

IV Airport sees potential gold rush

By
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Similar to the gold rush days, the Illinois Valley is poised for prosperity due to its unique attributes and could become part of a new high tech boom in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) development, according to boosters.

A recent report by the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI) states that global market, currently \$11.3 billion, is projected to total \$140 billion over the next 10 years. Also, economic impact of U.S. airspace integration, necessary to accommodate the new technology, will total over \$13.6 billion in the next three years and will grow sustainably for the foreseeable future, with projections estimated at over \$82 billion between 2015 and 2025.

Oregon is part of the FAA’s Pan-Pacific UAS test range which is comprised of airspace in Hawaii, Alaska and Oregon. Currently, the test range airports in Oregon are Pendleton, Warm Springs and Tillamook.

Supporters say that the Illinois Valley Airport is an ideal site to also become a test range airport. It’s more than 50 miles away from any commercial service airport (Medford) so UAV flights would not interfere with scheduled airlines. There are no major airways (high traffic routes in the sky) near the IV Airport. There is a fiber-optic data “pipeline” running the length of Hwy 199, and I-5 is less than an hour’s drive away. The Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area is immediately to the west, so no other development would infringe on the airport or UAV operations. The IV Airport itself has a 5,000 foot runway in good condition, and plenty of available space within its boundaries for new development.

It is anticipated that with recent developments in technology, UAVs will be used much more often under new regulations being developed by the FAA, members of the user-community and industry.

FedEx and UPS are pursuing UAV / UAS development as solutions to the problem of cost containment; but AUVSI asserts that the delivery business will not be the driver of UAS industry growth. Rather, data-intensive crop management, infrastructure management (dams, bridges and roads, pipelines and power lines), natural resource management (forests, wildlife, oceans and atmosphere), and communication systems will be transformed by

this new technology.

In addition, job creation across many supply chain sectors including electronics, avionics, computing, software and chips, precision machining, composites, battery technology, and education will revolve around these innovations.

Already UAV / UAS research and development is a worldwide phenomenon with countries as diverse as Australia, Canada, Greenland, Israel, and India investing in the technology. The report states that the United States is losing its leadership role in the world and currently lags behind other countries and regions including Central and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa.

Companies like Boeing, Lockheed and Airbus will do the research, design and manufacturing of UAVs, and companies like Amazon.com have famously proposed their future use to deliver goods directly to customers. These UAVs are generally the size of small single-engine aircraft like the Cessnas and

Pipers that are already based at the IV Airport, but overall there’s a wide range of UAV shapes and sizes.

