



# PORT OF BENTON Press Release

**July 1, 2021**

Project Contact  
Joe Walker, Director of Airports  
joewalker@portofbenton.com, 509-375-3060

## **Statement on the Prosser Airport (George O. Beardsley Field) Campground**

**Richland, Wash.** – The Port of Benton sincerely appreciates all feedback on the Prosser Airport Campground closure. The Port understands the removal of the trees will end the longstanding tradition of camping in and around the area the trees occupied. The Port would like to provide additional background and history to help shed light on inquiries made since our June 28 press release.

The Prosser Airport has never had a designated campground on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approved airport layout plan. This is important because approval of campgrounds is required by the FAA to be depicted on the airport layout plan and must meet several other important regulatory requirements. As for the tree removal, the additional hangar sites that will be created forces the Port to reposition an antenna that requires line of sight communications with the AWOS station. Unfortunately, the trees currently block that line of sight. The trees are also experiencing decay and present a serious safety hazard to anyone camping under them. For instance, branches as large as 8+ inches in diameter have recently fallen that could have caused serious injury to campers and are therefore a safety concern. There have recently been multiple reports from businesses providing flight training at the Prosser Airport that the trees were providing habitat to nesting hawks and creating a hazard to safe flight. The Port has verified that the nests are not currently active, which provides a very timely window for their removal. Additionally, honey bee nests have recently been relocated away from the trees by local honey farmers, all in an effort to minimize any environmental impact.

In the Prosser Airport 2020 Capital Improvement Plan, helipads were identified as a construction project slated to occur in 2025. The site of the helipads and access road are within the vicinity of the trees at issue, which would require removal of the trees under that project as well. The helipad project is in support of the aviation community, in support of cherry drying operations, expansion of air ambulance operations for the Prosser community, and in concurrence with the 2019 master plan. These projects received public input during the 2019 master plan process. We encourage all aviation stakeholders to actively participate in airport planning.

Some comments have claimed that the Port wants to close the Prosser Airport. This is not true. The Port is committed to improving aeronautical facilities for all stakeholders. Acceptance of FAA AIP grant funds requires the Airport to fully operate for the next 20 years. The airport sponsor (the Port of Benton) would be required to repay all AIP grant money received in the last 20 years if the Port proposed any type of closure. Receiving AIP funding is one of the best assurances in aviation for the continued operation of an airport. Acceptance of AIP grant funds helps ensure growth and further investment in the Prosser Airport.

– Continued on Next Page –



## PORT OF BENTON Press Release

As discussed in the master plan, while not a campground, in the coming weeks you will see changes that support the amenities previously provided to visiting pilots. Some of these amenities are picnic tables and small trees that will grow to provide shade for visiting pilots south of the trees to be removed.

The Port of Benton looks forward to providing additional capacity at the Prosser Airport. This will accommodate those individuals seeking hangar space, which continues to see an increase in demand. This project will also begin preparing the area for future helipads in support of agricultural cherry drying operations and lifesaving medical flights serving the Prosser community. The Port is also dedicated to continuing our partnership with the Prosser Balloon Rally organizers to support its continued growth and contributions to the Prosser community. The Port, as always, welcomes all comments, concerns, and questions.

# # #