Creek is indeed an historic salmon stream).

No Floatplanes for Seattle Waterfront

Seattle's downtown waterfront is no long threatened by increased noise from a proposed floatplane base near Pier 54 (Ivar's). Faced with strong opposition, floatplane operator Kenmore Air has withdrawn its application for a City-issued shorelines permit. The Seattle City Council has put a moratorium on applications while it looks at the whole issue.

Kenmore had planned as many as 16,000 sightseeing flight operations during the summer tourist season. Two downtown Seattle residential associations, and the Washington State ferry system, were concerned with impacts of the proposal, and appealed the City-granted permit to the Shorelines Management Hearings Board. Kenmore and Ivar's then withdrew the application, not wishing to "go out and fight the public," as Robert Munro, owner of Kenmore, put it.

Truth in Aviation

The Newsletter of the Regional Commission on Airport Affairs

Vol. 6, No. 1

Winter 2000

CROWD PACKS SEA-TAC WETLANDS HEARING

On November 3, a crowd of more than 500 people overflowed the auditorium at Foster High School in Tukwila for a hearing on the revised application of the Port of Seattle for permission to destroy 18-plus acres of wetlands as part of its third-runway project.

Both the Department of Ecology and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must determine that there will be no needless, unmitigated impacts on wetlands and wildlife before they can give permission for the Port to begin construction of the third runway in the headwaters of Miller and Des Moines Creek, west of the existing airport. The hearing was sponsored by the two agencies. The Corps is responsible for clearing the so-called "404" permit, which is needed to fill any wetland. Ecology is responsible for

issuing a "401" certificate, which concerns the water quality in State waters, wildlife issues, and impacts on the coastal zone.

The auditorium was too small for the crowd, so the fire marshal turned away many latecomers. Only 59 of those who signed up to speak were called to the podium. Local elected public officials led off the testimony with vigorous complaints about the over-all project, the details of the wetlands damage, and the inadequate process. Aside from some Port-paid "experts", almost all of the speakers pointed out serious deficiencies in the Port's revised application.

RCAA President Larry Corvari said after the hearing, "This huge turn-out shows that opposition to the third runway and its unacceptable

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Leah News

Concerned Highline Residents Sue Water District To Void Backroom Deal with Airport

Citizens Against Sea-Tac Expansion (C.A.S.E.), a citizens' group based in the Highline area, has sued the Highline Water District and the Port of Seattle in King County Superior Court, asking for a declaration voiding the District's attempt to transfer water rights to the Port of Seattle.

According to the complaint, the Water Dis-

trict and the Port of Seattle have secretly made an agreement to transfer one of the District's wells (Well #1) and associated water rights to the Port. The agreement was never discussed by the District Commissioners in open session, only in closed-door meetings. And the agreement's terms were kept secret until after the Commis-

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EXECUTIVE RON SIMS TORPEDOES COUNTY MITIGATION STUDY

For two years in a row, the King County budget has mandated a County study of the impacts of the proposed third runway in the area North of the Airport, including Seattle and the unincorporated area North of Burien. The planning office was to provide the equivalent of one full-time planner (1 FTE), and the County transportation department was to provide a half-time person (0.5 FTE) specifically to study transportation issues raised by the runway proposal. Thanks to personnel changes, the County's planning office got off to a slow start on the project, but was beginning to gather materials about other airport mitigation plans from around the country in co-operation with RCAA. Then, Ron Sims, the County Executive, ordered a change in direction, away from third-runway impacts North of the Airport to an economic plan for the Highline communities. This change was made without explanation or consultation with the County Council, and over the strong objections of the RCAA liaison committee. Sims refuses to meet with RCAA representatives to discuss his actions. The study was conceived by its sponsors as a companion to the State-funded study for the incorporated Highline area.

Appeals Court Confuses Everyone

Pending lawsuits seeking to stop expansion of Sea-Tac Airport are headed to the Supreme Court of Washington, as all parties seek clarification of confusing opinions issued by the Court of Appeals. The same panel of that Court ruled for the Port and PSRC in two related cases, but the two opinions give very different and inconsistent guidance as to the powers and duties of various levels of government to mitigate potential harm from the expansion. The Port has moved for reconsideration in one case, and the Airport Communities Coalition has petitioned the state Supreme Court to review the other decision, which also greatly restricts the authority of cities to make local plans.

