

## RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM

**Report Title:** GNOSS FIELD: Yeah, But It's Our Airport

**Report Date:** May 20, 2014

**Response by:** Marin County Board of Supervisors

### FINDINGS

- We agree with the findings numbered: **F4, F7, & F11**
- We disagree wholly or *partially* with the findings numbered: **F3, F5, F6, F8, F9 & F10.**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations R6, R10 & R11 have been implemented.
- Recommendations R8, R9, & R14 have not been implemented, but will be implemented.
- Recommendations R3, R5, & R7 require further analysis.
- Recommendations R2, R4, R12 & R13 will not be implemented.

## Marin County Board of Supervisors

Response to Findings and Recommendations from Grand Jury Report  
GNOSS FIELD: Yeah, But It's Our Airport

### **FINDINGS:**

**Statement regarding findings**, the County Board of Supervisors, through the Department of Public Works, Department of Finance, and the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services provides the following information:

#### **F3. The County's accounting for the airport is not easy to access.**

Response: Wholly disagree. Although summarized to the expenditure and revenue levels, the County Administrator's annual proposed budget identifies the Gross Airport Fund budget independently from the other fund and program budgets in the Public Works departmental budget section. In addition, the Department of Finance's annual Final Budget provides revenue and expenditure details and totals within the Enterprise Fund budget section. The annual Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) includes Gross Airport detailed financial information and the Gross Airport Fund details can be found in several sections including the fiscal year ended 6/30/2013 report. Beyond the County budget process, accounting information is provided to the Aviation Commission, and to interested parties and the public, such as the Gross Field Community Association.

#### **F4. The upcoming expiration of the long-term leases will provide an opportunity to renegotiate terms and rates at a more favorable level and to shorten the lease periods.**

Response: Agree.

#### **F5. GROSS FIELD does not have adequate fencing and signage to discourage incursions onto the hanger area or runway/taxiways.**

Response: Partially disagree. The airport is inspected annually by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and has been found by the TSA to meet their standards for the size of this general aviation airport. Fencing is provided where there is potential for public access. There is opportunity though to generally improve security, particularly signage.

- F6. Gness Field safety is not up to best practices. There are inadequate written procedures, lack of safety equipment throughout the facility, and lack of appropriate signage.**

Response: Partially disagree. Safety systems and procedures are in place and function well. During the week of May 25 there were in fact two non-injury aircraft incidents at the airport and there were appropriate and timely responses, including from Novato Fire Protection District. Fire extinguishers, pull stations in the public pilots lounge, and Automatic Electric Defibrillators (AEDs) are available at the airport. Emergency phone numbers are posted, and fueling safety procedures are established. As in many airport facilities and operations of this nature, there is room for improvement.

- F7. Planning documents indicate that the runway is not to be resurfaced until construction of the proposed extension in 2018, potentially allowing current conditions to deteriorate further.**

Response: Agree. However, the County will take needed maintenance action to maintain the runway in a safe condition until a full runway paving project can be completed.

- F8. Gness Field is not integrated into the Marin County Emergency Plan.**

Response: Wholly Disagree. The Marin County Operational Area Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) is intentionally designed as a broad concept of operations plan. The purpose of the plan is to provide a general framework of roles, responsibilities and organizational structures that support disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. One step in developing this concept of operations plan is the completion of a threat assessment. Assessment 12 of the current Marin EOP is "Transportation Accidents". Aircraft crashes are included in this assessment with a description of Gness Field in the "Specific Situation" subsection on page #63.

We note however, that there may be a misunderstanding of the types of emergency plans and level of detail for each. Page 3 of the Marin County Emergency Operations Plan has a figure on the various emergency preparedness, operation and recovery plans.

**F9. Pilots landing at Gness Field occasionally fly over homes and cause noise disturbances. There is no clear remediation available.**

Response: Partially disagree. Although aircraft noise disturbances occasionally occur, the County will continue to look for measures to minimize and reduce airport operation related noise. The Airport Manager has been successful in correlating some of the reported overflights to airport operations and has reminded pilots to follow the airport's noise abatement procedures. Some undetermined number of reported overflights and noise disturbances are unrelated to Gness Field operations.

**F10. Staff of DPW or the Assessor's office has been unable to determine whether lessees are using the hangers for non-aviation related uses or whether all aircraft are being properly assessed for property tax purposes.**

Response: Partially disagree. The tenant Aircraft Storage Permit requires that the principal use of the hanger be for aircraft storage. The Airport staff maintains a database of all hangars and reported aircraft in the hangars. Tenants are required to provide this information as part of their aircraft storage permit. We rely on the hangar owners to notify us of changes. Although there have been occurrences of a hanger not being used to store aircraft, these situations are rare and easily discoverable by airport staff. Airport staff annually, in January, provides the assessor information on the tenants, hangars and type of aircraft stored in those hangars (e.g. model and type). Airport staff believes that all hangers currently are used to store aircraft.

**F11. The Gness Field Master Plan is out of date and incorporates faulty growth projections for general aviation in Marin.**

Response: Agree. The Master Plan is out of date. At the time the Master Plan was prepared the projected growth was an estimate which has not occurred.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2013-2014 Marin County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

- R2. Marin County improve its accounting of its enterprise fund, in order to clearly delineate that Gness Field revenues and expenses are reported within the enterprise fund and not the General Fund. The enterprise fund report be available to the public.**

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. As discussed in the response to Grand Jury finding F3, there are several annual publications that clearly delineate the Gness Airport Fund revenues and expenditures as separate and apart from the County's General Fund.

