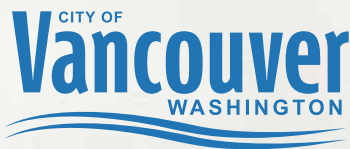
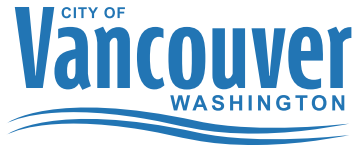


VANCOUVER NATIONAL HISTORIC RESERVE

PEARSON FIELD TRANSITION REPORT

2020





Dear Director Vela,

By our signatures below, the National Park Service and the City of Vancouver, Washington, share with you for your information the enclosed report that speaks to the collaborative work and commitment of both our agencies in supporting the continued operation of Pearson Field as a general aviation airfield while enhancing its historic value to the community and the region.

This report was required in the 1994 agreement between the City and the National Park Service that allowed for the continued operation of Pearson Field and the repurposing of Park Service owned buildings at the Field into Pearson Air Museum.

Pearson Field is a municipal airport, located in both an urban national park and a federally designated historic reserve, in the Vancouver/Portland metropolitan area. The airport is located within the Vancouver National Historic Reserve and approximately 50% of the runway lies within the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. This location is the basis for a unique partnership between the City and the Park Service.

Many of the accomplishments that this partnership has achieved are detailed in the enclosed report. The accomplishments are consistent with the mission of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site and the Vancouver National Historic Reserve. They are also consistent with the long-term lease between the National Park Service and the City of Vancouver to ensure continuing historic airfield operations for many years to come. In addition, this report is supported by the following public planning documents: Vancouver National Historic Reserve Cooperative Management Plan (2000) and the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (2003).

In the development of the historic site, we recognized that, consistent with the overarching goals of preservation, education, and public use, we could put in place a thoughtful plan where the municipal airport operation respects the historic landscape of the national park site and the historic reserve, which includes the historic fur trade fort, U.S. Army fort, and historic runway and airfield. The Park Service is the lead on compliance, consulting with the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, tribes and Native Hawaiian groups, to ensure cultural resource protection and preservation of the Historic Reserve. Pearson Field and the Air Museum promotes the regional and nationally significant aviation history that took place through time here and promotes education in a myriad of ways, including historic fly ins, waysides, exhibits, and ranger-led tours.

It is important to note that this plan is not an end to our continued collaboration, but will serve as a foundation for our future goals. We believe you will agree that we have achieved much and have transitioned to a highly successful municipal airport operation that exists effectively and successfully within an urban national park site, historic reserve, and the historic central business district of Vancouver, Washington. We respectfully submit our report, which details the transition efforts that have been achieved for your information.

Sincerely,

Tracy A. Fortmann
Superintendent
Fort Vancouver National Historic Site

Anne McEnery-Ogle
Mayor
City of Vancouver

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Appendices (*linked below*)

[Appendix A: Public Law No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321-210, Section 3334 \(April 26, 1999\)](#)

[Appendix B: Memorandum of Agreement between the National Park Service and City of Vancouver regarding the operation of Pearson Field and the development of Pearson Air Museum \(Nov. 4, 1994\)](#)

[Appendix C: Washington State Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Historic Register Report for Pearson Field \(Nov. 11, 1990\)](#)