SEA-TAC PART 150 MEETINGS DRAW OVERFLOW CROWDS

Can changes in Sea-Tac flight corridors result in significant reductions in noise impacts on the ground? Thousands of Seattle, Eastside, and Federal Way residents, and the Operations Subcommittee of the Sea-Tac Part 150 study hope so.

On February 9, after months of discussion, the Subcommittee reached consensus to recommend major changes in the departure routes for south-departing Sea-Tac traffic. Then, in a noisy, contentious, difficult process, eight members — a majority of the subcommittee — voted to “move forward” a recommendation for dividing north-departing traffic into three streams. All these proposals seek to minimize present noise impacts on neighborhoods far from the Airport, resulting from the four-post traffic pattern imposed by the FAA in 1990.

These recommendations will be considered by the study's Committee of the Whole (the technical advisory committee and the citizens' advisory committee) which will file a report on all aspects of the study, for evaluation by Port staff. This report will then go to the Port Commission, which will make its own recommendations to the Pacific Mountain region of the FAA late this year, after further hearings.

Hope for Federal Way

The recommended changes in the South are to divide the traffic into two streams, and route them to the east of Federal Way, over the Green River industrial area. These changes were recommended without controversy. A third ‘arm’ to depart over South Des Moines attracted no support and was dropped. At present, the south-departing traffic turns West over Federal Way, at about So. 320th, the heart of the city. Since 1990, a Federal Way task force has negotiated with the FAA for a change.

The proposed changes on ‘north flow’ brought out standing-room-only crowds for three successive public meetings. On February 9, the Subcommittee, and the crowd, were enthusiastic for the proposal to develop the Duwamish-Elliott Bay noise-abatement corridor to the maximum extent. The companion measure, moving a majority of remaining ‘north flow’ traffic a mile farther north, and the rest three miles to the south, is highly controversial, with Seattle residents and neighborhood groups from Mt. Baker and Beacon Hill northward, and Eastside communities like Medina and Hunts Point in support, while Mercer Island, some South-East Seattle groups, Renton, and Bellevue oppose the idea.

The two factions filled the hearing room. Latecomers were turned away, and dozens of spectators stood for three hours. Printed and hand-made placards, pro and con hand-outs, and competing lapel pins were in great abundance. The “pro” group brought dozens of yellow balloons, simply marked “yes”.

Opponents fear that they will receive unacceptable levels of new noise, and argue that a split East Turn would impact many more people than it would benefit. Proponents say that opponents are misinterpreting the data presented by the study consultant, Dunkelberg & Co., and that noise will be greatly reduced for most people under Sea-Tac flight corridors. The Lakewood Seward Park Community Club presented a petition with 400-plus signatures in opposition. C.A.N.E., the “pro” subcommittee of Seattle Council on Airport Affairs, mounted an intense e-mail campaign to lobby subcommittee members in the days before the meeting.

Official Information Inadequate

Subcommittee members on both sides of the issue, and many members of the public, complained vigorously that the information from the Port and the study consultant was insufficient to permit a rational conclusion about benefits versus adverse impacts. At the end, the committee voted, 8-4, that the split turn, together with the Duwamish corridor, should “move forward” — that is, be passed to the full study committee for further work. The majority clearly hoped for further studies, and more data, to be presented before the Committee of the Whole makes its final report.

“Giant Noise-Generating Machine”

Despite inter-neighborhood rancor, citizens long active in Airport issues were favorably impressed by the crowd, and its fervor. C.A.S.E. president Mike Anderson pointed out that the real problem was not this or that corridor but a “giant noise-generating machine” in the midst of the metropolitan area. Jane Rees, RCAA Board member, commented that it was great to see so many more people actively engaged in Sea-Tac noise issues. Richard Kennedy, representing the City of Des Moines, noted the irony that Eastside residents were now agitating to save themselves from Sea-Tac noise, even though those communities had unanimously supported a Sea-Tac third runway, without regard to the noise that others would suffer.

