

VITF

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Comments by Robert L. Eastaugh

My wife and I are full-time Alaska residents. We live in Auke Bay from mid-May to early September each year, a period that roughly coincides with the annual tourist helicopter flightseeing season. My mother was born in Juneau and I was raised here. Our Auke Bay home has been in the family for nearly 100 years. Our deck is about 300 yards from the bed of Auke Nu Creek, and is thus close to some of the most-used glacier flightseeing routes. Until tourist flightseeing became a torrent, Auke Bay, and our home, were oases of quiet. Our deck overlooks Auke Bay and now it offers a peaceful and relaxed place consistent with the area's beauty and soul-nourishing atmosphere only when it is raining and the helicopters aren't flying.

The helicopter noise level, nature, and frequency are unacceptable in a civilized community. That is especially so given Juneau's beauty and its residents' shared interest in a high quality of life essentially unachievable anywhere else. It is impossible to reconcile the noise we experience daily with the sort of quality of life that I enjoyed growing up and that we should all be able to enjoy. This is Alaska. This is Juneau. This shouldn't be like the New York City East River heliport.

Helicopter noise is uniquely disturbing, as some have commented. It isn't merely the high decibel level, but also the raw collaboration of main rotor, tail rotor, and engine and transmission noises. And the frequency and duration are completely different than for any fixed-wing operations. We are exposed to 12 hours of overflights a day, often beginning at 8 am and potentially lasting until 9 pm. Last week, on the sunniest Friday of the year so far, three of my Juneau-Douglas Class of 1961 classmates joined us on our deck at 5 pm. Over the next two hours, there were few times when we couldn't hear any outbound or returning flightseeing helicopters. Sometimes we had to stop talking because we couldn't hear each other above the sound of the overflights.

Our experience is not unique. The only locals not exposed to the noise of the helicopters reside in the city cemetery or St. Theresa's columbarium. From Sunny Point northward, over the Mendenhall flats, Engineer's Cutoff, and Fritz Cove neighborhoods, the noise is often shattering.

There are, of course, times when no helicopters can be heard. The noise is not continuous. But it might as well be, since there is comparative silence for only a brief period before the intrusion begins again. Part of the unpleasantness is the anticipation during the five or ten minutes of quiet while awaiting the next intrusion. The noise

intrudes indoors, even if the windows are closed; it becomes even worse when summer comes, when windows are opened for ventilation.

I am offering these remarks in the hope there is indeed a good faith effort by everyone, including the operators and CBJ assembly members, to address and resolve a serious problem. I don't think anyone can objectively and correctly deny that tourist flightseeing helicopter noise is a serious problem. The only question is what to do about it. So, in that spirit, I suggest adopting these measures to reduce somewhat the noise and impact of the overflights:

1. Increase the minimum altitude from 1500 to 2000 feet.
2. Do not permit weather conditions to allow flight operations below the minimum except for return flights if ceilings have lowered after flights have reached the glacier. I.e., low ceilings must not be justification for initiating airport departures with flight operations below the minimum.
3. Increase the minimum altitudes when departing or reentering airport property to maximize altitude over private property beyond the airport. No long, low departures or approaches.
4. Weekday flights should end by 4:30, so residents returning from errands or employment (presumably Monday-Friday) can enjoy some peace and quiet as the day winds down. There is no reason why peace and quiet should be disturbed for 12 (or 13) hours a day, seven days a week.
5. In Auke Bay, restrict flightseeing to routes over the industrial dock area (from Allen Marine, AMHS, to the fish plant), i.e., west of Stabler Point. (Perhaps there are equivalent, less-intrusive, routes for the other main glacier paths (such as Thunder Mountain).

Some of these suggestions might have some economic impact. But I think increasing the quality of life of thousands of residents outweighs any incremental increased cost of operations, especially because the operators can simply charge more for the excursions. Since tourists effectively generate the noise, they should be paying for the measures to reduce the noise. In any event, I don't see why the quality of life of many must be sacrificed to increase profits of a few somewhat or to provide tourists with cheap flights. And, to the extent finances are relevant, the diminished value of all the real properties impacted by the noise must be taken into account. Remedying the problem will insure that the financial impact of noise is shared by those who cause it.