



Duluth Sky Harbor Airport
Obstruction Removal
Environmental Review Process
PPCC Project Update
May 2014



Park Point Community Club,

Staff from the Duluth Airport Authority and SEH will be attending the June 19, 2014 Park Point Community Club meeting to provide a project update on the Sky Harbor Airport proposed runway relocation project. Prior to that meeting, we will also be providing an update to several other governmental and non-governmental groups within the city, including the Duluth City Council, Duluth Planning Commission, and Duluth Tree Commission. Additionally, the Duluth Airport Authority may take action authorizing distribution of the Draft EA/EAW at their June 17, 2014 Board of Directors meeting at 8:00 a.m. at the Duluth International Airport, 3rd Floor Conference Room. Therefore, we are providing the Park Point Community Club a written project status update prior to your June 2014 meeting.

General Project Background

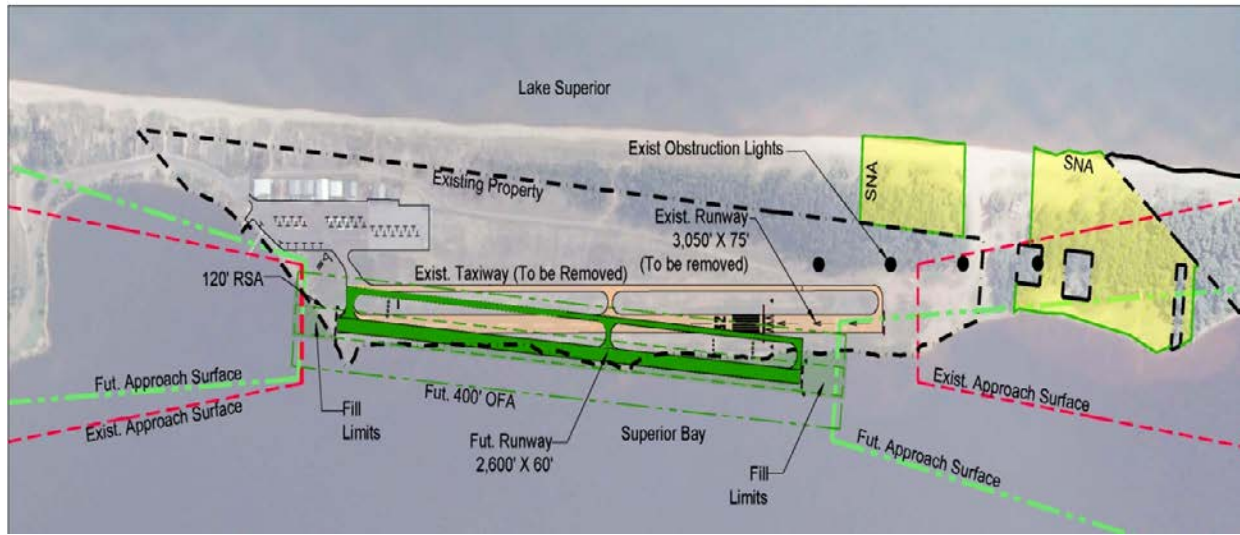
Sky Harbor Airport has been in operation on Minnesota Point since 1939 and consists of a single 3,050-foot-long paved and lighted runway with a parallel taxiway, two sea lanes and a seaplane ramp and dock for seaplane access. The airport is home to two businesses, and the unique presence of both a paved runway and water based landing facilities supports aircraft with wheel-type landing gear, amphibian (land and water) landing gear, floats (water only), and skis (snow and ice). The airport is also an International Port of Entry and air charter businesses use the airport as a base for aircraft ferrying passengers in and out of remote areas of Canada. In 2011, U.S. Customs cleared over 500 passengers at the airport.

Over time, old growth pine trees located off the south end of the runway have grown tall enough to be considered obstructions for aircraft on approach to the airport. In 2006, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Office of Aeronautics directed the airport to clear the trees on the approach to Runway 32 in order to maintain a State of Minnesota airport license. In 2007, an environmental review process was initiated to evaluate alternatives to removing trees in the approach.

A Project Scoping Document that reviewed numerous alternatives was published in 2010. This document identified the Purpose and Need of the project, assessed and narrowed the alternatives under consideration, including airport closure and relocation, and identified critical issues to be considered through the development of a federal Environmental Assessment (EA) and a state Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW). Four alternatives including the Preliminary Preferred Alternative were identified to be carried forward into the EA/EAW for additional review.

The Preliminary Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5a Short) avoids near and long-term impacts to the old growth forest and SNA by rotating the runway into Superior Bay. However, this alternative results in placement of 7.49 acres of fill in Superior Bay.

Alternative 5a Short (Preliminary Preferred Alternative)
2,600 foot long runway with a 5 degree rotation into Superior Bay



Current Project Status

The Duluth Airport Authority, FAA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the intent to preclude the need for routine revisiting of decisions that have already been agreed to earlier in the EA/EAW process, to encourage early substantive participation by the agencies, and to ensure that the information is adequate to address each agency's regulatory requirements.

In addition to the three signatory parties of the MOU, there are several non-signatory participating federal and state agencies. They include the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State of Minnesota (Department of Natural Resources, Department of Transportation, and Pollution Control Agency).

A joint EA/EAW has been prepared to evaluate the proposed action and alternatives. The FAA will use the federal EA as the basis for either its issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or determination that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. In addition, the state EAW is mandatory for this project because some of the alternatives considered could potentially impact the adjacent Minnesota Point Pine Forest Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) and because the preliminary preferred alternative would result in 7.49 acres of fill in Superior Bay.

The Draft EA/EAW is tentatively planned to be published in June 2014, and a public hearing will be held during the public comment period (at least 30 days after publication).

Staff from the Duluth Airport Authority and SEH are planning to attend your June 19 meeting to provide a project update and answer your questions. We are looking forward to walking through the main elements of the document, discussing the project alternatives and environmental consequences included in the document, and providing an overview of the upcoming EA/EAW publication process.

Additionally, the following outreach meetings are scheduled:

- Duluth City Council – Committee of the Whole – June 9 6:30 – 7:00 p.m. Council Chamber, City Hall
- Duluth Planning Commission – June 10, 5:00 p.m. Council Chamber, City Hall
- Duluth Tree Commission – June 17, 7:00 p.m. Conference Room 106A, First Floor, City Hall

It is anticipated that the Duluth Airport Authority Board may discuss the EA/EAW publication at the June 17 board meeting at 8:00 a.m. at the Duluth International Airport, 3rd Floor Conference Room.

A project public hearing will take place at least 30 days after the EA/EAW publication. Currently, a 45-day comment period is planned to allow additional time after the public hearing for agencies and members of the public to submit comments. The public hearing date will be finalized once the exact publication schedule is known.

We look forward to presenting to the Park Point Community Club at your June 19 meeting. If you have any questions before then, please feel free to contact SEH staff members listed below.

Thank you,

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