Highline Schools Need \$178 Million To Reduce Overflight Classroom Noise

The Highline School District, with some schools built in the 1880s and 1890s, and the majority built in the 1950s and 60s, has long had an uneasy relationship with Sea-Tac International Airport. The Airport opened for passenger traffic in Summer 1949 and added a second runway in 1972. From its beginnings with an occasional DC-3 or Constellation, Sea-Tac has grown to a multiple-runway facility, going full tilt day and night. Highline pupils, teachers, parents, and administration have complained long and loud that overflight noise was harming the education process. After years of fruitless, secret negotiations with the Airport's lawyers for financial help, the District went to the Legislature, which provided \$165,000 in seed money for a thorough study. The Port then agreed to make a \$1,250,000 contribution toward the study cost.

How Much Noise Is Too Much?

The District hired a highly-regarded noise expert, BBN Technologies, to oversee the work. BBN researched the best information from acoustical and educational authorities around the world and reported that "an acoustically satisfactory classroom environment tolerates [a

maximum] error rate of 10% incorrectly heard words during maximum aircraft flyover noise levels". In short, learning is significantly impaired when pupils cannot understand at least 9 in 10 spoken words. BBN then determined the sound levels, classroom by classroom, in the 15 most-affected buildings in the District to learn just where that 9-in-10 threshold was exceeded. In the final phase of the study, architectural and engineering consultants studied each too-noisy building and classroom, providing detailed estimates of the costs to reduce classroom noise to the acceptable level.

On March 1, the District announced the results of this last phase of the study to the public. The needed work will cost \$178 million. Sources of funding for that work are still unidentified. There are some proposals circulating in the Legislature for substantial State assistance, but in the cash-strapped atmosphere of the post-Initiative 695 era, chances of help from the Legislature seem slim. The Port has said for years that a grand total of \$40 to \$50 million of Federal money will come its way for Airport mitigation, and has

half-promised all that money to the District. Over the years, Port staff have also suggested that various other impacts would be mitigated from those same funds. And as yet, FAA has made no public commitment to provide any money for school work.

This dilemma – too much noise and too little money – is the shape of the future for school districts in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties (and many other urban areas) as in-city airports like Sea-Tac plan more and longer runways for more and larger airplanes, bringing more noise over schools farther and farther away, and as outlying facilities, like Paine Field, inevitably are opened for passenger traffic. In Illinois, the City of Chicago, which operates ultra-busy O'Hare Airport, has stepped forward to commit hundreds of millions of its own money to retrofit suburban schools hard hit by O'Hare overflights. Chicago is a big, prosperous city, with ample financial resources; the Port of Seattle is a limited-purpose government, with scanty tax revenues of \$35 million a year – all of which goes to pay the never-ending expenses of its marine operations.

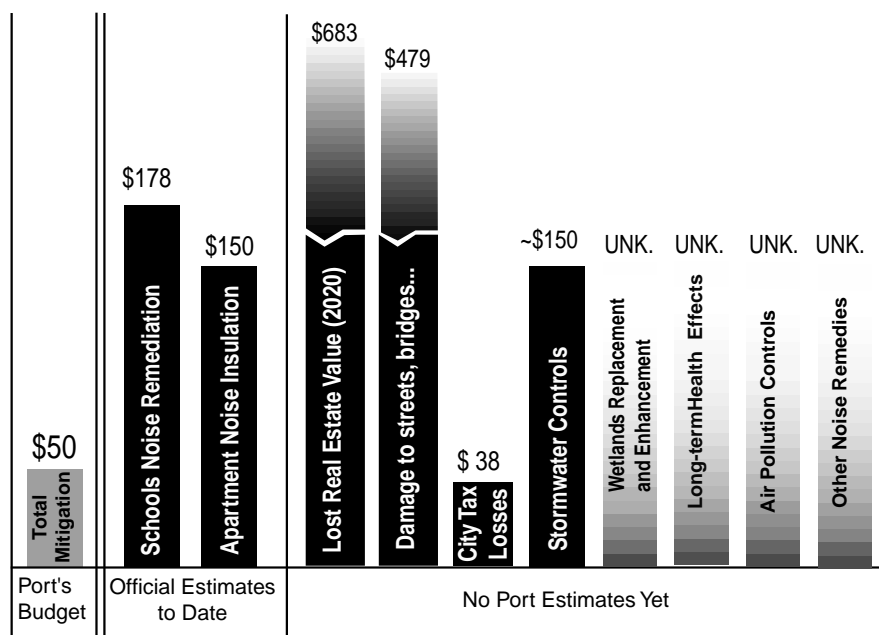
Most Mitigation Costs Unfunded or Unknown

