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Green Sheet

City of Ann Arbor Environmental News

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FLYGREEN PROGRAM TAKES OFF

Municipal Airport Focuses On The Environment

The Ann Arbor Municipal Airport (ARB) is developing a FlyGREEN program to enhance the principals and practices of environmental stewardship at the airport. This proactive approach will enable the airport to maintain a positive environmental position while meeting the requirements of a very highly regulated industry. The purpose of this program is to understand how airport operations effect the environment and how these impacts can be reduced or eliminated. The airport is committed to protecting our natural resources, improving energy efficiency, and promoting a sustainable community. According to Matt Kulhanek, the Airport

Fleet and Facilities Manager, "The FlyGREEN program is not only consistent with the City of Ann Arbor's environmental policies, it is the right thing for the airport to do as a public steward of the land."



Lighting Changes = Energy Savings

One of the airport's first energy savings plans as part of the FlyGREEN program is switching to energy-efficient lighting. The airport's taxiway, which connects the runway with the hangars, has several hundred elevated light fixtures that illuminate the edges of the taxiway in darkness or reduced visibility. These taxiway lights are on for at least 12 hours a day, seven days a week, which requires a lot of energy.

The airport recently installed 40 new Light Emitting Diode (LED) lights in place of the conventional incandescent bulbs. The LED bulbs will save up to four times the energy of the incandescent bulbs, and they will last up to 10 times longer. The city has also started converting lighting in its 150 hangars from incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescent lighting (CFLs) that are more energy efficient and last longer. These new lighting systems will be evaluated over the winter, and if they perform satisfactorily, the airport will continue with conversion to LEDs and CFLs. Since these new lights need to be replaced much less often than traditional incandescent bulbs, these lighting changes will add up to energy savings and reduced maintenance costs.

Noise Reduction

The FlyGREEN program promotes sustainable communities through initiatives such as the Airport Noise Abatement Procedures. This voluntary program encourages pilots to fly in a manner that reduces noise impact on the ground, which helps the airport be a good neighbor to the residential communities in the area. A recently-developed brochure for pilots includes suggested flight patterns into and out of Ann Arbor that utilize commercial areas and highway corridors to minimize noise in residential areas. The noise abatement procedures recommend that planes stay over Ellsworth Road and follow the US-23 corridor north or south of the city.

A poster is being prepared that details arrival and departure procedures, which will be distributed to flight instructors and displayed in conspicuous locations throughout the airport. A one-page handout will also be developed for residents who may have questions about the airport and the efforts to minimize noise in the area.



A Haven for Nesting Grassland Birds

Grasslands are home to a wide variety of wildlife, including some of our rarest birds. Many of these birds need large patches of grassland habitat to breed successfully. With some minor modifications in management, airports can provide some excellent habitat for these ground-nesting birds. For the last two years, the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport has worked with the City of Ann Arbor's Natural Area Preservation unit and Washtenaw Audubon Society to protect grassland birds by asking the airport staff to delay springtime mowing in non-critical areas on the airport grounds. Most species of grassland birds are in decline across the U.S., but the species of particular concern in our area are

Bobolinks (a male Bobolink is pictured above), Henslow's Sparrows, and Grasshopper Sparrows, all of which have nested at the municipal airport here in Ann Arbor.

Each spring, members of the Natural Area Preservation staff survey the airport grounds to determine where birds are nesting, so that airport staff can delay mowing in those areas as long as safety issues are not compromised. Most species have had the opportunity to nest and raise their young by the second week in July, when the normal mowing schedule is resumed. While the appearance of inconsistent mowing at the airport generates questions for some, most people are pleased to know that the airport is working to provide much-needed nesting habitat for grassland birds. The airport has found a successful balance between environmental stewardship and maintaining airport safety, which is always the number one priority.

Protecting Natural Resources

Protecting water resources is a high priority at the municipal airport, especially since four of the city's drinking water wells are located on the airport's 750-acre property. The airport follows stormwater management practices through the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. Since the majority of the airport property is undeveloped grassland, it provides a large surface area for water infiltration, an important component in stormwater management.

Education is also an important key of environmental stewardship. There are two fixed-base operators at the airport that provide services to the 170 private planes housed there. The airport makes sure that these businesses avoid spills and contamination during fueling and airplane maintenance. The airport works with them, along with airport tenants, on the proper disposal of used motor oil, batteries, and hydraulic fuels, all potential environmental contaminants.

Support for the Local Community

The municipal airport feels that it has an important role as a green space for activities like recreation, gardening, and agriculture. To encourage families to enjoy the airport surroundings and watch aircraft, the airport is developing a family play area. The play area will include pedal-powered aircraft which kids can "pilot" over an airport laid out identical to ARB. The airport is seeking financial and material donations to assist with this privately funded project. Contact airport manager, Matt Kulhanek, at mkulhanek@a2gov.org for more information.

Project Grow, an Ann Arbor non-profit that promotes community through gardening and gardening education, has a community garden with 17 plots at the municipal airport. According to Melissa Kesterson, the Executive Director of Project Grow, "The Airport Community Garden has fantastic soil! We had about 30 gardeners this year, which included primary gardeners, their gardening partners, and children. The number of people who help out at the garden is actually higher because people often bring along other family members, neighbors, and friends with them to garden."

Besides the community gardens, the airport also supports local agriculture by leasing two hundred acres to a local farmer. The farmer has some restrictions on which crops can be grown, since the airport needs to discourage deer. Through all of these activities, the airport shows its support for local families and sustainable community.



A2 Green is an environmental newsletter for Ann Arbor citizens, coordinated by the City Communications Office. Please send your suggestions and article ideas to Nancy Stone, nstone@a2gov.org, 734.994.4176. For more information on the City of Ann Arbor's green initiatives, visit www.a2gov.org/green.

For information on the municipal airport, visit www.a2gov.org and select Airport on the pull-down government menu.