



TWO STUDENTS help their pilot put his parachute on before taking off for a jump. Neighboring residents have complained when parachutists miss targets and land on their property.

Fate of Eagle Creek parachuting uncertain

By JOHN DEAN

EAGLE CREEK — The fate of sport parachuting in this area will be decided next week by Clackamas County Hearings Officer Richard Crist.

Crist will announce his decision whether parachuting is allowable on land zoned for exclusive farm use (EFU) Thursday, July 27 at 7 p.m. in the county courthouse in Oregon City.

The area in question is 23 acres on Heiple Road in Eagle Creek owned by Cindy Gay. Oak Grove carpenter Ralph Hatley runs a part-time parachuting school on the property.

Neighboring residents complained to the county planning department about the parachuting operation. The constant aircraft noise, they said, annoyed them and frightened their animals, while parachuters who landed off-target damaged their property or their crops.

The county planning commission ruled that the parachuting violated the exclusive-farm-use ordinance and presented a nuisance to neighbors. Hatley and Ms. Gay appealed the issue to Hearings Officer Crist, who heard three hours of testimony supporting and opposing the parachuting operation last Thursday.

Opponents of the parachuting submitted a petition with 93 signatures, all from the Eagle Creek area. Hatley and his attorney, Roger Wallingford, countered with petitions in

support of the operation carrying more than 1000 signatures. Hatley later claimed at least half of those signatures were from Estacada and Eagle Creek residents.

Hatley and Wallingford also turned in at least 33 letters supporting the operation.

For parachuting to be an allowable use of land zoned EFU Crist said, it must fit either the principal use or permitted non-farm use categories.

Principal uses, he said, are those that relate directly to farming. Allowable non-farm use cited by the ordinance include "private parks," "playgrounds or community centers owned and operated by . . . a non-profit community organization," and "personal use airports."

Paul Burket, state aeronautics administrator, ruled Hatley's operation in violation of ordinances on two counts: 1) the airstrip it uses is not a personal-use

airport, as required by the EFU ordinance, and 2) the airstrip has not been approved by the state aeronautics division.

At the Thursday hearing Wallingford responded that the ordinance "doesn't mention a lot of things that people don't complain about." Facilities such as stables and swimming pools, he felt, aren't included specifically as allowable non-farm uses; why not parachuting?

Wallingford took the position that "casual, recreational parachute jumping does not change the character of the land as agricultural. It is almost solely being used as agricultural."

Hatley estimated that the 23 acres would yield 50 tons of hay this year.

Eagle Creek resident Quentin Cook, who lives northeast of the airstrip, angrily vented his frustration to Crist. "I have had so much pollution from

that mess (airplanes) that I'm sick of it," Cook said. "I cannot enjoy myself on my property when I have that mess flying over me. I'm continually harassed from early morning until late at night. If that isn't pollution, I don't know what is."

Hatley noted later that there are at least 15 airports within a seven-mile radius of Eagle Creek. He said he is being blamed unjustly for most of the airplane noise.

Jack Heiple, whose land lies next to the airstrip, told Crist "I don't want parachute jumpers tramping around" on his property.

Wallingford responded late that two parachuters have fallen on Heiple's property since the parachuting school began in Eagle Creek in February 1977.

Ted Mayfield, operator of the Pacific Parachute Center in Sheridan, voiced the biggest concern the parachuters had. "If we are stopped from jumping on farm land," he asked, "then where do we go?"

A PARACHUTIST nears the ground for a landing after jumping from a plane at about an altitude of 3500 feet above the Eagle Creek site. A dispute over whether the landing site can continue to be used for parachuting will be made by Clackamas County Hearings Officer Richard Crist next week.

Photos by Curt Koop

AFTER LANDING, lines must be straightened. Parachutists must be careful with lines to make repacking of chutes easier and help insure proper opening of the parachute during their next jump.



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