In seeking approval from the Puget Sound Regional Council for the third runway, the Port of Seattle promised to "fully mitigate" the impacts of the project on neighboring communities. Recent studies of mitigation costs, however, raise questions about how the Port will find the money to do that. The only amount the Port ever budgeted for these "mitigation" costs is \$50 million. However, the new estimate for mitigating Highline schools alone is nearly four times that amount. (See story above.) A recent estimate from the Part 150 noise study committee put the cost of insulating apartment houses at \$150 million. The H-O-K study of a portion of the mitigation costs to cities south of the airport came to \$2.9 billion. The Port protested that study, but has never produced its own estimate of those costs. Many of the items needed for full mitigation, such as impacts north of the airport, have never been estimated. The Port has yet to identify any sources of funding for mitigation costs beyond the \$50 million dollar mark.

The accompanying graph shows the most recent estimates of mitigation costs. The items

range from those on the left, which have been studied in detail, to other obvious matters, such

as long-term health effects, that have not even been addressed.



Total Third Runway Mitigation Costs (in millions)

Where to Go for More Information

For an expanded, much more detailed version of this newsletter, readers may wish to consult our website www.rcaanews.org/rca. For an expanded version of this issue go to our website library at www.rcaanews.org/rca/libr.htm#libnews.

Lots of valuable information is also to be found at the website of the Seattle Council on Airport Affairs www.airportnoise.org.

While You're Up, Get Me a Grant — For \$6-10 Billion!

Critics of Sea-Tac Airport's expansion plans have long complained that the costs are not being fully disclosed. During last Fall's elections for two seats on the Port Commission, Port insiders quoted numbers that raised eyebrows even among those who thought Port estimates were far too low.

Bob Edwards, a candidate for the Commission, and a leader on an important Port-appointed advisory body, said in his campaign literature that the total cost was about \$6 billion. Pat Davis, then-President of the Commission, appeared on several KUOW radio programs about the Port Commission election, accepting the presenter's estimate of between \$7 and \$10 billion.

It will be very hard to find any Port publications that lay out the full costs and give a complete total, but these revelations by insiders are apparently based on staff summaries of numerous documents that deal with the project piece by piece. It is particularly interesting that the numbers would cover so wide a range — \$6 billion to \$10 billion. Financial planning for expansion at the Airport seems to be at a primitive stage. The public still has to see one comprehensive publication, putting it all together. The most recent staff report on capital admitted a shortfall of \$1.7 billion, and RCAA analysis indicates that the true shortfall is probably three times as great — not counting mitigation costs.

As to those, see article on p. 3.

1999 Year in Review

For Sea-Tac Airport Expansion, 1999 could be called "the year of **didn't**." The Port didn't get its wetlands permits. Its application wasn't reworked until Fall, so the hearing wasn't held until November. The Port **didn't** finish its acquisition program as planned. There are still an estimated 160 parcels to be acquired according to the *Sea-Tac Forum*. Westside Citizens for Fair Acquisition report 78 homes yet to be acquired, with 29 lawsuits pending. The Port **didn't** start building the third runway. See our annual photo of 12th Ave. S., which is at the centerline of the proposed runway. The Port **didn't** haul a substantial amount of dirt for the runway—only 60,000+ cubic yards. The total for three years is only 7.3% of the 19.84 million cubic yards that will be eventually be needed. It **didn't** locate funding sources for most of the project and **didn't** finish detailed estimates of the "mitigations" costs.

