

December 8, 2021

**To: John Eastman, chairman, Jackson Hole Airport Board
Bob McLaurin, vice president, Jackson Hole Airport Board
Ed Liebrecht, treasurer, Jackson Hole Airport Board
Valerie Brown, secretary, Jackson Hole Airport Board
Jerry Blann, member, Jackson Hole Airport Board
Jim Elwood, Director, Jackson Hole Airport**

**Copy to: Palmer "Chip" Jenkins, superintendent, Grand Teton National Park
Board of County Commissioners of Teton County
Tony Chambers, owner and pilot, Wind River Air
Dr. Ronny Schroeder, Emory-Riddle Aeronautical University**

Dear neighbors,

I am writing to provide proof that a helicopter scenic tour operator, Wind River Air (WRA), has been routinely flying at unacceptably low altitudes over Grand Teton National Park.

Please inform the FAA's Denver Flight Safety Office of this clear pattern of National Park low-level overflights, as the Airport Board is required to do in section 4 (e) of the 1983 Use Agreement between Jackson Hole Airport and Grand Teton National Park. I am making this request as co-owner of Flat Creek Ranch, which has an interest in quiet skies around our valley.

I am not talking about flight segments during takeoff and landings, which necessarily cross a portion of the Park. Rather, I am talking about flight segments that were measured as having taken place at least three miles away from the Jackson Hole Airport at altitudes much lower than 2000 feet above ground level.

This letter focuses on a series of recent flights by WRA's Robinson R44 helicopter (tail number N307WR). They began near the end of the 2021 summer tourist season and continued through early October 2021. By my calculations, the WRA helicopter flew 31 miles over Grand Teton National Park during low-level flights in September and October.¹ That isn't counting its additional mileage over the Park during takeoffs and landings. The flights I have highlighted here are just the "tip of the iceberg" of the persistent problem of WRA's low-altitude flights over noise-sensitive public lands inside and just outside the Park. These public lands are prime habitat for bears, elk, deer, moose, eagles, pronghorn antelope, hawks and

¹ My consultant, Dr. Ronny Schroeder, determined that the WRA helicopter flew 506 flight segments over Grand Teton National Park in September and October 2021. Each of the flight segments is 100 meters long. A simple multiplication shows that the WRA helicopter flew 50,600 meters over the Park. This converts to 31 miles.

sage grouse. They are also some of most beautiful places in the world where humans should be able to find solitude.

These findings are not rooted in rumor. They are based on flight track data transmitted to the Jackson Hole Airport from inside the cockpit of the WRA helicopter. Thanks to the Airport management's efforts to be transparent, the flight track data was shared with me at my request.

Here's what an analysis of the flight tracks proves:

>> At 2:52 PM on September 3, the WRA helicopter flew above Grand Teton National Park at an altitude above ground of 800.4 feet at a distance of 7.3 miles from the Jackson Hole Airport. The location was 0.6 miles northeast of the town of Kelly WY.

>> At 2:16 PM on September 7, the WRA helicopter skimmed 0.15 miles northeast of the intersection of Mormon Row Road and Lower Gros Ventre Road at an altitude of 616.5 feet above ground. This was 3.9 miles east-north-east of the Jackson Hole Airport.

>> At 4:36 PM on September 9, the WRA helicopter overflow an eastern portion of the Park at an altitude of 776.6 feet above ground. This was 7.3 miles from the Jackson Hole Airport and 0.5 miles northeast of Kelly WY.

>> At 1:47 PM on September 13, the WRA helicopter flew over an eastern portion of the Park near the Gros Ventre River at an altitude of 634.6 feet above the ground. This was 7.3 miles from the Jackson Hole Airport and 0.7 miles northeast of Kelly WY.

