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Airport gets \$200K cleanup

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Billeter Marine of Coos Bay recently finished a \$160,000 contract to remove trees and other vegetation from both ends and both sides of the 60-foot-wide runway at the Bandon State Airport.

The total cost for the job was \$200,000, including engineering, environmental reviews and other preparatory work, said Chris Cummings, a planning manager for the Oregon Department of Aviation.

Some 60 acres were cleared of gorse, brush and trees, including about 50 acres on airport property and 10 to 12 acres within easements on nearby private lands.

"This clearing work around the runway was done to meet Federal Aviation Administration standards and to improve aircraft safety," said Don Hankwitz, an airport operations specialist with the ODA.

Among species that were removed were lodgepole pine, cascara, spruce, Douglas fir, deciduous shrubbery and gorse. Hankwitz noted that there wasn't enough usable timber on the airport acreage to merit trying to salvage it.

Ninety-five percent of the clearing project's funding came from the FAA and 5 percent from ODA aircraft registration fees.

"It was a pretty big job that took about six weeks starting around the end of November," Cummings said. "Billeter Marine and its crew leader, Jesse Pullen, did a great job."

A huge strip of gorse was cleared along the east side of the runway and gorse also was removed from the area around both ends of the landing strip. The area off the south end of the runway was cleared of vegetation for a distance of 300 yards, while a 400-plus-yard strip was cleared off the runway's north end.

Cummings noted that, although tree clearing work will be needed here again sometime in the future, he hopes the gorse cut this year will be kept mowed annually.

Other improvements

Hankwitz and Cummings said the airport's rotating beacon and the tower it's mounted on were replaced last year with better components in a more secure setting. The tower and beacon, which is operable during nighttime hours only, are located along the west side of the runway.

The ODA has other plans for improving safety for pilots using this airport. Hankwitz explained that the landing strip is surrounded by a runway safety area extending 240 feet beyond the ends of the runway and 30 feet beyond its sides.

Airport officials want those adjacent areas to be level with the runway itself in order to smooth the way for any aircraft that may be forced to travel on the ground in those areas.

To that end, the ODA plans to level a few existing low spots along the runway's sides this summer. Plans also call for the construction of 100-foot-by-80-foot blast pads at each end of the runway this year.

Hankwitz explained that the asphalt blast pads will be constructed adjacent to both ends of the runway. They'll extend 100 feet beyond the runway's ends and 10 feet beyond its sides.

"These blast pads will dissipate the prop wash and, hopefully, eliminate the scouring that lowers the ground

level off each end of the runway because of the high winds here," he said.

Beyond the blast pad at each end of the runway, another 140 feet of level ground will be maintained to improve safety for pilots who may under- or overshoot the mark.

Cummings estimated that constructing the blast pads, leveling existing low spots, restriping the runway and making a few other improvements will cost about \$250,000, including engineering and other prep work. The money is to come from the FAA.

Automated weather

ODA officials hope to install an automated weather observation system at the airport, possibly in the next 10 years, depending on other priorities and funding.

An AWOS contains a cluster of instruments that can provide local weather information to pilots, weather forecasters and other interested parties.

"It will improve safety by providing on-site weather information for flight planning purposes and for weather forecasting," Hankwitz explained.

Among the types of information available will be wind direction and velocity, visibility, dew point, sky conditions, altitude above sea level and more.

"This information can help pilots in their flight planning," Hankwitz said. "For example, it can help you decide which runway to use (when there are more than one), whether you have visual or instrument conditions for flying, and so on."

Cummings didn't list a figure for the cost of purchasing and installing an AWOS here, but he said such a facility would probably cost \$5,000-\$10,000 a year to maintain once it's up and running.
