

Beaver Island Airport Takes Action to Address Safety and Funding Challenges

Beaver Island, MI April 12, 2024

In response to ongoing safety and funding challenges, Beaver Island Airport (SIX) is proactively addressing tree penetration issues in its runway approach areas. The airport, like many others in Michigan, faces the common problem of normal tree growth encroaching upon the 20:1 approach surface required for runway safety. For clarification, the 20:1 approach criterion begins 200-feet off the end of the paved runway and at the physical end of the runway for the turf runways. For every 20 feet moving away from the runway, the allowable surface goes up 1-foot in height. This extends for several thousand feet away from each runway end. As you move farther away from the runway end, the allowable heights of structures/vegetation in that area increases. If a structure or tree penetrates this surface, then it is considered an obstruction.

To meet this standard, some airports often consider shortening or closing runways, compromising safety and usability for various aircraft operators, but that is not a feasible long-term solution and something we're aiming to avoid. Recently, we successfully resolved the tree issues at both ends of Runways 9 and 27, but the ongoing growth poses a continuous challenge and the airport's overall operational flexibility is impacted by prevailing wind conditions, which do not always favor the use of Runways 9 or 27. Additionally, future plans to repave runways 9 and 27, which are necessary for infrastructure maintenance, also presents a temporary closure challenge so we need all runways to be safe and operational. Further, Beaver Island Airport is currently operating under a provisional license, from the State of Michigan Office of Aeronautics (AERO), which limits our access to future government funding until these safety concerns are addressed. The airport's acceptance of federal funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and MDOT AERO further obliges it to provide appropriate approach clearances.

Conservation is a priority for the Beaver Island Airport, and to ensure we only remove trees that are in violation of safety regulations, AERO, has adopted innovative drone technology with LIDAR scanning that can pinpoint individual trees causing obstructions. This detailed information is crucial for the airport's licensing reviews and to demonstrate adherence to regulatory standards.

Beaver Island Airport is also subject to the Airport Approach Plan (AAP) under the Aeronautic Code of the State of Michigan, requiring property owners within approach plan zones to maintain clear approaches at their expense. The airport committee, recognizing the responsibility shared with private landowners, is actively seeking collaborative solutions. A recent successful collaboration involved landowners Al Hunting and Roger Lear, who granted the airport permission to remove trees impacting the approach to runway 23 (Southwest). Our community and neighbors are important, and to address safety concerns and optimize tree removal, the Beaver Island Airport Committee (BIAC) is exploring the use of an excavator for safe and efficient operations. Plans include working with adjoining property owners as well as offering incentives to defray some costs for those assisting in tree removal. To keep the community informed and engaged, BIAC will hold future meetings where detailed survey maps showing areas of concern will be presented.

The Airport Commission understands the importance of ongoing dialogue with property owners to ensure a comprehensive and cooperative approach to address these challenges, and the Beaver Island Airport remains committed to maintaining a top-notch, safe and accessible aviation facility. Our collaboration with you, our community, is key to overcoming these challenges. The airport is required to support island emergencies and commerce on a year-round basis. Beaver Island Airport Commission