

ATTACHMENT #5

April 14, 2010

Jerry Godkin, Chair
Juneau International Airport Board
Juneau, Alaska

Dear Chairman Godkin and Board members,

As you imagine, I strongly disagree with the airport's decision to seek and implement an emergency permit to remove the nest of the resident bald eagles. These birds -- or other individuals in a pair bond relationship -- have lived in the forest adjacent to the floatpond for more than 20 years. My first recollection of eagles in this area is 1989.

I have documented this eagle family's activities for the past ten years. Some of the salient dates and events are listed below.

I use my observations and common sense to counter the airport's assessment that the nest is (1) a new nest, and (2) a safety emergency.

It is well known that birds nest in spring. There was no need to declare this a safety emergency. This pair, as with most Southeast Alaska bald eagles, normally begins incubation in mid-April. Had the staff adequately monitored the nesting area perhaps the abrupt and traumatic removal on Monday, April 12 of the female eagle -- who was lying belly-down in the incubating posture -- could have been avoided.

Nest removal activities should have been proposed, evaluated and planned well in advance of the nesting period. Clearly that was what the airport board expected with its December, 2009 board vote to apply for the permit but take no action until board approval. Some might wonder if the emergency permit was sought in order to avoid the formal permitting process. The precedent-setting nature of this permit -- the nation's first permit to take an active nest at an airport -- demanded that it be done properly. Instead, it was rushed through in one day.

Had the normal process been followed the airport might have had the opportunity to learn that this is not a new nest. It is one used during the late 1990s and through 2001. The eagles successfully raised one chick in 2001 at that nest. The entire chick-rearing period was observed by hundreds of people who watched from the airport dike trail. SEAWEEK students, families, bird watchers, and hikers observed the eagle family with delight. Many photographs exist of the female eagle and the 2001 eaglet. (A large portion of the nest blew down in a November, 2001 storm.)

Without consulting the airport board as the December, 2009 vote requires, staff has determined that all nesting activity will be discouraged: nest materials will be removed; eagles will be hazed and harassed out of the woodland; trees will be cut if nests cannot be manually pulled out. This plan was explained to permit officials by airport wildlife management staff on Friday, April 9 at the site of the nest. At that time no board members had been informed by the airport of the pending nest removal.

I urge you to set aside the emergency permit and follow the full procedure outlined by the board in December, 2009. I recommend including consultation with the Airport's Wildlife Hazards

Working Group and US Fish and Wildlife Service officials to determine if alternatives can be implemented that would avoid the drastic eradication efforts the airport proposes.

Woodland bald eagles' timeline:

2000: Nesting unsuccessful. Incubation begins April 22 in nest #1. Nest abandoned June 12 after 52 days of incubation. Normal incubation is 38 days.

2001: Successful. One chick fledged and survived. Incubation begins April 14. Eaglet hatches May 22. Juvenile fledges (takes first flight) August 17. Nest blows down November 3.

2002: Unsuccessful. Incubation begins on April 26. Both eagles abandon nest on May 7. New nest constructed June 24.

2003: Successful. Incubation begins April 22 in nest #2. Fledging occurs August 19.

2004: Unsuccessful. Incubation begins April 13 in nest #2. Chick viable on May 23. Falls out of nest and dies. Adults abandon nest May 27. Their flight/rescue attempts for the fallen chick completely flatten all grasses (3 feet tall) in the meadow surrounding the nest.

2005: Unsuccessful. Adults abandon nest #2 on May 24.

2006: Unsuccessful. Incubation begins April 15. Nest construction/rehabilitation continues as late as June 15. Nest #4 construction begins on June 27.

2007: Unsuccessful.

2008: Successful. One eaglet raised in nest #2. Incubation begins April 23. Two small eaglets visible on May 27. Only one survives. Fledges August 27.

2009: Unsuccessful. Incubation begins May 1 in nest #2. Adults abandon nest July 11. Incubation period 70 days. (Double normal period. Indicates great perseverance!)

Respectfully submitted,



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Enclosure: Book by Robert Armstrong, et al; THE MENDENHALL WETLANDS: A GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED IMPORTANT BIRD AREA.



Bald Eagle

In 2008, about 68 Bald Eagle nests were close enough to Mendenhall Wetlands that the resident pairs could forage there; but only about 35 percent of those nests are active in any given year. The Wetlands have probably been essential to the nesting success of these birds.

Bald Eagles can be found on the Wetlands essentially any day of the year, although their spatial distribution differs among seasons. Usually 10 or so eagles can be seen on any given day. Assemblies of 100 or more eagles may gather to feed on Pacific sand lance and capelin – usually during April and May.

Despite the late-summer abundance of salmon on the Wetlands, our eagle counts in August and September have been relatively low. At this time eagles are probably widely dispersed on salmon streams throughout Southeast Alaska, and foraging on higher reaches of streams than the portions we observed in our surveys.

Other raptors

A variety of hawks, falcons and owls are attracted to the Wetlands, where they feed on rodents and other birds. The two species we see most often are Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls.

The most commonly seen falcons are American Kestrel and Merlin, although Gryfalcon and Peregrine Falcon have occurred. The most commonly seen hawks are the Goshawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk, but some Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks have been sighted as well.

The most obvious pair of Bald Eagles are the two that hang out along the Dike Trail. This photograph was taken at one of their nests within the floatplane basin. In this year the eaglet hatched about May 22. The photo was taken on June 14, and the eaglet is in its second coat of down plumage.



Northern Harriers are one of the most common birds of prey seen on the Wetlands during their migration. Here they hunt primarily for voles and smaller birds.