

Gearhart neighbors say biplane too noisy

Biplane activity sparks conversation about FAA rules

By KATHERINE LACAZE
EO Media Group

SEASIDE — Jim Grant's biplane offers residents and visitors alike the chance to survey the surrounding scenic area from a rare, bird's-eye view in an open cockpit.

During the summer, Grant, of Portland, provides custom scenic flights from the publicly owned Seaside Municipal Airport, located on Seaside property surrounded by the city of Gearhart off U.S. Highway 101. Two passengers — he will take anyone ages "4 to 94" — can ride the biplane at one time.

"I've had a lot of people come who like having it here," Grant said. "It's a summertime activity that's been traditional since the 1920s."

But Grant's flyovers are riling local residents who feel the operation is too noisy, interferes with wildlife habitat and creates a safety hazard, especially in light of a 2008 Gearhart crash of a small plane that killed five people.

Mayor Dianne Widdop addressed the topic at a Gearhart City Council meeting earlier this month. Widdop, who sits on Seaside's Airport Committee, said residents whose neighborhoods he flies over are concerned about safety, wildlife intrusion and especially the noise.

"I've heard from people

on my street where he flies over, the estuary front on Little Beach, on Nita and Ocean Avenue," Widdop said. "The complaints have been with the noise, and it's annoying to everyone."

Wildlife, air safety are concerns

Grant's routes vary. The "Seaside Intro" tour covers Seaside, the Cove, the mouth of the Necanicum River, Gearhart and the golf courses. Another, the "Seaside Plus," climbs to a higher altitude for a more panoramic view of the Columbia River, Astoria and more. Other flights, Grant said, go farther up the coast and get cheaper by the minute. They hit landmarks such as Fort Stevens, the south shore of the Columbia River and two lighthouses by Ilwaco, Wash. Some of Grant's routes also fly over the Gearhart Ocean State Park.

The Necanicum Estuary is a wildlife reserve the Audubon Society of Portland has designated an important bird area. It provides habitat for western snowy plovers, bald eagles, Calidris sandpipers, semipalmated plovers, small numbers of whimbrel and occasionally long-billed curlews.

Gearhart resident John Dudley, who lives on Little Beach Drive, said flights over the wildlife reserve are "the major concern." "It is fright-

ening to think of those birds colliding with the plane," he said.

In September 2004, the Federal Aviation Administration issued an advisory that encouraged pilots making flights near noise-sensitive areas to fly at altitudes higher than those permitted by regulation to reduce aircraft noise.

The advisory's definition of "noise-sensitive" areas included parks, recreational areas, wildlife refuges and cultural and historical sites where "a quiet setting is a generally recognized feature or attribute."

The background for the policy is that "excessive aircraft noise can result in annoyance, inconvenience or interference with the uses and enjoyment of property, and can adversely affect wildlife," according to the FAA.

To reduce bird strike risks, the Aeronautical Information Manual states pilots should "avoid overflight of known areas of bird concentration and flying at low altitudes during bird migration. Charted wildlife refuges and other natural areas contain unusually high local concentration of birds which may create a hazard to aircraft."

Neighbors have cited general safety as another concern.

Brian Fennerty, a former U.S. Airways pilot who also lives near Little Beach, said he was most alarmed about safety.

"He's well below what we consider a safe flight path," Fennerty said. "If you talk to

pilots, the higher up you are when something goes wrong, the longer you have to correct it. He has no buffer for an emergency. None. Zero."

Gearhart residents clearly remember the morning of Aug. 4, 2008, when a single-engine plane crashed into a home at 398 N. Marion St., killing the pilot, his passenger and three children in the house. Three other people, including two children, went to a burn center with injuries.

"It still brings back some very raw emotions," Dudley said of the crash.

Widdop agreed. "You can't imagine, unless you were here," she said. "For a long time after, you would just shake if you heard a plane."

Following the rules

Grant said his safety record is clean, and he conducts his flights by the book. He said he travels no more than a 25-mile radius, the legal limit, and has a record of safe flight going back several decades.

According to the FAA, biplanes must adhere to the same general restrictions as other aircraft. Over any congested area of a city, town or settlement or over an open air assembly of persons, an aircraft must maintain an altitude of 1,000 feet above the highest obstacle within a horizontal radius of 2,000 feet.

Over "other congested areas," an aircraft must maintain an altitude of 500 feet above the surface, except over open water or sparsely populated areas. In that case, the aircraft may not be operated closer

than 500 feet to any person, vessel, vehicle or structure.

"That's what I go at," Grant said, adding his flight patterns are "perfectly legal."

FAA regulations do not prescribe minimum altitudes for takeoff and landing. Grant said he descends at a height that allows him to spot elk, pedestrians and other safety hazards on the landing strip. He carries a radio with him, although it's not a requirement, he said.

He said he doesn't believe his flights disturb wildlife.

"It's not a fast airplane," he said. "It's loud, so a bird can hear it coming."

He is only aware of one person who has expressed concern, and he described her as a "NIMBY" — an acronym for "Not In My Back Yard" used to describe someone who opposes an activity only as it personally affects them.

Otherwise, Grant added, he feels the community is supportive, as his local business makes use of the airport.

The Facebook page for Jim's Biplane Rides is filled with enthusiastic remarks from passengers. "This was an experience that I'll never forget," one wrote.

"Great adventure, fantastic pilot and tons of fun," wrote another.

Reaching a compromise

"This is an issue where you realize everybody probably has a perspective that is really different," Fennerty said.

He and Gearhart's Dudley both said they respect Grant has a business and wants it to be profitable.