Last year, the Editors of *Truth in Aviation* issued their fearless forecasts, and did pretty well. We predicted that "problems with financing, schools, wetlands, fish, erosion, and water pollution" would plague the project in 1999 — and they did. (And these problems will continue through the coming year.)

We thought that the Port would submit its new wetlands application in Spring 1999 and that the permitting process would be over by New Year's 2000. The Port was half a year slower than we had predicted. We correctly said that another huge crowd would turn out for another wetlands hearing. We predicted that even after its second count, the Port would underestimate wetlands by 10 acres — and so far, an-

other five acres have been found since that second count. We predicted that the Port would continue to refuse financial aid to the Highline Schools—and happily point out that we were wrong! We also forecast that the Port would continue to claim the runway was under construction though no construction actually occurred. We were partially right. In November, a Port spokesman announced that the runway, initially scheduled to open in 1997 at a cost of \$261 million, is now scheduled to open in 2004 at the earliest and at a cost of \$773 million was "on time and on budget." Go figure.



12th Ave. S. at the centerline of the proposed third runway on Feb. 24, 2000

Burien Chooses Clark

Long-time RCAA Board Member Rose Clark was elected to the Burien City Council in November, and has resigned from the RCAA Board. On the RCAA Board, Rose followed the long-term health effects of airport noise and air pollution. Ms. Clark remains chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Sea-Tac Part 150 Study.

Truth in Aviation is published by the Regional Commission on Airport Affairs (RCAA), a coalition of citizens' groups concerned with airport expansion and air transportation issues. Closing date this issue: Feb.22,2000

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Editorial

Farewell to the "Sea-Tac Forum"

For years, the Port of Seattle has published a newsletter, now known as *Forum*, which was widely distributed in the communities closest to Sea-Tac Airport, and to other interested parties. In January, the Port announced that the *Forum* had published its last issue, to be replaced by a website and radio/TV advertising.

While our approach to Sea-Tac issues is very different from that of *Forum*, we must regret its passing. We and many others relied on it to provide current information from the official Port standpoint, and as editors of the news publications of RCAA, we have always read through the latest issues of *Forum* before writing our own newsletters. The community at large now loses a unique source of inside information that a website and occasional spot ads cannot replace. The public will know even less than it now knows about the Port's views of its stewardship of public resources.

RCAA Election

Larry Corvari, of Normandy Park, was elected President of RCAA in recent annual elections, succeeding Al Furney who was elected Vice President. Phil Emerson, of Burien, stays on as Secretary-Treasurer. Other Board members, serving one-year terms, are Dennis Hansen, M.D., Jeanne Moeller, and Len Oebser. Additional at-large directors, serving two-year terms, are Jim Bartlemay and Clark Dodge. Three directors represent member groups: James Alls

Continued from page 1 Wetlands Hearing

impacts is incredibly strong. To my recollection, this was one of the largest crowds ever for a third-runway event. The more that people know about this thing, the more they hate it."

The heart of the Port's plan for dealing with wetlands damage is a scheme to "replace" wetlands west of the present airport by creating new, artificial wetlands in Auburn, in the Green River watershed. In addition, some "mitigation" was proposed in the Miller Creek basin. Commenters at the hearing pointed out serious technical deficiencies in the Auburn plan (which does nothing to protect Des Moines or Miller Creeks). Ordinarily, Ecology and other environmental agencies require that wetlands mitigation take place in the watershed being affected. Heavy criticism was directed at the vague plan for a huge wall to hold back the 19.84 million cubic yards of fill on which the runway would be built. There were no details of construction methods disclosed to the public, and the wall is an obvious threat to Miller Creek.

The wall is planned to be 500 feet long, and 150 feet high, or higher, in some places.

(Seattle), representing Seattle Council on Airport Affairs, Mike Anderson representing Citizens Against Sea-Tac Expansion, and Jane Rees representing the Seattle Community Council Federation.

C.A.S.E. Officers

Mike Anderson of Burien is the newly elected President of Citizens Against Sea-Tac Expansion (CASE). Clark Dodge (Normandy Park) serves as Vice President. The Secretary-Treasurer is Wally Meyers (Burien).