- R3. DPW staff survey fees at neighboring airports in order to establish comparable rental rates on the hangars and business sites and implement those rates for new leases at Gness Field.**

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. The County intends to develop information on neighboring airport fees, but the methodology needs to be developed, resources assigned to do the work, and the timing established to complete the work. The methodology developed should standardize rates or otherwise provide sufficient information so that the rates can be compared. Hangers rates can vary based on leasing details, utility and services provided, type of hanger and associated exterior space and Fixed Based Operation services provided at the airport.

- R4. Gness Field increase security patrols so that there is at least one staff or security person on the airport site 24 hours per day.**

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Either County airport staff or contracted security patrols are at the airport all but 5 hours a day, including early morning nighttime hours, except on holidays. Signs are posted for an airport 'watch program' with a phone number to call if tenants or other users see suspicious activity. There is usually regular user activity at the airport when airport staff is not present, and users can observe and report suspicious activity.

- R5. The County provide higher fences, locked gates, and improved signage discouraging unauthorized entry onto the taxiways and runway at Gness Field.**

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. There is opportunity to improve security and such measures should be based on the degree of threat reduction and available funding. Noted in the Grand Jury report was that the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) considers major incident threats as relatively low. The airport manager will review opportunities and provide detail recommendations within 6 months to the Aviation Commission.

- R6. The County inspect the Gness Field runway and make needed changes including resurfacing as necessary, even if that work precedes completion of a runway extension.**

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. The State Department of Transportation, Division of Aeronautics, conducted a compliance inspection for the FAA in April of this year and found the airport to be in excellent condition with no permit compliance or safety deficiencies. The runway is inspected daily for any safety defects. The runway was last closed seven years ago to repave a 615 foot portion in the center of the runway. General asphalt condition is assessed periodically and patches or other maintenance measures are taken when needed. Implementation and construction would depend on available funding. County staff from the Roads or Engineering divisions also assists in inspection and corrective actions.

- R7. The County update the video surveillance system at Gness Field by adding cameras to allow viewing of the runway. Additionally, the County adopt a system that will allow off-site visual assessments by the Sheriff's Department and Fire Department.**

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. The County considers this a security system improvement opportunity. However, an assessment of the existing system is needed to determine whether cameras can be added or a new system should be installed. Implementation and construction would depend on available funding. The Sheriff or the Novato Fire Assessment District would need to determine whether they would participate in upgrades.

- R8. County staff prepare an emergency manual and provide it to staff, renters, and others who may need to respond to emergencies on the site.**

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future as staff resources become available. We expect to combine this item with R9 below.

- R9. DPW staff complete an emergency response plan using the template provided by the Department of Homeland Security.**

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future as staff resources become available. We expect to combine this effort with item R8 above.

- R10. The County Department of Emergency Services, in consultation with DPW staff, consider incorporating the airport into disaster planning as appropriate, noting that the airport might not be usable in certain types of disasters such as earthquakes.**

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. The Marin County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services recently participated in drafting a revised "Bay Area Earthquake Plan Transportation and Logistics Strategy" with California Office of Emergency Services and Federal Emergency Management representatives. This recent planning effort included discussions regarding the capabilities of Gness Airfield as both a resource and liability given its location, size, runway length and geologic challenges.

In addition to the "Bay Area Earthquake Plan" the Marin County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services will assess the appropriateness of including any airport emergency manual and/or airport emergency response plan that may be completed in response to R8 and R9, in the Marin County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). The proposed Gness Field emergency response plan may be referenced in the Marin EOP in Part One: General Information, Emergency Operations Plans and Documents as a "Supporting Plan".

- R11. The County communicate on a regular basis with residents of Rush Creek and Bahia neighborhoods to address noise complaints and efforts undertaken by the County to reduce incidents.**

Response: This recommendation has been implemented. A Gness Field Visioning Workshop was held on July 17, 2014 with over 1,500 mailers sent to property owners from Black Point to Partridge Knolls, airport tenants and other interested parties. Plans are in the works to improve the airport web site and provide easier and more detailed reporting of aircraft noise. County staff will continue to diligently follow up on noise complaints with aircraft owners and aviation community groups.

- R12. The County install a call box or direct line to notify first responders in case of emergencies at the airport.**

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable. Most airport users have cell phones and can dial emergency response providers at anytime, anywhere at the airport. There is a phone in the public space at the airport lounge that someone can use to dial 9-1-1. County staff also has MERA radio to access emergency responders directly.

- R13. All new leases require that lessees provide keys or there be other means to allow airport personnel and/or the Assessor to inspect hangars and aircraft housed at Gness Field.**

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable. Current aircraft storage permits allow County staff or the Fire Marshall to enter hangars with reasonable notice to the tenant. Issuing keys to County staff for all aircraft hangers would introduce additional liability to the County.

- R14. The County update the Master Plan to reflect current utilization and needs at Gness Field.**

Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future as staff and other resources become available. County plans are to consider a Master Plan amendment after federal grant funds are secured for the airport runway extension and runway paving projects. A Master Plan update requires a significant effort,



environmental documentation, and funding. As an example, Sonoma County Airport recently completed a Master Plan update that required an EIS/R and took at least four years to complete.