

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: WINGS OVER HUMBOLDT COUNTY,
CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AVAITION

Report Date: JULY 30, 2025

Response by: HUMBOLDT COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FINDINGS

The county agrees with the findings numbered 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 12.

The county partially agrees with the findings numbered 3, 6 and 8-10.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 3 has been implemented.

Recommendation 2 is in the process of being implemented.

Recommendations numbered 1, 4, 5 and 6 will not be implemented.

Date: Oct. 21, 2025

Signed: _____

Michelle Bushnell, Chair

Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

Number of pages attached: 6



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
FROM: COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO "WINGS OVER HUMBOLDT COUNTY,
CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF AVIATION"
DATE: OCT. 21, 2025

In the Grand Jury Report, "*Wings Over Humboldt County, Charting a New Course for the Department of Aviation*," the Grand Jury has requested that the Board of Supervisors respond to Findings 1 through 12 and Recommendations 1 through 6. The County Administrative Office is proposing the following response as detailed below.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: *Creating a Department of Aviation has improved operations and management, thus providing greater opportunity for growth and revenue.*

Agree.

Finding 2: *Aviation management and staff are well qualified and experienced, ensuring that facilities and operations are maintained for public safety.*

Agree.

Finding 3: *Compliance with Federal Aviation Administration requirements is critical for the Department of Aviation to successfully apply for and receive grant funds to undertake major safety projects at all six airports.*

Partially agree. The County of Humboldt agrees that compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirements are critical for the county to successfully apply for and receive grant funds at most, but not all, of

the county's airports. The Dinsmore and Kneeland airports do not receive FAA funding because they are not included in the FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems, which is a requirement for grant eligibility under its Airport Improvement Program.

Finding 4: *In 2024, the Department of Aviation was awarded Federal Aviation Administration grant funding of just under \$1.9 million. This allowed the Department to make capital improvements at the airports in Rohnerville, Garberville and McKinleyville.*

Agree. The Department of Aviation received the following FAA grants totaling \$1,893,844:

- \$883,043 to reconstruct Taxiway A at the California Redwood Coast-Humboldt County Airport (ACV)
 - \$404,489 to rehabilitate/reconfigure the terminal apron at ACV
 - \$359,275 to rehabilitate runway 11/29 at Rohnerville Airport (FOT)
 - \$247,037 to rehabilitate the runway, taxiway and apron at the Garberville Airport (O16)
-

Finding 5: *Commercial air service is currently available to the east and south. Establishing air service to the north would result in increased revenue because passengers would be less likely to start their journey at another airport.*

Agree.

Finding 6: *The Department of Aviation has been collaborating with Project SOAR (Sourcing Opportunities for Airport Revenues). This promotes economic development at the airports. (R1)*

Partially agree. The Department of Aviation's Project SOAR Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the County Administrative Office's Economic Development Division was not renewed in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 and has not been renewed for FY 2025-26. The Department of Aviation and Economic Development Division are currently collaborating on how to best utilize the Project SOAR partnership for airport and air service recruitment related marketing.

Finding 7: *The focus of the current Aviation Advisory Committee has primarily been on airport operations. The committee could be better utilized by focusing on broader economic development. (R2)*

Agree.

Finding 8: *The Dinsmore landing strip is threatened by river encroachment. This necessitates constructing a dike to protect the runway or repurposing the site solely as a medivac heliport. (R3)*

Partially agree. As noted in Volaire's 2017 study, the Dinsmore Airport has physical challenges that will be exceptionally expensive to fix. The county agrees that the Van Duzen River is eating away at the south side of

the Dinsmore Airport, threatening to take part of the runway with it. However, this area requires more extensive work than just constructing a dike. The area would need to be shored up and the runway would potentially need to be rebuilt over the long-term.

In addition to its challenges with the river, the Dinsmore Airport is surrounded by large trees that continue to grow and block approaches to both ends of its runway. The airport also has significant rising terrain off the approach end of Runway 9, which requires pilots departing in a westerly direction to immediately turn and follow the Van Duzen riverbed to avoid the rising terrain.

The Dinsmore Airport's current primary use is by medivac helicopters, so these challenges are not currently a significant issue, but they are an issue that requires monitoring.

