

October 6, 2014

Adm Paul Zukunft
Commandant (CG-00)
US Coast Guard Headquarters
2100 2nd St. SW STOP 7000
Washington DC 20593-7000

Re: Scheduled Closure of Coast Guard Air Station, Newport Oregon

Dear Admiral Zukunft:

I am writing to urge you to please reconsider the scheduled closure of the Coast Guard air station in Newport, Oregon. I know the decision to close the station was made before you came onboard but I believe the decision was made without a full understanding of local conditions.

Our community has the highest regard for the U.S. Coast Guard. Men and women from the Coast Guard have been active members of our community for years. Some personnel, after serving here, come back and retire here. Newport was one of the first cities in the nation to be designated as a U.S. Coast Guard City.

We are located on the central Oregon coast and our fleet operates in the cold, treacherous waters of the Pacific Northwest. We are a deep water port and the homeport for some 250 commercial fishing vessels, the *new* NOAA Western Pacific Fleet, the OSU Marine Science Center, and thousands of recreational boats from the state and surrounding regions. In addition, the Port of Newport International Terminal has recently undergone an extensive rebuild and development process and cargo shipment operations will soon begin.

Our community worked hard to secure the helicopter station back in 1986 and I can speak firsthand about that effort because I was part of the Newport Fishermen's Wives Assn. which led the effort on behalf of our community. Ultimately, the station was established because of lives lost back then due, in part, to the time it took to get the Coast Guard helicopter on scene.

Back then, the Coast Guard told us that they were getting new, faster helicopters which would put one on scene from North Bend in about 45 minutes. We were told that placing a helicopter station in Newport did not meet the placement standard which was then about 400 miles apart. We were also told that the Coast Guard did not have the funds to build, equip, and man a station in Newport.

We successfully demonstrated that the national standard does not take into account survival rates in the Pacific Northwest's frigid, turbulent waters. Here minutes count. In an hour, you are searching for a body.

Today, the need is even greater. Newport is one of only three deep water ports in Oregon, and is a major hub of sport and commercial fishing and marine research and is active year around. The fleet has

grown to one of the largest, most diverse, and active fleets on the West Coast. NOAA moved its Pacific fleet homeport from Seattle to Newport recently. We are proud to have one of the few real working waterfronts in the nation.

We respectfully ask that you revisit this matter and reverse course. I'd like to address the reasons given us for the closure:

1) *The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014*. Few dollars would be saved by closing the small station. It is already here - built and equipped. The logistics work. The need is so great that I believe the number of available helicopters and personnel will not be reduced, in fact, you may find you need to increase personnel and equipment in No. Bend because of the longer distances to cover.

When the station was first established, the community provided the necessary infrastructure and support for its operation. We even had a local fire truck standby for each takeoff and landing. Believe me, this community will not rest until we have secured an operational air station – either the one we have now or the one that has to be reopened which would end up costing the Coast Guard more money.

2) *Improved communications and detection systems*. As you know, unless a vessel sinks, and the signal beacon (EPIRB) is dispatched into the current, signal beacons will only direct rescuers to the vessel. The priority is saving lives – not property. A person overboard quickly drifts away from the vessel making locating that individual nearly impossible, especially if an hour has passed before a helicopter can get on scene. Also, a beacon floating in the current will not necessarily float with the person in distress. The huge recreational fleet is not required to carry the beacons.

3) *There have been improvements in safety and survival equipment that greatly increase the chance of survival and detection for imperiled mariners*. This is true but a person in the water without a survival suit only has minutes before becoming incapacitated and dying. People fall overboard, boats sink. Equipment and training help enormously but there is no substitute for having the helicopter on scene quickly.

4) *Consolidating air operations in southern Oregon at the air station in North Bend will meet all national SAR response standards*. Those standards might be sufficient for So. California waters or the Gulf of Mexico but they are not applicable to us here in the Pacific Northwest. The current national standard is an unbelievable four hours. Even the average one hour flight time from No Bend means certain death for some of our fishermen and other mariners.

Admiral Paul Zukunft
October 8, 2014
Page Three

As the years go by, times change, personnel retire, and institutional memory is lost. Whoever recommended the closure of our air station is clearly not acquainted with conditions here on the central Oregon coast or the variety of marine activity going on here. One very glaring example is the scheduled closure of the air station on the opening day of our Dungeness crab fishery. It is by far the deadliest fishery on the West Coast as it is conducted when the ocean is at its worst – freezing cold and turbulent. The Coast Guard has put tremendous effort into training, education and inspections to make this winter fishery as safe as it can be. All that is wiped away with the closure of our air station.

We out here work on and near the waters of the treacherous Pacific Northwest. We understand the risks and conditions better than anyone. Survival suits were in common use by commercial fishermen long before they were required. I am proud to share that when I was an OSU Sea Grant Marine Extension Agent, we worked closely with the Coast Guard and the Alaska Marine Safety Education Assn. to create the first *Coast Guard approved* marine safety training program for fishermen *in the nation*, again, before any training was required. Hundreds of fishermen voluntarily signed up for the class and paid a fee. In many cases, entire vessel crews attended the training. Retired Coast Guard Chief Tom McAdams was our lead instructor and the first few years the training lasted FIVE DAYS before reducing it to three days by separating out First Aid/CPR.

We know the risks and have taken many meaningful steps to mitigate those risks. Keeping our little air station open is a crucial part of our overall marine safety strategy. I'd be willing to bet that there is no community outside of Alaska that has more respect and admiration for the Coast Guard or needs a locally based Coast Guard helicopter station more. Closing the station is not cost effective under any rational scenario.

We stand by ready, willing and able to be of assistance and will do anything it takes to help make the reversal of this decision a priority.

Thank you so much.



Ginny Goblirsch
6720 Otter Crest Loop
Otter Rock, OR 97369

Ph: 541-765-2193; Cell: 541-272-1385; Fax: 541-765-3225