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P R E S S R E L E A S E

Tahoma Audubon Society

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Tahoma Audubon Society supports HB 1791, a revised bill from the House Transportation committee House of Representatives. It updates previous legislation which selected three airport greenfields in Pierce and Thurston Counties.

HB 1791 is sponsored by Jake Fey (R-Tacoma) and was filed on February 6, 2023.

"It is unfortunate that the previous state's Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission did not have better agency support and research. Somehow the commission didn't know about zoning restrictions that protect Joint Base Lewis McChord from encroachment. Just reading available maps in use by state agencies would have shown that the boundaries of the military installation are protected from encroachment," said Eric Siebel.

"In the revised airport legislation, the guidelines for a continued search for an airport greenfield will restrict future selection of an airport greenfield in Thurston and Pierce counties," said Siebel, who is co-chair of Audubon's Conservation Committee in Pierce County.

The new bill also requires that when sites in the state are researched, state and federal laws regarding encroachment on military installations will be considered as well as county zoning laws, county Growth Management Plans and protection of wildlife under the State Environmental Policy Act.

"It is unfortunate that the previous selection process traumatized many of the property owners who live in or near these proposed airport greenfields," said Kirk Kirkland, co-chair of the conservation committee of Tahoma Audubon Society.

"Few people were, understandably, willing to sell their homes. And many faced family hardship if forced to move their families or their farm animals. Ranch land in Pierce County is also a major producer of local food in Pierce County. This was no place to build what would be a city the size of SeaTac to support two proposed runways."

"The legislation sponsored by Jake Fey (D-Tacoma) is a game changer," said Kirkland. "It authorizes an Airport Workgroup to replace the previous Airport Commission (CACC). It also adds voting members to represent state environmental groups and a member of the local community. New guidelines propose a better community engagement effort. In particular, the guidelines also focus on people in the geographical area impacted by expanded aviation activities."

Tahoma Audubon and our partners operate more than 200 acres of wildlife preserve near one of the proposed airport greenfields. The new legislation would protect these areas as well as the streams and wildlife corridors in the watershed of the Nisqually Rivers.

Nisqually Indian Tribal lands will also be protected from encroachment under the new bill. Because of the way the legislation is written, it protects all tribes in the state which include the Muckleshoot Tribe, whose lands sit near Enumclaw, which could be proposed as a greenfield airport in the future.

People living in South Pierce County between Roy and Eatonville contacted Audubon Society and asked for our support to save the birds in the greenfield areas. Many people knew of TAS's earlier success in stopping the Crossbase Highway from being built around an 800-acre wildlife area near Spanaway Marsh and on McChord Air Force Base, Eric Siebel said.

"As a result, I got involved with neighborhood groups in both Pierce and Thurston Counties. By sharing information between these groups, it led to the discovery of how the selection of greenfields could be stopped in our counties," Kirkland said.

"It is amazing how successful groups can be when they work together as partners," Kirkland said.

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About Tahoma Audubon Chapter

Tahoma Audubon Society (TAS) has members throughout Pierce County. The mission is to connect people to nature. We do this through political activism in support of Growth Management and Shoreline Management acts. Our goal is to protect and enhance the natural environment in Pierce County.