Finding 9: *Landslides have shortened the effective length of the Kneeland landing strip. Restoration will require an environmental impact report and repairs likely costing millions of dollars. (R3)*

Agree. The 2017 Volaire study for Kneeland noted that a long-term fix to the runway deterioration will likely cost several million dollars, and it is unclear if the FAA would be willing to fund the fix. Kneeland's runway is crumbling as a large hill slides. The length of that runway has been reduced. Kneeland's main apron would be large enough, and sufficient, for it to remain open as a helicopter base. The runway does serve as an alternate airport for aircraft when coastal airports are fogged in. However, outside of inclement weather the runway is not needed for the majority of the aviation users.

Finding 10: *Murray Field Airport is below sea level and sinking. In the long term, the airport will need to be either closed or reconstructed; reconstruction would require obtaining a California Coastal Commission permit. (R3)*

Partially agree. The county agrees that Murray Field is built on wetlands, and it is one of the few airports in the United States to sit below sea level. Users of the airport, which is Humboldt County's busiest in terms of takeoffs and landings, report the runway is heaving, sinking and cracking as are the taxiways. In time, the runway will require a complete rebuild for it to remain safe. This information was also noted in the 2017 Volaire study.

Part of the airport lies within the purview of the California Coastal Commission which could make runway reconstruction difficult environmentally. An upcoming Cal Trans study will provide the county with additional information related to sea level rise at Murray Field. Additionally, the Department of Aviation is anticipating approximately \$3.5 million in FAA grant funding for projects at the Murray Field Airport, including repairs, rehabilitation or the installation of a Vertical Guidance System (PAPI-4), improvements to Runway 12/30 and Taxiway A, obstruction removal, hangar repairs, runway lighting system upgrades and perimeter fencing.

Finding 11: *Many of the 2017 Volaire report recommendations have been implemented, but several could still be implemented. Revisiting those recommendations would provide opportunities for expansion, commercial development, increased public safety, and increased revenues. (R4)*

Agree. Since the 2017 Volaire Study, the Department of Aviation has made significant progress on many important initiatives, including creating an Aviation Department, hiring a professional Airport Director,

advancing air service development activities, establishing airport system lease rates, improving passenger vehicle parking at ACV and completing a solar power development project.

Several projects are currently underway including restructuring the Aviation Advisory Committee, developing a standard air service incentive policy, exploring the possibility of opening a terminal restaurant at ACV, land and lease development, and further developing the airport's website.

Some recommendations from the study still remain. These include, but are not limited to, further evaluating staffing levels, scheduling regular airport-tenant forums for general aviation, adopting formal vision, purpose and values statements, clarifying the role of Fly Humboldt (now Fly ACV), air cargo, vetting the hangar waiting list and developing a rental car service facility.

***Finding 12:** Airport hangars and other infrastructure at the smaller airports are in disrepair due to long-term deferred maintenance. Delaying repairs accelerates damage and can significantly increase the final cost of repair, as well as foster dissatisfaction among hangar tenants. (R5, R6)*

Agree.

RECOMMENDATIONS

***Recommendation 1:** The Board of Supervisors direct the Director of the Department of Aviation to continue their collaboration with Project SOAR (Sourcing Opportunities for Airport Revenues) to attract revenue-generating businesses to non-aeronautical land at the airports. (F6)*

This recommendation will not be implemented. As noted in the response to Finding 6, the Department of Aviation's Project SOAR Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the County Administrative Office's Economic Development Division was not renewed in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 and has not been renewed for FY 2025-26. The Department of Aviation and Economic Development Division are currently working together to determine the best way to utilize Project SOAR for airport and air service marketing, as well as to identify and manage the funding sources associated with the project.

***Recommendation 2:** The Board of Supervisors continue to evaluate the composition, role and responsibilities of the Aviation Advisory Committee. (F7)*

This recommendation is in the process of being implemented. The Humboldt County Aviation Advisory Committee is an active, engaged group with a strong passion for the future of aviation in Humboldt County. With broader membership diversity and a clearer focus, the committee would be better positioned to support the Department of Aviation and the Board of Supervisors in advancing the county's aviation goals and strategies. At its Jan. 7, 2025, meeting the Board of Supervisors directed the Clerk of the Board to review the Humboldt County Aviation Advisory Committee and return with recommendations regarding its membership, areas of focus and any other information that would help the Board decide whether the committee should be disbanded or restructured to better meet its needs and expectations. These recommendations were presented at the April 15, 2025, meeting where the Board decided to form an ad hoc group to better define the committee's revised composition, roles and responsibilities.