"I don't think the neighborhood is against someone flying over it," Fennerty said, adding they are aware they live near an airport.

With flights sometimes occurring upward of a dozen times per day, however, they wonder if something could be done to mitigate the noise pollution and safety risk. They suggested solutions like flying at a higher altitude and taking a different flight path.

"I would like to know what latitude there is," Dudley said in regards to Grant making a steeper descent from a higher altitude. "It seems to be doable in terms of other aircraft we've seen approaching the airport and making a steeper incline into the landing path."

He also would prefer if Grant could vary his routes more so the same people and areas wouldn't be continually affected by the noise pollution.

A member of the Seaside Airport Committee, Widdop said she talked to Grant about elevation, frequency and safety. "His attitude was, 'This is the way it is.' I suggested there might be more runs over Seaside and fewer over Gearhart. He wasn't taken with that. And there's nothing we can do. His altitude is legal, his biplane is older and it makes noise, so I guess all we can do is wait until Labor Day."

Widdop said it would be beneficial to have a conversation addressing the question, "What can be done so it's a win-win situation for everyone?"

Buoy 10 hatchery-only

The Daily Astorian

Stick to hatchery salmon, as of today.

To continue the Buoy 10 salmon fishery through Labor Day, state managers limited catches to hatchery adipose fin-clipped salmon.

Recreational fishers are quickly approaching their share of the salmon run, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reported, and the changes should help extend Buoy 10 through Sept. 7 as scheduled.

The state reported 18,600 Chinook kept during 46,600 angler trips through Aug. 20. The limits starting today are as follows:

- Through Sept. 7, only adipose fin-clipped Chinook may be retained.

- The overall daily bag limit is still two adult hatchery salmon or steelhead, in combination. Only one may be a Chinook. All wild steelhead, coho, and Chinook salmon must be released.

- All jack salmon caught between Tongue

Point and Buoy 10 must be released through Sept. 30.

- Anglers may transport unclipped Chinook salmon caught in adjacent fisheries, such as the Pacific Ocean or the Columbia River above Tongue Point, through the Buoy 10 area. But they cannot fish in Buoy 10 with an unclipped salmon on board.

All Chinook salmon retention in the Buoy 10 area is scheduled to close Sept. 8 through Sept. 30. Managers will monitor the fishery, and an earlier closure is possible if effort and harvest rates continue to be high.

State managers are predicting over half a million coho will be returning to the mouth of the Columbia.

From Sept. 8 through Sept. 30, the fishery closes to Chinook salmon, but fishers may keep a daily limit of two hatchery coho salmon. From Oct. 1 to Dec. 31, anglers can catch Chinook and hatchery coho, with a daily limit of two.

Cyclists honored by — and for — veterans

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

When Bryce Nurning started organizing his cross-country bicycling fundraiser nearly two years ago, he said many doubted it would happen. He advertised the ride at the high school, and recruited senior Ryan Tallman and junior Jonathan Williams.

On Saturday, less than a week after finishing their ride from the Peter Iredale shipwreck to the Hudson River in New York City, the three cyclists and Boy Scouts sat in Clatsop Post 12 of the American Legion, receiving several rounds of congratulations from some of the highest echelons of the American Legion, along with parents, friends and local politicians.

Nurning, Tallman, Williams and Don Child, a former Vietnam infantry medic from Hawaii, left the Peter Iredale shipwreck June 15. They rode 3,521 miles through 12 states, dipping their wheels in the Hudson River Aug. 15 after riding into New York City with a police escort. Along the way, they raised about \$20,000 for Operation Comfort Warriors, a veterans support group operated by the legion. The group doubled their fundraising goal and made it across



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian
From left, Bryce Nurning, Jonathan Williams and Ryan Tallman went through several rounds of congratulations and photo shoots Saturday at Clatsop Post 12 of the American Legion.

the U.S. within three days of their original schedule.

"You have put service to others above your own interests," said state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, who spoke Saturday along with Astoria Mayor Arline LaMear and others.

Support from American Legion

Nurning's event would not have been as successful, he said, without the support of the legion, friends and family. The group raised about \$3,000 from local businesses and individuals, and the trip was sponsored by American Legion posts across the coun-

try. It was Nurning, an Eagle Scout, fitness enthusiast and overall high achiever, who originated the idea and assembled the equipment lists, contacts, route maps, lodgings, locales, mileage and more. He was inspired for the ride by the Lucky 13 crew of scouts who cycled from Maryland to Seaside, raising money for a cancer center.

On the trip, the riders split their time camping out, staying in the homes of supporters and sleeping in motels. Scott Lee, Bikes and Beyond owner and Clatsop County commissioner, provided a discount on the group's bikes, which are being shipped back from New York City free of charge by an Afghanistan veteran and bike shop owner there.

"The whole country stepped in along the way," Nurning said. "It was really impressive and inspiring to see how many people helped us."

Hardest day

The hardest day of the ride, Nurning said, was riding 113 miles in 110-degree weather through North Dakota, while the most difficult portion was the shorter but steeper Appalachian Mountains near the end.

By the end, Nurning said, the American Legion arranged for a police escort as he and the other riders traveled down the freeway toward the Hudson. He estimated the ride and fundraiser had been featured on several television stations and about 20 newspapers.

Williams is the only rider coming back to Astoria next school year, as a junior. Nurning said he is going to board at the private St. Michael's University School in Victoria, British Columbia, to help him prepare for college. Tallman's family moved to Hillsboro. Williams said he has thought of organizing a similar adventure fundraiser.

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