David Cole, of DOWL Engineering, a consultant retained by the Airport Communities Coalition, commented: "A wall of this height and length is a massive undertaking...It likely will be...one of the highest walls of its type constructed in a seismically active area." Cole went on to point out the risk of a collapse of the embankment (including probable complete blockage of Miller Creek) should the wall fail, especially during an earthquake.

Not included in the application or supporting studies is the Port's plan to rebuild and enlarge its industrial wastewater system – which will impact another five acres of wetlands, for which NO mitigation measures were described.

Ecology has six months to act, after which the Engineers can issue their own ruling. Appeals are almost certain, no matter what. Observers wonder why the agencies allowed the application to go to hearing, when the documentation needed to understand the project was obviously far from complete, and there have been calls for a new hearing after the Port finally finishes its work. Also to be factored in to the timetable is the State study of the hydrology of the Highline area.

In addition to the hearing comments, many written comments were mailed in. The main text of RCAA's comment is posted on the RCAA website (www.rcaanews.org/rcaa/action.htm), along with links to the ACC's comments, which include critical reports from technical consultants and wetlands experts. The comments and the numerous supporting papers can also be reviewed at the RCAA office.

Truth in Aviation

Regional Commission on Airport Affairs

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sioners had voted on the it. The District's actions, C.A.S.E. charges, violated the Open Public Meetings Act and are therefore null and void.

The District's actions also violate State law governing the transfer of water-district property, according to the complaint. Water rights are considered to be real property (like land or buildings) and cannot be given away if they are surplus but must be sold on the open market. C.A.S.E. asserts that the Water District ignored all of these procedural safeguards.

Although the District claims to be neutral concerning the Port's controversial third-runway project at Sea-Tac airport, part of the agreement commits the District not to appeal any of several approvals the Port needs for the project. This provision is described by C.A.S.E. president Mike Anderson as "the rottenest plank in the whole deal". He added, "We cannot understand why the District would forfeit its ability to safeguard the water supply of its tens of thousands of customers with all available legal remedies."

Commissioners Dig In

Angry citizens have attended three successive meetings of the Water District's Commissioners, demanding an explanation of the agreement, and calling on the Commissioners to re-

Highline Water District Wants To Reclaim Public Records

Central to the Port's deal with Highline Water District is the claim that the District gave up all its rights to Well #1 many years ago. Documents obtained from the District by RCAA through a request for disclosure of public records last year show that the Port cannot document that claim, despite repeated demands by the District. In mid-February, the District's lawyers claimed that the documents are 'privileged' and that RCAA should return them. RCAA says that the documents 'are in the public domain.' What's the big secret?

consider their action and to comply with the Open Public Meetings Act. A majority of the Commissioners have twice rejected motions for reconsideration, and insisted on going forward. At the District board meeting of January 25th, commissioners Jerry Guite, George Landon, and Randall Taylor each voted to oppose a motion made to rescind the agreement with the Port.

According to Anderson, District records show that the Port can provide no documentation to support its claims to the disputed well and water rights. The District originally refused to give up its rights to appeal permit applications by the Port. Last May, the District's attorney de-

scribed the Port's position as "absurd and without merit". The attorney indicated that the District had "no intention of waiving its rights and responsibilities to protect the integrity of its water system as well as the public health and safety of its customers. To do so would be irresponsible, particularly given the fact that at present, neither the District or the Port are in a position to fairly and fully anticipate the scope of environmental issues and impacts that may arise in future years."

What Happened Behind Closed Doors?

"C.A.S.E. wants to know what happened behind closed doors to persuade the Commissioners to cave in to the Port," said Anderson. "The fact that the District and the Port adopted the agreement in secrecy certainly suggests that they realized the deal could not stand the light of day," he added.

On January 10, 2000, the Burien City Council passed a resolution expressing that city's opposition to the agreement. Des Moines and Normandy Park are studying the possibility of taking over the District.

A ratepayers' committee to monitor the activities of the local water and sewer districts is being formed. Ratepayers interested in serving on the committee can contact Stan Scarvie at 206.824.5235.