



CYPRESS ISLAND AIRFIELD PROPOSAL

2023

- THIS IS A “NO COST” PROPOSAL FOR REOPENING, REHABILITATING AND CONTINUING MAINTANIANCE OF THE CYPRESS AIRFIELD.
- THIS AIRFIELD IS BASICALLY IN GOOD CONDITION AND WOULD BE AN EXCELLENT LOCATION FOR FLY-IN CAMPING AND HIKING.
- THIS AIRFIELD IS A STATE ASSET AND COULD SERVE NUMEROUS VALUABLE PURPOSES.
- THE FIRST STEP IS REVISION OF WASHINGTON DNR “CYPRESS ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN” TO ALLOW USE OF CYPRESS AIRFIELD.

Proposal to reopen an airfield in the San Juan Archipelago for fly-in camping and hiking on Cypress Island, Skagit County, WA

The Cypress Island airfield was created in the early 1980's on the east side of Cypress Island, carved out of the mountain at 920 feet elevation. A 3150-acre parcel of land planned for a resort/golf course and airfield was sold to the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 1989. This already established gravel airfield would make an excellent backcountry airstrip as it is unimproved and away from civilization. The airfield has a north-south runway with safe approaches to both ends and is 2,550 feet long. 5,101-acres of the 5,581-acre island including the airfield is controlled by the DNR. Currently, the island's only option for public access is by boat.

Fly-in camping is very popular nationwide and in the San Juan Islands. This airfield is surrounded by woods and would be excellent for camping and hiking. The island has over 20 miles of trails to cliff tops, small quiet lakes, remote beaches and pockets of ancient forests. Reopening this airfield in the San Juan archipelago would be a great service to the public who desire to fly-in and explore nature.



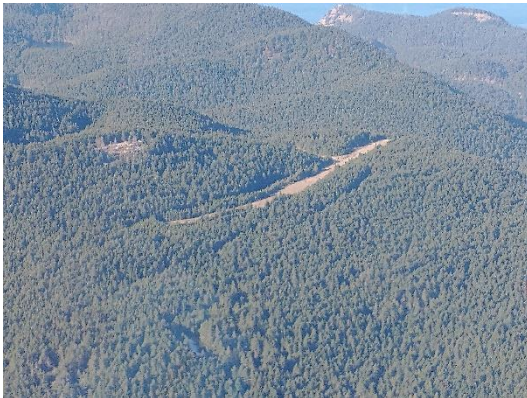
Picture of the Cypress Airfield from 2020.

This airfield could be rehabilitated with volunteer's by cleaning up the runway and adding primitive camping facilities, making this a safe backcountry airfield. The Recreation Aviation Foundation (RAF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving backcountry airfields and has partnered for over 20 years with USFS, BLM, National Park Service and the Nature Conservancy, along with state resource organizations all across the country. They have a solid reputation of stewardship and collaboration with public agencies and are willing to serve as a responsible partner in this project. Washington Pilots Association (WPA) is also willing to

support the redevelopment and ongoing operation of this airfield. Like many backcountry airstrips, some in highly sensitive areas nationwide this airfield could be continually maintained and funded by volunteers at NO COST to taxpayers.

Backcountry airstrips have minimal impact on land, especially compared to motor vehicle roads or boats mooring in sensitive shoreline areas. Small aircraft have a light footprint and a short and minimal noise signature. This airfield is located in a DNR designated “Minimally Sensitive, Disturbed” area, not near residents or shorelines and could comfortably support several campsites without further clearing. Cypress Island currently serves boaters with (25) mooring buoys and (16) campsites with toilets, the aviation community also desires consideration. This airfield is 4.8 miles NW of Anacortes Regional Airport and in the flight path for regular air traffic to the San Juan Islands and only 14.8 miles north of Whidbey Naval Air station. Overflying aircraft including jets are very common. The current DNR efforts to restore this area to its natural condition is problematic as the airfield has been stripped to mineral soil and excavation is permanent. Reopening the airfield would have minimal additional impact to the island.

Aerial views of Cypress Airfield, 2022.



Cypress Airfield showing clear approaches.



Looking down on Cypress Airfield.

An airfield on Cypress could also serve:

- youth groups for conservation activities.
- as a perfect location for “Night Sky” astronomy programs
- as an excellent location for staging quick emergency wildland firefighting teams.
- as a safe location for staging emergency air medical evacuation for people in need.
- as a quick and easy access for state naturalists, rangers or university students to study, serve and monitor the island.
- importantly, as a safe option for aircraft overflying water to make emergency landings.

The Cypress airfield is marked mid-island.



Opening Cypress Island Airfield would create a new second option for the public to explore this island with minimal additional impact to this preserve. Air traffic could be managed by requiring prior permission by the RAF or WPA similar to the Stuart Island airstrip. Cypress airfield could be leased to an endorsing organization to relieve the DNR from maintenance and liability, similar to other backcountry airstrips on federal and state lands. On 1/24/23, seven key people from the endorsing organizations met with the NW Region DNR managers. The DNR was clear that they follow the Washington State DNR 2007 “Cypress Island Comprehensive Management Plan”. The decision to close this airfield in 2007, likely received little or no input from the aviation community. The first step in reopening this airfield will require modification of the Cypress Management Plan by changing or removing the line, “*Permanently prohibit use of the airstrip (except for emergency helicopter use...)*” on page 38. The decision to prioritize opening the management plan would be made at the state level. We believe that this airfield can be a valuable state resource, available at no taxpayer cost and **should not be lost**.

Endorsed by: Recreation Aviation Foundation, Washington Pilots Association, Port of Lopez, WA Air Search & Rescue.