

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Airport Improvements  
Chatham Municipal Airport  
Chatham, Massachusetts**

**Proposed Action**

The “Proposed Action” under consideration is the removal of trees in the airport’s airspace with associated easements, and the construction of hangars. The Proposed Action is described in detail in section 2 of the Environmental Assessment (EA). The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is triggered by a Federal Action. Federal Actions in this case include approval of an updated Airport Layout Plan, and subsequent federal funding for tree clearing and associated easements.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to comply with FAA airport design standards and to provide for the aeronautical needs of the Airport and Airport users. These needs will be met by 1) removing trees and other objects that obstruct the Airport’s protected surfaces as defined in FAA Engineering Brief No. 99, Changes to Tables 3-2 and 3-4 of Advisory Circular 150/5300-13A; and 2) constructing T-hangars (approximately 22 units) and associated infrastructure needed to access the hangars in an effort to meet hangar demands at the Airport. The “Purpose and Need” are described in section 3 of the EA.

**Alternatives Considered**

The EA includes a review of alternatives to the proposed action. These alternatives are found in section 4. There is a detailed discussion of alternatives/assumptions and possible impacts for the tree clearing project in particular. The hangar development (if implemented) will likely be funded privately, as the FAA typically does not fund revenue generating projects such as hangars. These projects were fully described and assessed in the Master Plan, which preceded the EA.

**Public Comment**

The FAA participated in two Airport Commission meetings and discussed the EA process. An initial public comment period was undertaken during the Draft Environmental Assessment, and a large number of comments were received. This was also the case with the recently completed Master Plan. Some commenters appeared confused by the fact that the FAA worked closely with the Airport Commission and the EA consultant to administer NEPA. This is how all airport EAs are done. It is the local airport owner/operator who proposes the improvements. They know the local issues/constraints better than a federal agency. We work with local entities in all EAs and Master Plans, as this is the most responsive and productive way to meet everyone’s needs while implementing the federal requirements.

Due to the number of comments, another comment period was provided for the Final Environmental Assessment. The issues/concerns raised most frequently are discussed below. Twenty-four individuals provided comments on the Final EA. Some comments pertained to the master plan or the governance of the airport, and used the EA process to restate outstanding

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grievances. While the concerns raised may have merit, an EA is not the appropriate venue for some longstanding concerns that may not specifically relate to the projects under consideration in the EA. We understand some may not have achieved their desired outcome in the master plan. But the appropriate process was followed and the master planning decisions will not to be relitigated in the EA.

**Assessment**

Noise was the most frequently raised issue in the comments on the EA. This is the case with most EAs, regardless of the actual subject of the EA. Aircraft produce noise, which is particularly bothersome to people living under flight paths and near runway ends. As airports experience more traffic over time, particularly in periods of economic growth, the noise increases. Due to newer designs, jet engines in particular have become more quiet, and the noise environment around the larger commercial airports has benefited. But these larger issues do not have much relevance to individual residents near smaller airports like Chatham, where people expect a quieter environment. Our experience at many airports nationwide shows that a detailed noise analysis is typically not useful. The numbers and type of aircraft at Chatham are far too small to make such a study worthwhile. Even doubling or tripling the number of flights here would not cause the noise levels to reach the federal threshold of noise that is “incompatible with residential land use”. For this reason, there is no detailed noise analysis in this EA. The projects under consideration should have little impact on the noise environment in Chatham.

Another frequent issue raised in the EA is protection of the water supply. Chatham, and most of Cape Cod, sits on an EPA-designated Sole Source Aquifer. Protection of the water supply is in everyone’s best interest. Consultation was initiated with the EPA, as is the case with all EAs on Cape Cod. Consultation was also initiated with the local water supplier. That consultation will continue. None of the projects under consideration here is a threat to the public water supply. Recently, the presence of PFAS in the groundwater on Cape Cod has been a serious concern for residents. Some PFAS chemicals have been detected in Chatham wells, but it is far lower than the levels found at other locations, near commercial service airports that have used firefighting foam. There is no such history at Chatham, and the levels here are much lower than elsewhere. Chatham, MassDEP, and water suppliers across The Cape will continue to assess and remediate any contamination in the aquifer. The projects under consideration should have no impact on the water supply.