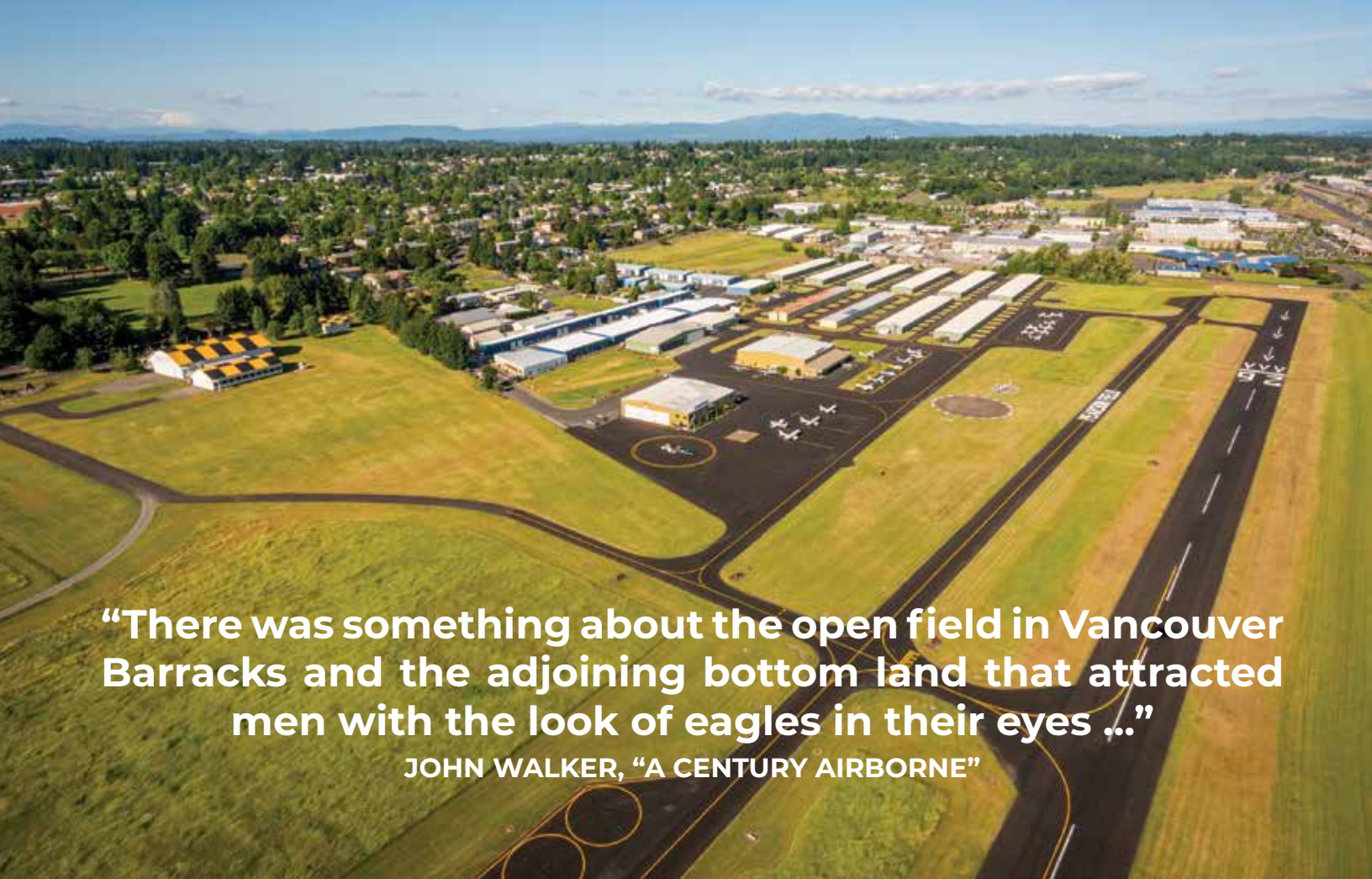
[Appendix D: National Register of Historic Places, Vancouver National Historic Reserve Historic District, Pearson Field Section \(May 31, 2006\)](#)

[Appendix E: Lease between the National Park Service and City of Vancouver for Pearson Airfield \(April 1, 2011-March 31, 2051\)](#)



Left: Statue of Captain C.F. Bond honoring aviation pioneers at the Pearson Air Museum [Photo: City of Vancouver]

On the cover: Lt. Alexander Pearson, Jr. poses with a Curtiss R-8 aircraft [Photo: National Park Service]



“There was something about the open field in Vancouver Barracks and the adjoining bottom land that attracted men with the look of eagles in their eyes ...”

JOHN WALKER, “A CENTURY AIRBORNE”

Pearson Field Airport looking northeast, 2014 [Photo: City of Vancouver]

PURPOSE OF REPORT

Pearson Field in Vancouver, Washington, is a general aviation municipal airfield operated by the City of Vancouver (“City”). The field is contiguous to and within Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (“FOVA”), a unit of the National Park Service (“Park Service”), and is part of the federally-designated Vancouver National Historic Reserve (“VNHR”). The Park Service owns the western half of the Pearson Field runway.

In November 1994, the City and Park Service signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) (Appendix B) under which both agencies agreed to work together on projects and activities that transition Pearson Field to a more historic focus. As specified in the MOA, the City and the Park Service mutually agreed

to prepare a joint report on the transition efforts and submit it to the Director of the National Park Service by January 1, 2021.

It was anticipated that through the partnership forged through the MOA, a successful transition would have occurred by 2021. In April 2011, the City and Park Service signed a 40-year lease (Appendix F) for the continued operation of Pearson Field as a general aviation airfield. The new lease incorporated the provision for a report on the transition to be submitted to the Director of the Park Service. This document serves as the report envisioned in the 1994 MOA and 2011 lease.

A HISTORIC GENERAL AVIATION AIRFIELD

The City and Park Service have agreed, through the terms of the 2011 lease agreement, that Pearson Field will continue operations as a general aviation airport. The Federal Aviation Administration divides civil aviation into two categories: commercial aviation (airline) and general aviation, which includes all other civil aviation.