Recommendation 3: *The Board of Supervisors direct the Director of the Department of Aviation to review the specific 2017 Volaire report recommendations regarding the future of Murray Field, Dinsmore, and Kneeland airports. This direction to Aviation shall be made by no later than December 31, 2025. (F8, F9, F10)*

This recommendation has been implemented. Humboldt County's Interim Director Aviation has reviewed the 2017 Volaire report's recommendations.

Recommendation 4: *The Board of Supervisors direct the Director of the Department of Aviation to review the 2017 Volaire report. The Director will report a plan for possible implementation of Volaire recommendations to the Board of Supervisors by no later than December 31, 2025. (F11)*

This recommendation will not be implemented. The Interim Aviation Director has reviewed the 2017 Volaire Study and determined that the Civil Grand Jury's imposed deadline of Dec. 31, 2025, for reporting an implementation plan is not practical.

A comprehensive planning study is already underway at the Murray Field Airport through a detailed, multi-agency Sea Level Rise Planning and Economic Feasibility Study. It is anticipated this planning study will involve in depth technical assessments, environmental evaluations and the development of long-range adaptation strategies. The scale and complexity of this work make it infeasible to produce feasible recommendations regarding this airport by the Grand Jury's deadline.

Similarly, the long-term viability of Kneeland and Dinsmore airports hinges on nuanced environmental, financial and operational considerations. Kneeland may require significant environmental permitting and capital investment to restore its runway, while Dinsmore faces increasing erosion from river encroachment. Both sites are being evaluated for possible transition to helicopter only operations and or other viable options. These decisions cannot be made without thorough and extensive usage analysis, cost projections and community input. As such, the planning work necessary to inform responsible long-term recommendations for the Kneeland and Dinsmore will extend well beyond December 2025.

Additionally, as noted in the response to Finding 11, since the 2017 Volaire Study, the Department of Aviation has made significant progress on many important initiatives, including creating an Aviation Department, hiring a professional Airports Director, advancing air service development activities, establishing airport system lease rates, improving passenger vehicle parking at ACV and completing solar power development projects.

Several projects are currently underway including restructuring the Aviation Advisory Committee, developing a standard air service incentive policy, exploring the possibility of opening a terminal restaurant at ACV, land and lease development and further developing the airport's website.

The Department of Aviation is aware that recommendations from the study remain. These include further evaluating staffing levels, scheduling regular airport-tenant forums for general aviation, adopting formal vision, purpose and values statements, clarifying the role of Fly Humboldt (now Project SOAR), air cargo, vetting the hangar waiting list and developing a rental car service. Due to the scope and complexity of this work, it is not possible to develop practical implementation plan recommendations for this work by the Grand

Jury's deadline.

Recommendation 5: *The Board of Supervisors direct the Director of the Department of Aviation to develop a hangar repair plan, by December 31, 2025, to bring hangars up to commercial standards. (F12)*

This recommendation will not be implemented. Developing a comprehensive hangar improvement plan is a complex and resource intensive undertaking that will require significant planning, detailed analysis and multi-year coordination. This process involves not only assessing the current conditions and compliance of each hangar, determining the long-term sustainability of the airport, phased improvement strategies, environmental impact analysis and regulatory compliance. The financial analysis must also consider return on investment. Due to the complex nature of the analysis required for a study of this kind, the Civil Grand Jury's imposed deadline of Dec. 31, 2025 for developing a hangar repair plan is not feasible.

Recommendation 6: *The Board of Supervisors allocate all hangar rental revenue, as well as seek other funding sources as needed to implement the hangar repair plan developed by the Department of Aviation. To be done by June 30, 2026. (F12)*

This recommendation will not be implemented. It is important to note that hangar revenue cannot be used exclusively for hangar maintenance and repairs, as it also helps cover the overall operating costs of each airport. However, since the beginning of fiscal year 2025–26, the Department of Aviation is allocating 10% of hangar rental revenue to hangar funds for each respective airport, to support hangar repair and improvements.

As previously noted, developing a comprehensive hangar improvement plan is a complex, resource intensive effort that requires detailed analysis, long-term planning and multi-year coordination. Due to the complex nature of the analysis required for a study of this kind, the Civil Grand Jury's imposed deadline for developing a hangar repair plan is not reasonable.