Another issue raised by commenters pertains to the consultant’s role in the development of the EA. All Airport EAs are completed under the supervision of the FAA. Much of the analysis and writing of the document is done by a consultant, selected by the airport owner/operator, following FAA guidance on consultant selection. The process used here is no different than any other EA, and has no effect on the ultimate outcome. The responsible parties are always the local, state and federal agencies who oversee the process.

The final issue that was most frequently raised is protection of wetlands. We agree this is an important issue, which is why we make it a priority in our EAs. The document provides considerable detail on natural resources, rare species and wetlands. The appendix includes even more detail, including a Vegetation Management Plan (VMP). Commenters should feel

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confident that wetland resources will be protected, not only because the parties involved feel that's important, but also because Massachusetts has some of the strongest wetland protection regulations in the nation. The wetland permitting process will follow this EA, and precede implementation of any improvements.

Only two proposals were under consideration in the EA: Removal of trees in the airport's airspace (and associated easements), and construction of hangars. The removal of trees is required NOW. Many comments throughout the process focused on the perceived impacts of a new procedure. Early in the process, some understood the tree clearing was required only for a new/improved approach procedure. This understanding is incorrect. The existing airspace is currently obstructed and must be cleared. The construction of hangars is a modest proposal, and has minimal environmental impact.

The FAA recommends the obstructed airspace be cleared as soon as possible, once all approvals and funding are in place. Care must be taken to address abutters concerns and mitigate potential impact to wetlands and rare species. FAA funding is typically available for such projects. Hangar construction will likely be pursued as need and funding arises. The FAA typically doesn't fund hangars, or other "revenue generating" projects.

**Mitigation Measures**

No significant impacts are anticipated, and there are no federal requirements for project mitigation. Any wetlands or rare species mitigation required during permitting will be implemented. Appropriate construction management practices must be followed to minimize temporary construction related impacts.

The Airport proposes the following mitigation efforts with respect to vegetation obstruction removal:

- Cutting trees/brush to ground level, without stump removal, minimizing ground impacts;
- Tree cutting and removal will be performed in a manner that causes the least amount of environmental disturbance. Considerations will be given to leave downed trees and branches on site, where practical, to minimize disturbance and create wildlife habitat;
- Using equipment that will perform adequately while minimizing soil disturbance and wetland disturbance. Mid-sized equipment such as tracked or four-wheel drive vehicles will be used to move trees to staging areas for processing into smaller material and loading to prevent ground disturbance;
- Within wetlands, the stumps of the trees will be left in place, no soil disturbance, grading or grubbing will take place, and no fill material or temporary mats (or similar measures) will be placed in wetlands;
- All ground disturbing activity will be halted immediately should evidence of archaeological or historical resources be encountered;
- Sediment and erosion control, dust prevention, and hazardous spill prevention and response plans (above and beyond the Airport's SPCCC) will be developed and implemented;

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- On residential properties, stumps will be cut 6” below grade so that replanting ground cover necessary following tree removal can occur. This may include grasses and shrubs that will not intrude into the Airport’s approach surfaces;
- Vegetation removal activities will be performed during frozen ground, or otherwise dry and stable conditions;
- Special care shall be taken that machinery is not being driven, and logs are not being stockpiled/stored, within wetlands;
- Tree cutting near vernal pools shall be performed after amphibians migrate from the pool;
- Tree removal within wetlands shall be done by mechanical means from the uplands or hand felling, and within the vernal pool removal shall be done with hand tools only.

The Proposed Action involves the construction of hangars as the future need may arise, and the removal of vegetative obstructions from 21 properties, Town right-of-way, and Airport property. Additionally, the Proposed Action seeks to acquire avigation easements over 21 properties for the purpose of obstruction removal. Based on the analysis in this Environmental Assessment and extensive experience with similar projects at multiple airports, the environmental impacts resulting from these actions are not anticipated to be significant.

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

I have carefully and thoroughly considered the facts contained in the attached EA. Based on that information, I find the proposed Federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives of Section 101(a) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and other applicable environmental requirements. I also find the proposed Federal action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or include any condition requiring any consultation pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of NEPA. As a result, FAA will not prepare an EIS for this action.

**APPROVED:**



Richard Doucette,  
Environmental Program Manager

September 9, 2021

Date

**DISAPPROVED:**

Richard Doucette,  
Environmental Program Manager

Date