While there is no formal definition for “historic aircraft,” the City and Park Service have agreed that fixed wing, propeller driven aircraft meet the requirement for the transition to historic aircraft operations identified in the lease. The City and the Park Service also agree that Pearson Field, as a general aviation airport, will continue to accommodate small (12,500 lbs. or less), general aviation, fixed wing, propeller-driven aircraft throughout the term of the lease, until March 31, 2051.

It is the intention of the Park Service and the City, as documented in the lease agreement, that the transition to a more historic focus not conflict with the Federal Grant Assurances that the City has accepted or will accept as a condition of receiving federal funds. The transition will also not be construed to limit the authority of the Federal Aviation Administration in any way over aviation activities at Pearson Field.



Examples of fixed wing propeller-driven aircraft
[Top photo: City of Vancouver]

THE HISTORY OF PEARSON FIELD

For over 100 years, Pearson Field has played a pivotal role as a location for general aviation in the Pacific Northwest.

Pearson Field, located in Vancouver Washington, opened in 1921 as a military aerodrome and is one of the oldest active airfields in the United States.

While the airfield did not formally open until 1921, there were earlier, signature aviation events that occurred at the site. These include the 1905 landing of the dirigible "Gelatine," piloted by Lincoln Beachey, and the 1911-1915 "Aviation Camps" hosted at the Vancouver Barracks Polo Grounds (located roughly west of the historic Pearson Headquarters building today). During the summertime Aviation Camps, the U.S. Army allowed local civilian aviators to house and fly their aircraft from the Polo Grounds, to help demonstrate the utility of fixed wing aircraft. Early aviators, such as Silas Chistofferson, Charles Walsh, and Walter Edwards, flew their home-built aircraft from the Polo Grounds, often establishing new flight records.

World War I brought a temporary cessation of flying activities from the field as the U.S. Army nationalized the lumber industry in order to guarantee a steady supply of Sitka spruce lumber to be used in the construction of war

planes. The Spruce Production Division was created in the fall of 1917, and headquartered at Vancouver Barracks.

The Spruce Production Division constructed the world's largest Spruce Cut Up Mill in 45 days, across the area now associated with Pearson Field. At its peak in the summer of 1918, this mill employed over 4,500 soldiers, operated 24 hours a day, and cut up to one million board feet of lumber a day to be used in aircraft production.

This lumber was shipped to the East Coast by railroad, to be used at U.S. aircraft production plants, or to Great Britain and France by ship to augment their aircraft production.

At this critical moment in history, while flying had temporarily discontinued at the field,

"The historic old airport has played a major role in peace and war."

LEVERETT RICHARDS, RETIRED AVIATION & MILITARY EDITOR OF THE OREGONIAN NEWSPAPER





The U.S. Army's 321st Observation Squadron at Pearson Field, 1926
[Photo: National Park Service]



Lt. Alexander Pearson, Jr., 1923
[Photo: National Park Service]

the Spruce Mill operation occurring in its footprint had international consequences. On the world's stage, the United States exhibited its power—both people and resource capabilities—to make its mark and make a difference in World War I.

The 321st Observation Squadron (a U.S. Army Reserve unit) was formed at Vancouver Barracks in 1921, and was initially composed of veterans of World War I from the local area. In 1924, 1st Lieutenant Oakley Kelley was designated as the unit's Air Officer, ushering in the historic period of greatest growth for the airfield. Kelley was a famed Army aviator, having set a world record with a non-stop flight from New York to San Diego a year before. Under his guidance, a complex of buildings was moved or constructed,

including a large hangar, to provide protection from the weather for the World War I-era biplanes which were the principal aircraft in use at that time.

In 1925, the field was formally named in honor of Lt. Alexander Pearson Jr., a Portland, Oregon, native and one of the Army's top test pilots. Pearson had been killed in 1924 while flying in preparation for an air race in an experimental high speed aircraft at Wilbur Wright Field in Ohio.

Kelley was a proponent of civilian aviation, and partly due to his efforts, the Vancouver Chamber of Commerce leased a plot of land to the east of the Army airfield in 1925, establishing the first municipal field in the Vancouver area. Both the Army



A crowd gathers around Russian aviator Valery Chkalov's airplane at Pearson Field following his transpolar flight in 1937.
[Photo: National Park Service]

and the civilian airfields were eventually called Pearson Field, and operated contemporaneously.

Pearson Field played a key role in the establishment of aviation in the Pacific Northwest, particularly during the “Golden Age of Flight”. Arguably, one of the most famous events to occur at the field was the landing of the first transpolar flight, piloted by Russian aviator Valery Chkalov in June, 1937. The three Russian aviators, Chkalov, co-pilot, Georgi Baidukov and navigator Alexander Belyakov, were welcomed by Vancouver Barracks’ commanding officer, General George C. Marshall.

