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### US Federal News

**FAA, NPS Developing Voluntary Agreement at Lake Mead National Recreation Area**

#### *Summary of Facts*

The FAA, in collaboration with the National Park Service (NPS), is developing a voluntary agreement for the Lake Mead National Recreation Area under the **National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000**. Under the act, commercial air tour operators must seek FAA operating authority before conducting tours over an NPS unit.

Additionally, the FAA and the NPS are mandated to create an air tour management plan (ATMP) for each national park unit where commercial air tour applications are submitted, unless exempted.

Alternatively, the law permits the FAA and the NPS to form with commercial air tour operators—including operators with interim operating authority or new entrants—voluntary agreements that regulate commercial air tour activities over national parks by establishing specific conditions. These agreements address management issues to protect park resources and visitor experiences without compromising aviation safety or air traffic control.

Written comments on the proposed voluntary agreement for the Lake Mead National Recreation Area can be submitted [here](#).

### ***VAI Position and Actions***

**VAI supports voluntary agreements for park units because they offer a balanced approach that allows for the continuation of air tour operations while addressing environmental impacts and community compatibility.** By actively participating in the development of these agreements, our industry can contribute to shaping policies that support sustainable air tour operations, benefitting both the vertical aviation industry and the preservation of national park resources.

Furthermore, advocating for voluntary agreements demonstrates our commitment to responsible and cooperative management of the airspace in which our industry operates. This proactive approach can contribute to the long-term success and viability of air tour operations.

## **State and Local News**

### **Hawaii Increases Tour Operator Liability Insurance Requirement**

#### ***Summary of Facts***

**In January, Hawaii State Sen. Chris Lee introduced SB 2747, which would require the state director of transportation to establish regulations mandating that tour aircraft operators maintain aircraft liability insurance coverage of at least \$1 million per person per incident.** After the bill's initial hearing in the Hawaii Senate Committee on Transportation and Culture and the Arts (TCA), the TCA advanced the bill, indicating that the Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection (CPN) would review the language, given CPN members' expertise in handling insurance limits.

As of last week, the CPN amended the insurance coverage requirement to be \$20 million per person per incident and passed the bill with amendments. SB 2747 will now head back to the Senate floor for final approval.

While testimony isn't being accepted at this stage, you can let legislators know what you consider acceptable or unacceptable in terms of the final bill. The final version of the bill must be voted on by both chambers of the state legislature. To voice your opinion about the bill, contact your state representative directly. For further information about the legislation, go to [SB 2747 Measure Status](#).

#### ***VAI Position and Actions***

**VAI has expressed opposition to SB 2747 since its introduction, citing concerns that the mandated insurance, not readily available at a reasonable cost to operators, creates an undue burden on air tour operators without equivalent requirements for other operators.** VAI highlighted that such a disparity could be considered a violation of the grant assurances established with the FAA when accepting federal Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funds. Moreover, the bill appears to encroach on the FAA's exclusive authority to regulate aircraft safety, which, independent of AIP-based assurances, renders the bill federally preempted.

## **Nevada Aviation Association Holds Annual Conference**

### ***Summary of Facts***

**Last week, Katia Veraza, manager of government affairs at VAI,** spoke at the Nevada Aviation Association's annual conference. As a panelist, she **delivered an overview of critical issues affecting the rotorcraft industry in Nevada and nationwide.** Her discussion covered topics including infrastructure and accessibility, advanced air mobility, workforce development, piston-engine aircraft, and VAI's advocacy efforts at the state level.

### ***VAI Position and Actions***

**Our contribution to the dialogue in Nevada aims to foster the sustained growth of the vertical flight industry within the state.** VAI was happy to participate in the Nevada conference, and we look forward to expanding our involvement in the state.

## **New York Appellate Division Says East Hampton Can't Close Airport**

### ***Summary of Facts***

**Last week, a New York State appellate division ruled that the Town of East Hampton is not permitted to close the East Hampton Airport (KJPX) and impose onerous restrictions curtailing its use without first complying with state and federal law.** Specifically, the court rejected the town's attempt to circumvent federal obligations by temporarily closing and reopening KJPX. This decision reinforces the Airport Noise and Capacity Act's (ANCA's) prohibition on access restrictions at publicly owned airports without FAA approval, necessitating a Part 161 study for any limitations on operations at KJPX falling under aircraft noise categories Stages 2 through 3+.

This ruling has significant implications for the ongoing Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement (DGEIS) process, indicating that a Part 161 study alone can't impose restrictions without complying with ANCA. Although East Hampton may pursue alternatives to limit ANCA's applicability, such as targeting piston or Stage 2 helicopters, the current study does not meet ANCA requirements. While the town may respond critically, this ruling could prompt more meaningful discussions, especially under new leadership.

### ***VAI Position and Actions***

**VAI emphasizes the importance of upholding federal obligations such as those outlined in ANCA.** It is important to maintain public access to airports while addressing community concerns in a transparent and collaborative manner. VAI advocates for

solutions that balance the needs of both residents and aviation stakeholders while also ensuring compliance with relevant environmental laws and regulations.

## Farewell to John Shea

It is with mixed emotions that we bid farewell to VAI's senior director of government affairs, John Shea, who has been an integral part of our team for the past five years. John's dedication, expertise, and commitment have significantly contributed to our association's success in advocating for the vertical flight industry. As John embarks on this new chapter in his career, we extend our heartfelt gratitude for his contributions and wish him the very best in all his future endeavors.

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