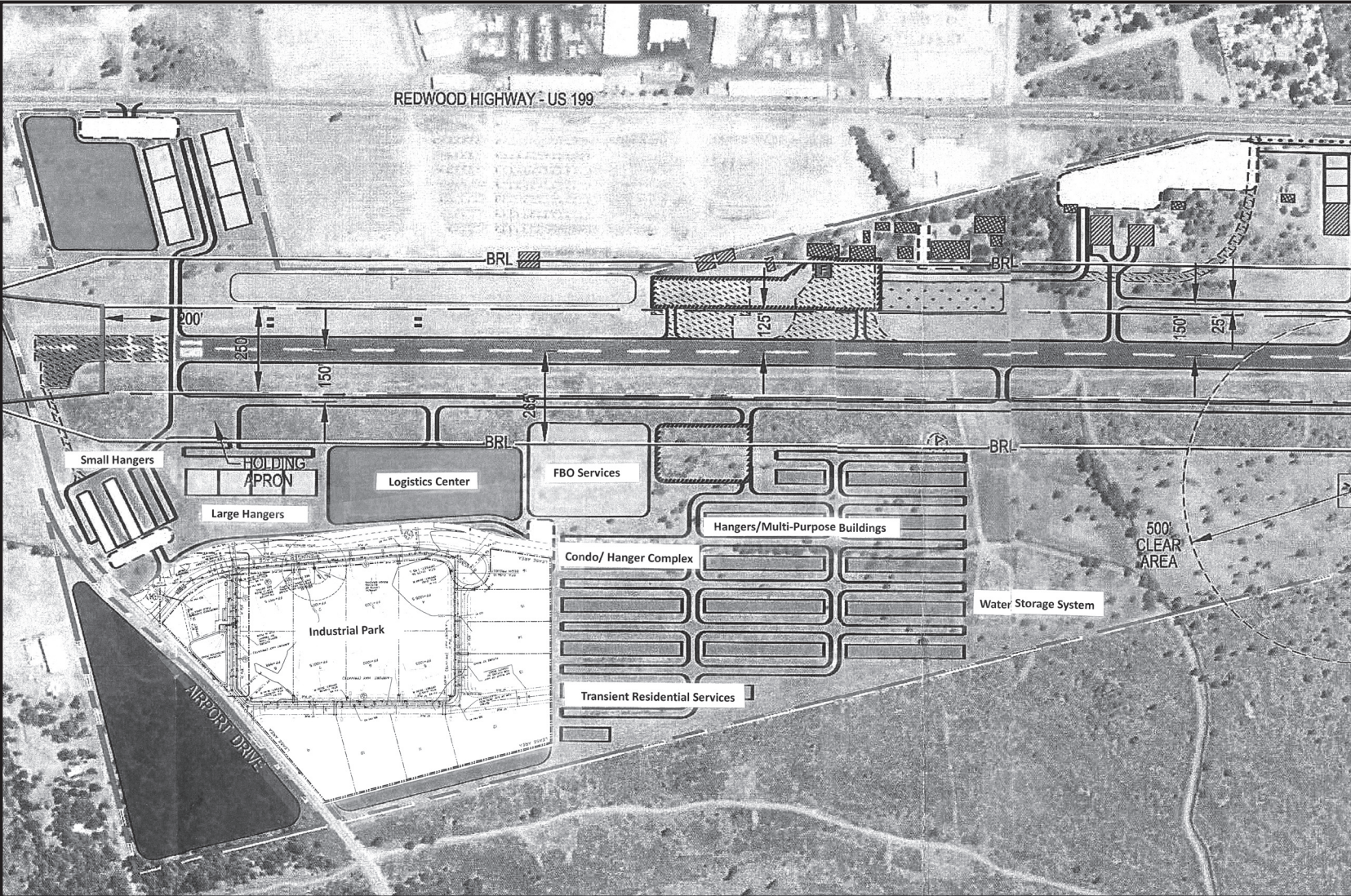
IV Airport has been in operation since the 1940’s and owned and operated by Josephine County since the BLM deeded the land to the County in 1987. The conveyance states that the BLM gave the land to the county for the purpose of operating a public-use airport “for the benefit of the community.”

“In all that time, no one has ever approached the county with an offer to lease any part of that land on the west side of the airport, except for two hangar buildings just off Airport Road,” said Larry Graves, manager of both Josephine County airports. “We’ve received three USDA Community Development Block Grants to design and build an Industrial Park on the airport, which is completely unoccupied. We have a letter from the FAA dated November, 1999, giving Josephine County permission to operate an industrial park inside the airport boundaries. This newly proposed development

would utilize all of that investment and much more.”

“Suddenly, we’re looking at the possibility of a lease for more than 75 acres of land, with a steady income for the 30-year term of the lease.” Graves said. “On top of that, the proposed business activity there would require that many highly qualified individuals be hired or brought into the area, and that means there could be a large uptick in the need for housing, food, medical care, schools and a host of services impacting the local economy in a very positive way. All the money to pay for these economic necessities would presumably come from the private companies operating under sublease at the airport.”

“Contrary to some citizens’ concerns, commercial application of UAV won’t be ‘spying on people,’” Graves concluded. “I feel very, very good about this. The future is going to happen. Josephine County might as well be on board.”



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