Marshall rose quickly in military ranks from serving as a Colonel to shortly thereafter reaching the rank of General as the Commander of the Vancouver Barracks, to the Commanding Officer of the Department of the Columbia headquartered at Vancouver Barracks.

The Army decommissioned the 321st Observation Squadron one month after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The pilots were mobilized into the active Army Air Corps, and the formal military presence at Pearson Field ended after 21 years.

After World War II, the Army formally transferred the western half of the landing strip for the municipal field to the City, and the operation grew between the late 1940s and the 1960s with new hangars constructed near the former Army hangars. In 1971, the City sold the western half of Pearson Field, including the original Army hangars and the historic Headquarters Building, to the Park Service with a clause allowing the City to continue to use the land for 30 years. In 2011, working together, the City and the Park Service put in place a long term lease for the western half of the runway, creating a partnership that allows for the continued management and use of this historic airfield as a general aviation airport.

Due to the many historically significant events that occurred at the field, the preservation of open landscape associated with the airfield, and the preservation of the 1921 U.S. Army wooden hangar, the 1904 U.S. Army Munitions Building, and the 1918 Pearson Field Headquarters Building (formerly the Spruce Production Division’s Finance Building), Pearson Field is listed on the State (Appendix C) and National Registers of Historic Places (Appendix D). In addition, in 2012, the field was listed as a Historic Aerospace Site by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics.



Celebrating the 1937 transpolar flight (left to right: Russian navigator Alexander Belyakov; Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Alexander Troyanovsky; General George C. Marshall; Russian pilot Valery Chkalov; and Russian co-pilot Georgi Baidukov) [Photo: National Park Service]

TRANSITION TO A HISTORIC FOCUS

Pearson Field's role as one of the oldest operating airfields in the country has been preserved and enhanced in part through the actions described below.

Formation of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve

The 1994 Memorandum of Agreement recommended the formation of a "Vancouver Partnership" composed of the National Park Service, Department of the Army, State of Washington, and the City of Vancouver which would advocate for the protection, enhancement and coordinated development of the historic area surrounding and including FOVA.

In 1996, Congress officially designated the 366-acre "Vancouver National Historic Reserve (VNHR)". The VNHR's four legislated partners noted above were charged with cooperatively administering their respective adjacent historic venues while allowing each entity to manage its resources according to its own missions, policies, and regulations.

The VNHR includes Fort Vancouver, Vancouver Barracks (including Officers' Row and the Parade Ground), Pearson Air Museum and Field, the Water Resources Education Center, and portions of the Columbia River waterfront. Since the departure of the U.S. Army in 2012, the remaining landowners are the Park Service and the City.

