

Bowman Field tree cutting could cost extra \$1M



[James Bruggers](#), @jbruggers 1:05 p.m. EDT May 2, 2016

Local airport officials have said they may walk away from federal grants to help pay for expanded tree trimming and cutting near runways.



(Photo: Courtesy Michael Hayman)

If Louisville airport officials walk away from an environmental review of [expanded tree cutting near Bowman Field](#), they would need to reimburse the federal government up \$1 million grant money that's helped pay for the study, the Federal Aviation Administration says.

That cost would be in addition to a loss of about \$2 million in federal funds to help pay for new tree trimming and removal, the Louisville Regional Airport Authority acknowledged Monday.

[Bowman Field area residents](#) last month were told in a letter that airport managers are prepared to go ahead and acquire additional airspace easements and trim or remove more trees on their own, "without federal funds and without waiting for the completion of FAA evaluations." The trigger, airport officials said, will be if the FAA fails to meet its most current schedule for completing the studies - finishing all cultural and environmental reviews and signing off on the project by July 14.

Last week, Skip Miller, the airport authority's executive director, expressed frustration with FAA delays, saying that safety needs were paramount, and pilots are complaining. It's been more than five years since the authority first announced it wanted to clear additional airspace.

Authority spokeswoman Trish Burke on Monday confirmed that any reimbursement of review costs would be in addition to the \$2 million in potential grant losses Miller discussed last week.

"The only thing to add is to express our appreciation to the FAA for the time and effort they have spent to date on this project and note that we look forward to continuing to work with them on this and future projects," Burke said.

At issue are some 108 trees additional trees have been identified as needing to be cut or trimmed. Airport officials have said they'd pay for the new easements and cutting out of reserve funds.

Recent tree cutting and trimming around the general aviation airport has been in airspace easements already owned by the airport authority, which runs Bowman Field in addition to Louisville International Airport.

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Coyotes seen at Bowman, Middletown, Payne St.

In a written response to questions, FAA spokeswoman Kathleen Bergen said the authority could reject federal funding and withdraw from the environmental assessment.

But if it did, FAA would seek to recover as much as \$1 million in grant funding allocated for the studies. So far, she said, the LRAA has drawn \$621,000 of the \$1 million. "FAA would seek to recover all of the grant funds that LRAA has drawn as of that date" when the authority were to terminate the studies, she said.

Miller last week complained about FAA "timidness" in recognizing the need to make sure airport approaches are safe for pilots and neighbors from trees that grow in protected airspace.

Bergen said the FAA is following a federal law that allows for state, local and federal agencies to review the proposal and gives the public a chance to participate in the process. "FAA has received more than 100 public comments, and it has taken a considerable amount of time to review them," she said.

It's not uncommon for completion schedules to change, "especially where there is significant public interest in the proposed project."

Some neighbors have said the authority has not adequately weighed alternatives, including lighting and shortening the usable portion of the airport runways.

The group Plea for Trees, which has sought to make sure local and federal officials follow environmental and historical preservation laws, wants the environmental studies completed.

"To the extent that the LRAA really intends to attempt to acquire easements and cut trees in a manner that skirts any further federal and public review, the action is unnecessarily provocative and will provoke with absolute certainty a legal response," Louisville attorney Tom FitzGerald, director of the Kentucky Resources Council, said last week.

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