

PUBLIC FORUM WILL ADDRESS FLIGHTSEEING VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE MEASURES

Assembly and Advisory Committees Will Listen to Citizen Input

CONTACT: Caryl McConkie, 907.586.0218
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The Planning and Policy Committee (PPC) and the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) will meet with citizens next week to discuss flightseeing voluntary compliance measures for the upcoming tourism season. They will also take input on the Assembly's short- to mid-range actions to address flightseeing noise. The Public Forum will be held on Monday, February 28, at Centennial Hall from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The meeting follows a work session with flightseeing operators earlier in the month in which operators reviewed their voluntary compliance activities in previous years. They also briefed PPC members on their plans to improve voluntary compliance measures in a joint effort to alleviate more of the noise impact next summer.

Amy Windred, ERA Helicopters, said that a key thing to remember is that in addition to the Voluntary Compliance Program, the operators are working with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on voluntary letters of agreement. "We are addressing all routes and areas," she said, "and are identifying those areas where we will have less impact." Typically the letters of agreement with the Flight Standards District Office and the Air Traffic Control Tower focus on improving safety, the FAA's primary concern; but Bob Engelbrecht, Northstar Trekking, says that operators have also introduced the issue of reducing noise impacts with the FAA. "All of the operators sitting here at the table are people who have lived in Juneau a long time and want to be good members of the community," he said.

The operators expect to finalize their agreements with the FAA in the next few weeks; however their proposed additions to current voluntary compliance measures indicate that citizens can expect the following improvements for the 2000 tourism season:

1. Pilots will raise their altitude in the Gastineau Channel (float planes returning from Taku Glacier and helicopters crossing the channel) and fly 500' higher.
2. Operators will increase efforts with route management to minimize impacts by using less disturbing routes whenever possible (weather and operational constraints permitting).
3. The departure from the airport to the west will be routed directly over the beacon to the north of the cut in order to avoid having aircraft drifting too far to the north (unless otherwise directed by the Air Traffic Control Tower).
4. Operators have identified voluntary "low-use zones" and will avoid the following areas in the proximity of the tour routes: Perseverance and Granite Creek Basin area, Peterson Trail and Lake area, John Muir cabin, Eagle River and Eagle Glacier cabin area.
5. Operators will increase emphasis on training pilots to make sure they are using designated routes to minimize impacts.
6. Operators will increase coordination efforts among themselves to encourage adherence to the guidelines and improve the effectiveness of the Voluntary Compliance Program.

City officials also believe that increased coordination among operators could make a difference in flightseeing noise impacts this summer. "All of the operators have been meeting diligently since last fall to work on solutions," said Donna Pierce, Deputy City Manager, "and having them work together as a group is something we just haven't seen in previous years."

Working with flightseeing operators is just one action in a package of options the Planning and Policy is considering. In recent weeks, the PPC has methodically moved through a process of reviewing earlier work on flightseeing noise and researching the viability of numerous citizen recommendations. While Tom Garrett, PPC chairman, admits the process may be tedious and frustrating at times, he says that the review and the research have been necessary. "Now we have something to put before the public," says Garrett, "and it's time to hear from citizens to see if they think we are moving in the right direction."