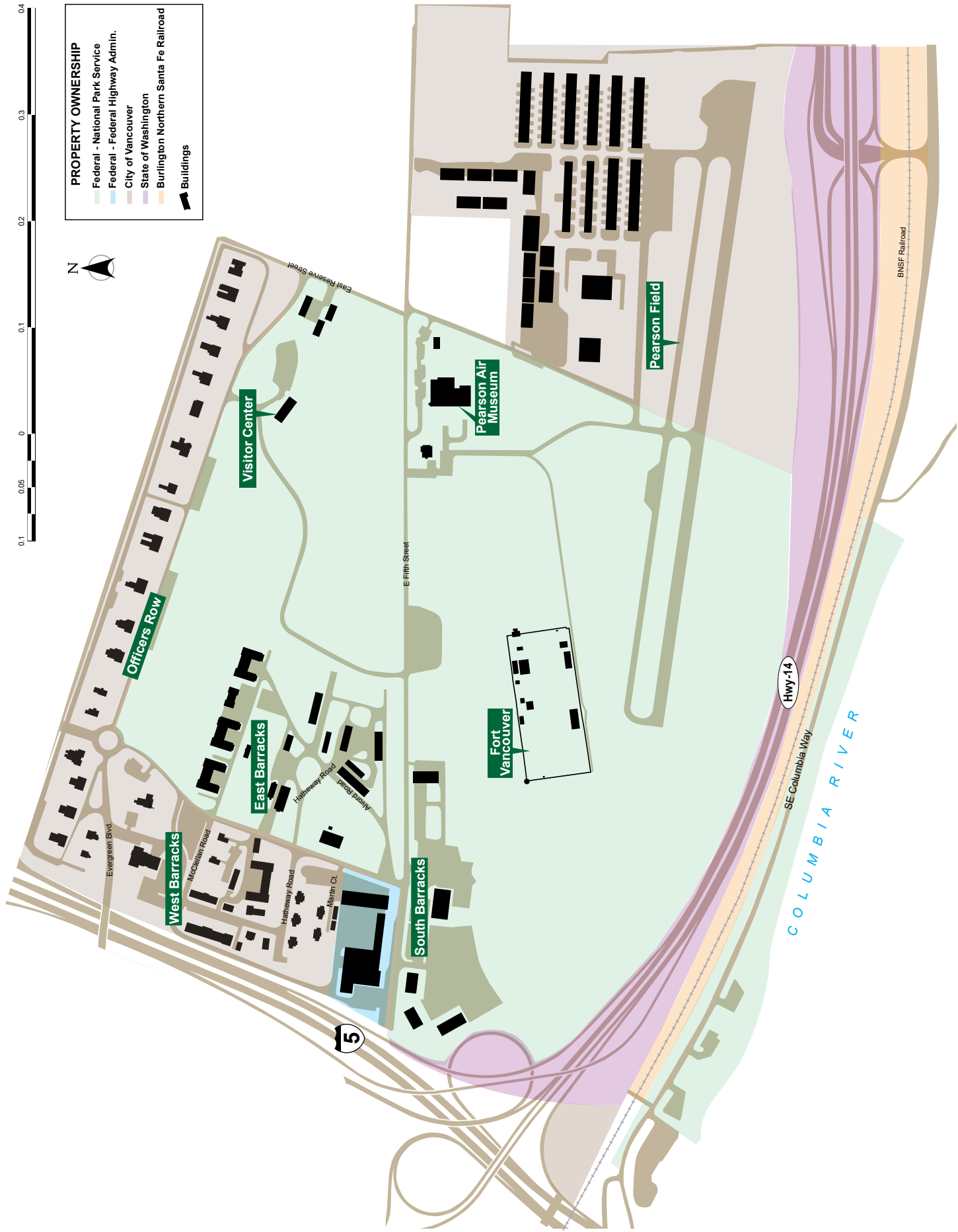
The City and the Park Service have a long history of working cooperatively together. This partnership recognizes both agencies' mandates, missions, and regulatory responsibilities while also promoting and seeking mutually-beneficial and innovative opportunities. The VNHR is managed based upon a series of foundational public planning documents and policies, including but not limited to:

- Vancouver National Historic Reserve Cooperative Management Plan (2000)
- West Barracks Reuse Plan (2002)
- Long Range Interpretive Plan (2004)
- Fort Vancouver National Historic Site General Management Plan (2003)



Aerial photo of Pearson Field from 1937 with an inset photo of the U.S. Army Air Corps hangars from the same year
[Photos: National Park Service]

VANCOUVER NATIONAL HISTORIC RESERVE PROPERTY OWNERSHIP (2019)



- Reserve-wide special events and public art policies and
- VNHR Wayside Exhibit Plan (2005)

In the spirit of partnership and in an effort to protect cultural resources in a manner consistent with the VNHR's national status, the City and Park Service have jointly taken the following actions:

Cultural Resource Protection

In 2004, the Park Service and City entered into an additional MOA regarding the management and protection of cultural resources within the VNHR including Pearson Field. The Park Service serves as the lead agency for all cultural resource management actions, including compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. This agreement serves as an innovative, successful example of the effective partnership that has directly benefited not only Pearson Air Field but also other city properties within the VNHR.

Restoration of Historic Landscape

The 1994 MOA required the City to remove all non-historic aviation buildings, lights, signage, and other aviation devices on Park Service property, except for the airfield and associated taxiways. This was completed in 2002 and the property has been restored to an open prairie landscape. Cost for the removal and restoration was just over \$1 million. New t-hangars and other buildings to support the operation of the municipal airfield were constructed on the east side of the airfield property to allow visitors to experience more of the restored cultural landscape without modern intrusions. The Park Service provided funding and professional services in the removal of these antiquated hangars to facilitate the rebuilding of new hangars on City property to the east. This is another example of how the City and



Pearson Field in 1995, prior to the removal of old hangars on the west side of the field [Photo: National Park Service]

Park Service collaborate to safeguard the nationally significant historic resources of the properties within the national park and the affiliated city properties.

Viewing Areas

The City's "Discovery Historic Loop Trail" runs through most of the VNHR. The trail runs along the east end of Pearson Field where there is a viewing area and wayside panel about the airfield. The Park Service provided text and photos for the wayside panel and the City constructed the viewing area and installed the panel.

