

April 23, 2020



Dear members of the Airport Board,

We last wrote to ask that the Airport Board defer Wind River Air's application until after the coronavirus pandemic is over and the public can fully engage. Today, we offer additional pressing considerations before granting a permit: **the need for Wind River Air to plan for COVID-19 safety, and to bond against potential wildfire fighting and Search & Rescue (SAR) costs in the event of a crash.**

Grand Teton National Park is requiring all businesses operating in the park to develop plans to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Wind River Air should be held to that same standard. **Please require Wind River Air to provide a plan for how it is prepared to meet Center for Disease Control guidelines, including social distancing and proper disinfecting, before granting a permit.** We echo the many concerns about our small community's ability to adequately respond to a public health crisis when tourism restarts and operations like heli tours bring people from around the country or world.

We must also be prepared to respond to other crises, such as the rescue of survivors and/or fighting a wildfire after a helicopter crash. As you know, the Robinson R-44 helicopter has had more fatal crashes than any other helicopter.<sup>1,2</sup> Recent "scenic helicopter tour" operations have been involved in many fatal crashes around the country – including the tragic high-profile loss of Kobe Bryant, family, and friends.<sup>3</sup> A crash on our public lands would require Search & Rescue operations and could also require a major wildlands firefighting effort. In 2018, the Paradise fire in California devastated an entire community and cost many lives. This last summer, we had two close calls in Jackson. A mid-summer helicopter crash could spark a massive wildfire; that in itself is reason enough to deny the permit. If you decide that you must approve a permit, **please require that the operation bond against all potential costs incurred by a crash, so the public doesn't have to cover them – before you grant the permit.**

These conditions are far from discrimination – they are a means to avoid substantial costs incurred to our community by Wind River Air. We have been reassured that the Airport Board has heard our community. We understand that your hands are tied by

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<sup>1</sup> Christensen, Kim. (2018, Nov. 18). "With the Robinson's safety issues, the FAA has taken a more hands-off approach." *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/la-me-ln-robinson-heli2-20181118-story.html>;

<sup>2</sup> Christensen, Kim. (2018, Nov. 18). "Danger spins from the sky." (2018, Nov.) *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/projects/la-me-robinson-helicopters/>

<sup>3</sup> Golliver, Ben and Miranda Green. (2020, Jan. 26). "Kobe Bryant, 13-year-old daughter killed in helicopter crash." *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/01/26/kobe-bryant-helicopter-crash/>

the FAA, as have Grand Teton National Park's – and we all know that the FAA has a bad record when it comes to safety (see: Boeing MAX).

But now you, the Airport Board, have a choice: you can put conditions on the permit to protect our community, or you can grant an unconditioned permit. We know that conditions could draw threats of legal action or appeal to the FAA, but **we hope that you will put our community first, require these reasonable conditions, and then defend them fiercely for as long as it takes.**

Sincerely,



Brooke Sausser  
Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance



Sharon Mader  
National Parks Conservation Association