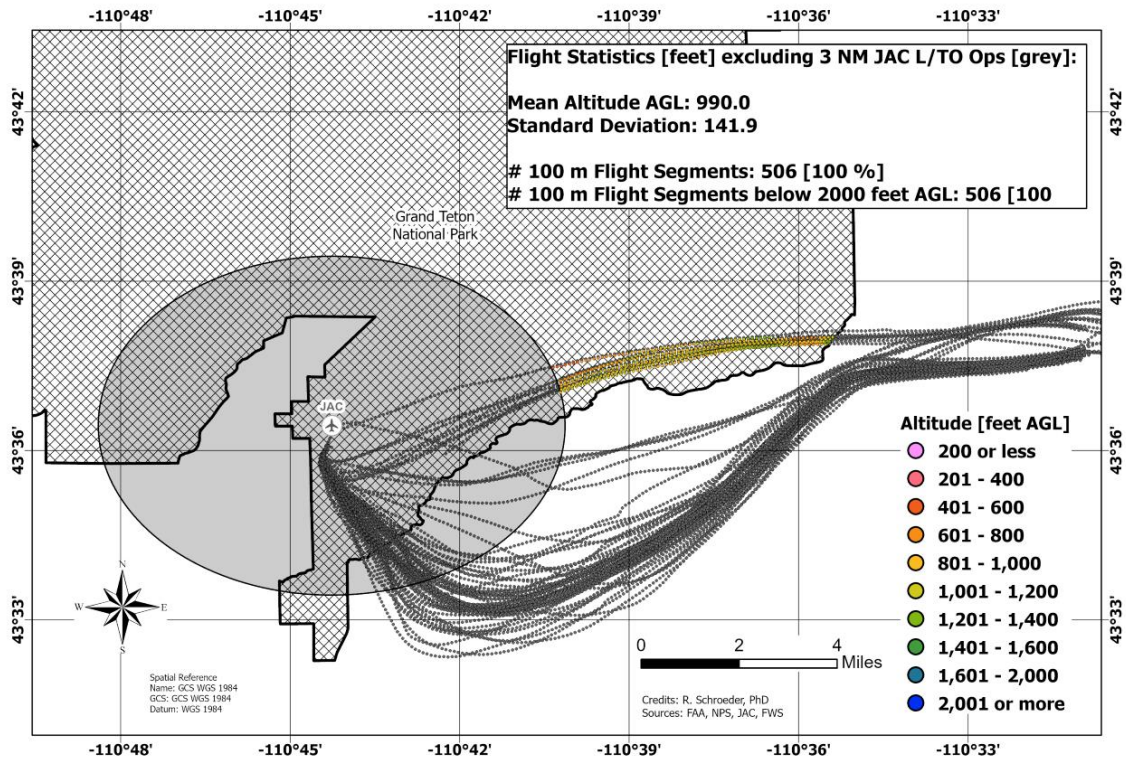
>> At 1:15 PM on September 15, the WRA helicopter flew at an altitude of 852.1 feet above the ground over an eastern portion of the Park that was 7.3 miles east-north-east of the Jackson Hole Airport. It flew 0.5 miles northeast of Kelly WY.

>> At 2:36 PM on September 22, the WRA helicopter flew at an altitude of 939.6 feet above the ground 0.15 miles southeast of the intersection of Mormon Row Road and Lower Gros Ventre Road. The helicopter was 4.0 miles from the Jackson Hole Airport.

>> At 2:36 PM on September 23, the WRA helicopter flew at an altitude of 860.9 feet above the ground 0.6 miles northeast of Kelly WY. At that moment the Jackson Hole Airport was 7.2 miles away.

>> At 2:54 PM on October 1, the WRA helicopter flew at an altitude of 764.5 feet above ground 0.15 miles south of the intersection of Mormon Row Road and Lower Gros Ventre Road. At that point the Jackson Hole Airport was 4.0 miles away.

Flight Above Ground Level (AGL) over National Park Land



I cannot tell from the flight tracks whether the WRA helicopter was carrying tourists on these flights from the Jackson Hole Airport – or whether these were “repositioning flights” back and forth to Pinedale where the WRA helicopter is based. Airport Director Jim Elwood told me yesterday that these were in fact “repositioning flights.” However, it is clear that these low-altitude flights were an integral part of WRA’s scenic tourist business, whether or not tourists were aboard. A low-flying helicopter has the same noise impact on humans and wildlife no matter who is aboard.