The Confluence Land Bridge, located in the southwest part of the field, also has a viewing area oriented towards the airfield. The Land Bridge is a 40-foot wide earth-covered pedestrian bridge landscaped with native plants that arcs over State Route 14, connecting Fort Vancouver with the Columbia River. The Land Bridge was built as part of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial commemoration, and includes interpretive features and art focusing on the indigenous peoples of the region. This public/private partnership brought together the Confluence Project (a non-profit organization), the City of Vancouver, the Park Service, Washington

State Department of Transportation, BNSF Railway, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, American Indian Tribes, Federal Aviation Administration, representatives of the aviation community, and the U.S. Coast Guard in the planning and construction of this signature art and interpretive piece. This regionally-significant venue provides a unique perspective of the Airfield to thousands of visitors annually.

The Park Service constructed the Spruce Mill Trail to connect Fort Vancouver with Pearson Air Museum, where visitors can get an incredible view of aircraft operations at Pearson Field. This self-serve trail, located outside of the municipal airfield operation area, enables the general public to walk in the footprint of what was the world's largest mill operation which positioned the United States as a major force in the ending of World War I.

Cultural Landscape Preservation

In October 2005, the "Vancouver National Historic Reserve; Cultural Landscape Report" was completed. The report provides a detailed analysis of landscape characteristics that contribute to the historic significance of the site and recommends treatments for preservation of the cultural landscape. The

report recommends that the three remaining historic buildings associated with Pearson Field (now part of the Pearson Air Museum complex) and the airfield itself be preserved and continue to demonstrate historic aviation.

To assist in preserving the cultural landscape associated with the Vancouver National Historic Reserve including Pearson Field, in 2006 the Vancouver City Council approved language in the Vancouver Municipal Code (VMC) creating the "Historic Reserve Design Standards". This VMC sets standards for design features including lighting, signage, site furnishings, etc. The standards were then codified by FOVA through a Memorandum of Agreement with the City.

In 2006, an assessment was done on the signage at the VNHR. Signage deemed unnecessary to the safety or functionality of the site was removed. Any proposed new signage is required to be approved through a Section 106 compliance process.

"Fly Neighborly" Policy

The "Fly Neighborly" policy encourages pilots to consider the noise impact on people in the vicinity of the airport and within the traffic pattern. There are several informational signs



Pearson Field looking east from the Confluence Land Bridge *[Photo: City of Vancouver]*



A sign along the runway reminds pilots not to fly over the fort [Photo: City of Vancouver]

at the airport reminding pilots of locations to avoid, including the Fort Vancouver Stockade and Smith Tower (a downtown residential building for seniors). The airport policy also encourages operating with reduced power settings when safe to do so, which lowers the overall noise impact.

The “Fly Neighborly” policy is also posted at the Fixed Base Operation (FBO) and Pilots Lounge, and published in the official FAA Chart Supplements and on the Pearson Field website.

The City of Vancouver works with the Park Service to remind pilots to not fly over the Fort Vancouver Stockade, as well as to consider not flying during significant park events, such as the annual Campfires and Candlelight event, which brings 5,000 to 7,500 visitors to the national park in six hours. This event allows the public to go back in time and experience the fort as it was in the mid-19th century through costumed interpreters and volunteers.

Development of Pearson Air Museum

As envisioned in the 1994 MOA, the City of Vancouver and the non-profit Pearson Field Historical Society worked together in 1996 to develop the Pearson Air Museum which was dedicated as the Jack Murdock Aviation Center. Existing historic aviation buildings

on Park Service property, including the U.S. Army Munitions Building (ca. 1904), U.S. Army Pearson Headquarters Building (ca. 1918) and the Historic Hangar (ca. 1921) were rehabilitated as part of the museum complex. A new, main museum building was constructed, mimicking the shape and location of a 1925 steel hangar that was destroyed in a fire in 1977. Total investment in the Jack Murdock Aviation Center through City, State, Federal and private funding was \$4.2 million.

Pearson Air Museum was designed to be a “living” museum with participatory educational programs and with periodic fly-ins to provide visitors the opportunity to see historic aircraft in action. To support this activity, the City, as part of upgrades to the municipal airfield, constructed an airplane taxiway from the runway to the museum. The museum, which is part of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site and is operated by the Park Service, continues in the role of interpreting the history of Pearson Field through exhibits and events, and celebrating the aviation achievements witnessed here. As of 2019, over 30,000 visitors visit the free museum annually, and in addition 16,000 to 20,000 people attend special events or programs inside the Tex Rankin Theater and the Historic Hangar.

