Flight Corridor Safety Program Q&A

Why is the Port of Seattle removing trees around Sea-Tac Airport?

Removal of the trees will ensure Sea-Tac Airport complies with all Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations protecting the takeoff and landing corridors off the airport runways. These trees, which pose a risk to aircraft safety, are either penetrating the airport's airspace or soon will grow tall enough to penetrate the airport's airspace.

What is the plan for property owners who have trees on their property?

The Port will contact each property owner directly to notify them of the tree or trees on their property that need to be removed. Property owners will be offered a number of alternatives.

Where will the trees be replanted?

Every effort will be made to replant trees at the same location or in adjacent properties. Where it isn't feasible to replant in the same area, the Port will work with local jurisdictions to arrive at a opportune location.

When will the trees be removed and replanted?

Trees on property owned by the Port of Seattle and local governments will be removed and replanted in 2017 and 2018. Trees on residential and commercial property will be removed and replanted in 2018 and 2019.

Environmental best management practices are part of the program's overall design. Each area where trees are to be removed will be assessed to ensure that an individualized removal and replanting plan is carefully executed, consistent with the environmental characteristics specific to each location.

How many trees will be replanted?

The Port's implementation plan proposed a minimum of 1 to 1 replacement ratio in non-critical areas and a 2 to 1 tree replacement ratio in critical areas. In addition to the minimum tree replacement requirement, the Port established a site revegetation objective to restore native forest or shrub communities.

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What kind of trees will be replanted?

Native, low-height species will be planted on Port-owned properties such as Shore Pine, Oregon Ash and Red Alder. Local government and residential and commercial property owners will also have the option to select ornamental, non-native trees for replanting.

What other steps will be taken to maintain the ecological and wildlife habitat at the impacted areas?

Key steps for minimizing impact include developing site-specific removal and revegetation plans. Those plans vary, but can include recommended steps such as performing manual tree removal within critical areas, protecting existing native shrubs and groundcovers and leaving stumps and roots in place on steep slopes.

For areas where trees provide visual buffer, what steps will be taken to maintain that barrier?

A buffer will be maintained between any residential properties that border tree-removal areas.

Can you top the trees rather than remove them?

Topping a tree can often end up killing the tree and potentially creating a hazard. The airport's Wildlife Hazard Management Plan prohibits tree topping adjacent to the airport because it provides an ideal roosting and nesting site for large birds. Many bird species pose a serious risk to aircraft safety and so, it's important the airport take every effort to deter birds from making their homes close to the airfield.

Did the program go through an environmental review?

The Port of Seattle, as lead agency, issued a Mitigated Determination of Non-Significance (MDNS) for the initial phase of the project (i.e. trees on Port-owned property) on August 26, 2016. This is allowed under Washington Administrative Code (WAC). The Port of Seattle will conduct environmental review (i.e. SEPA) for the remainder of the program. This includes obstructions on commercial properties, public properties, and private properties located in the cities of SeaTac, Des Moines, and Burien. Once this process begins, it will be known what type of environmental review is conducted, ex. Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) or Determination of Significance (DS) that could trigger a Mitigated Determination of Non-Significance (MDNS) or Environmental Impact Statement.

Can you slow down this work and remove fewer trees each year?

The goal is to return the impacted areas to a natural state as quickly as is possible. If the program was extended and many of the same impacted areas disrupted by heavy equipment year after year, it would take longer for those areas to return to a natural state. So, the sooner the program starts and ends, the sooner the impacted areas can begin reestablishing themselves.

How does the program impact carbon capture in the region?

Through revegetation efforts, the Port expects carbon storage removed will be replaced, and likely exceeded, as replanted trees and vegetation continue to mature.