These data are generated by the WRA helicopter’s onboard automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast system (ASD-B). Two years ago, the Jackson Hole Airport Board had the foresight to require WRA’s helicopter to have the ASD-B system activated whenever operating to and/or from the Jackson Hole Airport. The Airport Board and Grand Teton National Park had tried to keep scenic helicopter tours from operating here, but these efforts were rebuffed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

A 9,000-line computer file containing records of the WRA helicopter’s flight tracks from May through October 2021 was released to me several months ago by the Jackson Hole Airport. To obtain an accurate analysis of this flight track information, I contracted with an expert

consultant and pilot, Dr. Ronny Schroeder, who is assistant professor of GIS and Remote Sensing of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, AZ. Dr. Schroeder converted the raw data in the computer file into a map showing the flight tracks of the WRA helicopter across the Park (see map above, flight tracks over the Park in yellow). I then added to Dr. Schroeder's work by measuring the distance from the Jackson Hole Airport of the selected flight segments by using the online Teton County Geographic Information System. An Excel spreadsheet (attached) shows the combination of Dr. Schroeder's work and my addition to it.

As we all know, the Jackson Hole Airport is wholly within Grand Teton National Park and operates under a Use Agreement with the United State Department of Interior. But the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) jealously guards its power to control whether and at what altitudes aircraft are allowed to fly over National Park land.

The FAQs on the Airport's website provide good background on the Airport's duties concerning noise limitations:

"In November of 1982, the Airport Board negotiated and proposed replacement of the Use Agreement with the Park. The new agreement was signed in 1983 and would have expired in 2033. In 2013 the Board and the Park extended the Use Agreement to 2053. Through the 1983 Agreement, the Airport was assured a long-term existence in the Park. In exchange, noise limitations were imposed for the first time. In recognition of the Airport's unique location within Grand Teton National Park, these noise limitations are more stringent than those required at any other commercial airport in the United States."

I have reviewed the 1983 Use Agreement (as amended). It contains this key clear requirement in section 4 (e): **"The Board will maintain records of complaints of aircraft violating the FAA airspace advisory of 2,000 feet above ground level over Grand Teton National Park and notify the appropriate FAA Flight Standards Office of all such complaints."**

Please consider this letter a formal complaint documenting WRA's eight recent flights over Grand Teton National Park at altitudes well below 2,000 feet above ground level. According to the airport's Use Agreement, the Board must maintain a record of this complaint and notify the FAA's Denver Flight Standards Office.

I would appreciate the Board's full support in this effort to make the FAA aware of these violations of the FAA's airspace advisory. I would welcome your GIS consulting firm reviewing these findings and informing the FAA and me if it finds any inaccuracies in what I have reported here.

What else am I asking?

For as long as any scenic tour operator including WRA continues to operate at Jackson Hole Airport, I believe the Board should provide more transparency to the general public regarding helicopter scenic tour operations.

I began preparing this flight track analysis by asking the Airport for a file of raw data about the WRA flights. The Airport promptly complied. Fortunately, I was able to find and make a consulting agreement with Dr. Ronny Schroeder, who is a widely respected expert in three-dimensional mapping technology.

At my expense, I got Dr. Schroeder to translate this raw data into usable form as a Google Earth map and several large Excel spreadsheets. I then spent considerable time of my own measuring the distances from the airport of specific flight tracks, using Google Earth and the online Teton County Geographic Information System.

The public and the press should not have to jump through expensive and time-consuming hoops to learn the truth about helicopter scenic tours.

In the interest of public transparency and accountability going forward, I am asking the Board to direct its staff and consultants to: (1) make WRA's flight track data, including altitude above ground, easily searchable and available in real time on the Airport website; (2) assure that boundaries of all public lands covered by the FAA's altitude advisory of 2,000 feet above ground level are shown in WRA's flight track maps available on the Airport website, and (3) provide regular (e.g., quarterly) reports to the Board regarding WRA's compliance or non-compliance with FAA's airspace advisory over Grand Teton National Park.

Jim Elwood, the Airport Director, replied to a draft of this letter yesterday by assuring me that the Airport would explore ways to make it easier for the public to monitor flight tracks, including flights of WRA's helicopter over Grand Teton National Park.

Any additional expenses associated with this effort could very likely be covered through the fees the Airport collects from WRA under its license agreement with the Airport.

Please place this item on the agenda for discussion at the Board's December 17, 2021 special meeting or as soon thereafter as possible. I thank you for your consideration and for your service to our community.

All best,

**Joe Albright
Co-owner, Flat Creek Ranch**