The museum interprets Pearson Field and



Front entrance of the Pearson Air Museum [Photo: City of Vancouver]

the “Golden Age of Flight” in the Pacific Northwest through:

- Permanent exhibits that feature the first aerial crossing of the Columbia River in 1905, the first airplane flight in 1911, the world’s largest Spruce Cut-Up Mill in 1918, the 321st Observation Squadron of 1921-1942, the first west coast airmail service in the 1920s, the first transpolar flight of 1937 and many other aspects of early flight in the Pacific Northwest.
- Temporary exhibits that feature specific aircraft or events.
- Replication of historic aircraft done by volunteers under the auspices of the Park Service. This provides visitors and community members the opportunity for hands-on learning about antique aircraft.
- Preservation and exhibit of aviation related artifacts. A curation facility is housed in the 1904 Munitions Building.
- Educational programs for students. Programs include ranger led

tours, an exhibit scavenger hunt, a Junior Ranger program and special programs throughout the year.

- Community events including historic aircraft fly-ins, hangar dances, and a World War II era military encampment re-enactment.

The museum is also an active participant in VNHR and national park special events like Get Outdoors Day, Junior Ranger Day, historic fly-ins, Chkalov Commemoration Ceremony, lectures and public presentations, the Campfires & Candlelight tours of Fort Vancouver and the annual 4th of July Celebration which draws thousands of people to the VNHR.

The Park Service continues to add to and redevelop the exhibits in the museum, and is currently working with a contractor to make new exhibit panels for the museum interior.



Fireworks light up the sky behind a Pearson Field hangar on Independence Day [Photo: City of Vancouver]

AIRPORT OPERATIONS



Fixed wing propeller-driven planes parked along the runway at Pearson Field [Photo: City of Vancouver]

Pearson Field has continued to operate as a general aviation airport for almost 100 years, and is one of the oldest operating airports in the world. The airport is fully certified and part of the National Plan of Integrated Airports System (NPIAS). It is one of the largest general aviation airports in the Pacific Northwest and offers hangar and tiedown rentals and a Pilots Lounge, as well as a variety of historic aviation and community focused events. A Fixed Base Operator (FBO) acts as the cornerstone for aviation support services and the Pearson Field Education Center (PFEC) provides an avenue for public outreach and education, both of which complement the services and activities of the airport.

As of 2019 Pearson has 175 based aircraft housed in a combination of rental T-hangars, tiedowns and privately owned hangars. Pearson also offers 13 transient tiedowns that are available to visitors. Through the lease agreement between the City and Park Service, the number of based aircraft at the airport is limited to a maximum of 185. This is primarily a reflection of the limited space available at Pearson for expansion but also to assist in preserving the historic integrity of the field and the adjacent areas of the park. Pearson Field is designated by the City of Vancouver as an “enterprise fund” which means that it is entirely self-funded and receives no subsidy from the City’s general

fund. This is a rare accomplishment for a municipal airport.

Pearson’s annual operating budget in 2019 was \$700,000. Revenue is generated through a combination of hangar and tiedown rentals, rental of commercial space, and fuel flowage fees. In addition to the operating budget, the City is able to make capital improvements to the Field through a combination of FAA Non-Primary Entitlements (NPE) and Airport Improvement Plan (AIP) grant funding, Washington State Department of Transportation, Aviation Division grant funds, and capital bonds issued by the City and repaid from Pearson Airport revenues. Examples of capital projects at Pearson Field include repaving of taxiways and runways, replacement of T-hangars, and improvements to parking lots.

As part of the lease agreement between the City and Park Service, the City pays fair market value for the land being leased for the western portion of the runway and the lease payment is used to support the operations of the air museum complex.

Airport Management

Pearson Field Airport is operated by a full-time airport manager who is an employee of the City. Other services like landscape maintenance, janitorial, legal services, etc.

are either provided in-house by City staff or through contract services.

A volunteer Aviation Advisory Committee, appointed by the Vancouver City Council, provides advice to the council and City administration on the operation of the airport.

Fixed Base Operator (FBO)

The Fixed Base Operator (FBO) at Pearson Field is Aero Maintenance Flight Center, Inc. Aero Maintenance has a full service flight school and maintenance facility providing aircraft and avionics maintenance, repair and restoration and fuel sales. The FBO also provides front line services, such as maps, weather information, etc. to visitors.

The airport places an emphasis on aviation history, and aircraft of all periods are flown, maintained, and restored at Pearson Field. To support the emphasis on historic aviation, the City requires the FBO to have the expertise to maintain both modern and historic aircraft. Since the aircraft based at Pearson Field are primarily fixed wing and propeller driven, aircraft at Pearson Field today provide a similar aesthetic value to the general public as if they were observing flight activities of more than 50 years ago.

Pearson Field Education Center (PFEC)

Located within a hangar at Pearson Field, the Pearson Field Education Center is a program of The Historic Trust, a non-profit organization whose mission is to “inspire civic pride and economic vitality through education, celebration and preservation of our community’s history”. The Historic Trust is headquartered at the VNHR and provides a variety of programs and events.

