

Lighting and noxious weed spread addressed at Airport meeting

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

Concerns about airport safety and noxious weeds dominated the conversation during the monthly Airport Advisory Board meeting.

Board and community members met Monday, Feb. 28, in the IV Airport cafeteria to monitor the progress of current projects such as se-

curing fuel for the airport and updating the Airport Layout Plan (ALP). Josephine County Commissioners Sandi Casanelli and Simon Hare both attended the meeting as liaisons.

Airport Manager Alex Grossi of Grants Pass updated the advisory board and said work was being done with the Department of Agriculture to control the spread of invasive Alyssum, which was planted on airport lands in the late 1990s to help extract nickel from soil.

But the Alyssum planting didn't have the success that proponents had hoped for. It's now classified as a noxious weed and has been spotted in areas of O'Brien and Kerby.

"The board needs to address the issue, not the symptom," said Smokejumper Base member Roger Brandt.

Board members expressed concern and frustration that equipment near

known Alyssum areas was not properly cleaned, meaning remnants from the plant could travel outside the area.

Grossi said at the meeting that several professionals touted Alyssum for its merits in the past. But the plant has proven to be extremely invasive, difficult to eradicate, and a threat to native plant life.

Area resident Gordon Lyford said the company hired to manage the plant did not follow the careful management practices needed to contain the Alyssum.

Lyford said U.S. Forest Service member Shawna Bautista of Portland presented a Powerpoint slideshow during a Feb. 3 meeting on Alyssum in Grants Pass.

The presentation showed a brief history of Alyssum in the area, US Forest Service maps of affected areas and treatment procedures used to control the spread.

According to the slideshow, Alyssum fields were treated with Escort and Phase surfactant in 2009. Alyssum appears better controlled, but seeds or root particles could spread to other areas of Oregon and Northern California, board members agreed.

Another primary issue discussed was a 2004 accident where a pilot crashed near Rough and Ready Botanical Wayside, reportedly unable to see the runway well enough to land. Board members seemed to agree that action needed to be taken to prioritize safety issues.

Board members Dave Bassett and others said a Visual Approach Slope Indicator (VASI) light should be considered for the Illinois Valley airport to aid pilots in landing at night.

Grossi said that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) might not allow for the repair of the VASI light

because they were already planning to replace lights in the future. Others said the VASI light at IV Airport had not been repaired in 20 years.

Board members were visibly frustrated with the lack of proper lighting and made a point to discuss the VASI light at future board meetings.

Also during the meeting, Roger Brandt, Grants Pass Airport liaison Dale Matthews and board member Gary Buck updated the group on the upcoming Siskiyou Smokejumper reunion in June.

In earlier meetings, board members expressed hopes to hold an aviation event Sept.

17 at the airport as a valuable tourist attraction, centering on the Apollo 14 moon mission.

The next airport advisory meeting is scheduled for March 28 at the IV

Airport cafeteria. The IV Airport Board works with the Josephine County Commissioners on the direction for the airport. Members have

a wide variety of aviation, construction and management experience.



Commissioner Sandra Casanelli



Commissioner Simon Hare

Residents seek alternatives to Lake Selmac spray

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According to Phillippi, the herbicides would be sprayed on a day with no wind from helicopters with booms on each side. She said when the helicopter flies near the property line, it leaves a 100-foot no-spray buffer without using the outside boom.

But local residents are concerned these chemicals can cause more harm than private companies may realize. Selma residents Mary and Orville Camp took photos of harvested forestlands in the Valley that had been sprayed. They and others believe even with a buffer, the chemicals can runoff from recently cleared land into nearby watersheds.

Selma resident David Bianco gave a presentation about his concerns at a weekly Josephine County commissioners meeting Feb. 23, saying McMullen Creek, part of the area being sprayed, is the main watershed leading into Lake Selmac.

Phillippi said ODF regulations required at least a ten-foot buffer between the spray and sensitive areas such as streams. Perpetua Forests Co., she said, plans to leave the 100-foot buffer where competing grasses will not be sprayed.

According to Phillippi, forest practice calls for private landowners to replant seedlings on areas that have been harvested. These seedlings compete with other plant life for sun and moisture, she said.

"In areas where seedlings are competing [with grasses], if we don't do something about it the seedlings won't make it," Phillippi said.

But in the Feb. 23 meeting, Selma resident Elaine Wood said the health concerns of herbicides and pesticides can affect everyone from private logging companies and local property owners. "This is an issue that goes

beyond Lake Selmac," Wood said in the meeting. "It's not a liberal or conservative issue."

She added that community members should avoid blaming logging companies, since many property owners spray or fertilize their own yards with chemicals.

"I would like it if we didn't make this a timber issue," Wood said. "We're concerned about the toxins."

One of the chemicals considered for the spray, Atrazine, was banned in Europe in 2004 due to reports that it was immunotoxic, meaning it could disrupt immune system function. Other reports suggested Atrazine affected hormone systems and led to birth defects.

Bianco and others at the meeting pointed out what they saw as a lack of public input regarding herbicide sprays. Private forest companies and individuals have to notify the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) of spraying, but if other individuals want information on pesticide sprays they have to pay for subscriptions to ODF notices.

"It's to let people know to be aware," Bianco said. "You're not getting the full story. They've kind of hidden it under the carpet."

ODF private forests coordinator Brad Knotts said members of the public could also request information about herbicide sprays. He said the department was gradually working on putting information online, but that the technology was not yet there.

"The tech [employees] redesigned the notification system last year, we just haven't reached the point where it would be directly available on the Internet," Knotts said.

Phillippi said Perpetua Forests Co. makes efforts to contact those who live near planned spray areas,

either by speaking to them in person or with a note.

"I've lived here my whole life and I know that area," Phillippi said. "I wouldn't want to do anything that would harm anybody. These are products people use in their yard. People can buy them at the Grange Co-op."

ODF representative Brian Sutch said the spraying was likely to happen closer to the end of March and that it was not yet decided which chemicals would be used. He also stood by the safety of the chemicals.

"Herbicides have been used in forestry for probably 20 years," Sutch said. "There haven't been very many documented cases where any ill effects have been shown."

Sutch said Perpetua's herbicides would likely be safer than property owners who spray or fertilize their own crops, because of training in how to apply the chemicals as directed by the EPA.

"I've been doing it myself for ten years," Sutch said. "I'm confident in what I do and confident in the contractors that they're going to do the right thing and apply [the chemicals] correctly."

Residents at the Feb. 23 meeting were unconvinced that these chemicals were safe, despite their approval by the EPA. Many advocated a precautionary principle to restrict harmful chemicals now, before there are many documented health cases.

Others suggested looking into ways the spraying could affect the local economy, saying that the threat of contamination could drive away tourists or businesses that use the lake.

"My task is the responsibility to see that [Lake Selmac] is protected, that something is put in place to prevent [the spraying] happening as planned," Bianco said.



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, Illinois Valley News)

Gordon Lyford speaks to the crowd during the Wednesday Feb. 23 meeting.

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