PFEC’s mission is to “inspire youth to pursue education and careers in the aviation and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields while instilling an appreciation for the people, events

and innovations of historic Pearson Field”. PFEC offers hands-on educational activities including summer camps, Open Saturdays, Open Cockpit Days, school tours and an aviation explorer club.

Historic Interpretation at the Field

In addition to the historic interpretation inside Pearson Air Museum and the Pearson Field Education Center, the Park Service, with input from the other VNHR Partners, developed a Reserve-wide Wayside Exhibit plan that helps to create a seamless interpretive experience as visitors move throughout the VNHR.

Wayside exhibits at Pearson Field and outside the Air Museum interpret the Pre-World War I aviation highlights, the 321st Observation Squadron, and Alexander Pearson. The museum grounds are home to a statue of Carlton Bond, a pioneer aviator who flew out of Pearson Field, and the Soviet Transpolar Flight Monument that commemorates the historic 1937 transpolar flight by Valery Chkalov and his crew.

Signage at the municipal airport is reflective of a more historic era. Signs include “Pearson Field” and “Learn to Fly” on the large retail/hangar buildings on the Field along with entrance signage to the Field. The signage, which reflects historic signage, is consistent with the overall sign plan for the VNHR which again helps to make a more seamless experience for the visitor.



A historical interpretive sign at Pearson Field
[Photo: City of Vancouver]

THE FUTURE OF PEARSON FIELD



A plane lands on the runway at Pearson Field [Photo: City of Vancouver]

Pearson Airport has a 10-year master plan that provides guidance for future development at the Field. Located in an urban core, Pearson has very limited space for expansion, with less than 5 acres of undeveloped land.

On the north and west, 50% of the runway abuts Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. Further to the west is Interstate 5 and downtown Vancouver. To the south is the BNSF Railway railroad berm and State Highway 14. To the east is an industrial area and the Grand Central Shopping Center complex.

In many ways, being adjacent to Fort Vancouver National Historic Site and part of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve has protected Pearson Field from the encroachment that many small, urban airports have experienced. It is located adjacent to a national park, whose primary mission is to preserve and protect the cultural landscape.

Given its proximity to downtown, Pearson likely would have been redeveloped into light industrial and retail use like the adjacent property to the east or into a residential neighborhood like those to the northeast.

In many ways the relationship between Fort Vancouver and Pearson Field is a

symbiotic one—while proximity to Fort Vancouver has helped to protect the airfield from development, the airport has been instrumental in preserving the Fort's feeling of open prairie and the iconic viewshed of Mt. Hood.

Like many communities in the Pacific Northwest, Vancouver is experiencing a significant period of growth and the continued revitalization of its downtown core. The City, Park Service and local pilots are working together to promote and support their shared missions. The 40-year lease demonstrates that strong commitment to working together.

Pearson's location, just across Interstate 5 from downtown, requires that a safe flight path over downtown be maintained. This has created tension between developers interested in creating taller and potentially more economically-viable buildings in downtown, and the aviation community who want to ensure the continued operation of Pearson Field.

In July, 2017 the Vancouver City Council took new steps to protect the future of Pearson Field by adopting changes to the municipal code that place height restrictions on buildings proposed to be built in the airport's flight path. Consistent with the City's action, the Park Service recognized

and acknowledged the significance of the historic airfield and the historic viewsheds to the east, west, north and south. Retaining these viewsheds honor our community's and the Pacific Northwest region's history and is supportive to both the missions of the airfield and the national park.

In 2018, the City completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for proposed capital projects at Pearson Field over the next five to seven years. The EA involved extensive research, consultation with the Park Service,

and public outreach. The Park Service will oversee the compliance process for any potential development projects, as well as archaeological monitoring for any approved projects that require ground disturbance.

Future plans for Pearson Field include moving the underground fuel tanks above ground, resurfacing the taxiways and aprons, replacing the aging T-hangars, and potentially constructing additional commercial space to attract needed aviation-related businesses.



Planes parked in front of a hangar at Pearson Field [Photo: City of Vancouver]

CONCLUSION

Since 1996, the City and the Park Service have made great strides in developing a long-term partnership that supports the municipal airport, the community, and the national park.

The City and Park Service leadership are jointly committed to the long term as evidenced in the creation of a 40 year lease, and both agencies are dedicated to work together, problem solve together, and move forward together. In just over twenty years, the partners have accomplished much.

Ultimately, the City and the Park Service are committed to working cooperatively to ensure the continued success of a sustainable municipal airfield, an active air museum visited by thousands annually, restored and protected historic buildings and landscapes, and daily opportunities for the general public and visitors to learn about the history of aviation in the Pacific Northwest.