



Port of Moses Lake proposed development sites shown in yellow.

Port of Moses Lake/illustration

Port of Moses Lake focuses on job creation

By TIM KUKES

Once again, the Port of Moses Lake is taking steps to making itself attractive to aerospace companies and industry in general. Nestled in the center of eastern Washington, the port is 5,700 acres and home to 240 acres of ramp space courtesy of its history as a U.S. military airbase.

This spring, the port announced that it was in the process of implementing an action plan concerning the Grant County International Airport Employment Center. The action plan is essentially a "what-if" scenario where the port looks at possible development plans for an area of the port and conducts an environmental assessment to see what the land can sustain in the way of jobs and industry.

"The idea behind it, quite succinctly, is to speed the development process by analyzing the environmental impacts before developers have to," Jeffrey Bishop, Port of Moses Lake executive director said. "Basically we envisioned what we could do any way that is permitted under the regulations and impacts."

It bears mentioning that the employment center isn't a physical structure, but a plan for creating a center of employment at the port. Carol Gibson, director of real estate at the Port of Moses Lake, said one of the biggest questions they got during the public part of the process was, "What is an employment center?"

"We're an agency that wants to promote economic development and the reason we promote economic development is so that the better part of our constituents have jobs," Bishop said. "And when we look at developing a piece of property our focus is on how many jobs can we create? So why not cut to the chase and make the planning unit employment?"

According to Gibson, the original estimate for the action plan

was for development of 400 acres on the eastern portion of the port, but as the process was worked through, the area became 1,200 acres with the potential to sustain up to 10,000 new employees.

To make use of the laws and regulations that allow for early permitting, the Port of Moses Lake had to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). EA Engineering, Science and Technology, Inc. was the lead consultant working on the EIS. An EIS can be expensive in money and time. The port applied for an Advanced Permitting Grant from the state and was awarded \$350,000.

"We had looked at doing it and then getting the grant just pushed us over because it's not a particularly cheap process to do," Stroud Kunkle, Port of Moses Lake commissioner said.

The Advanced Permitting Grant was part of an incentive package that the state created to entice Boeing to bring its work on the 777X to the state. Part of the package was a pool of funds for environmental permitting efforts to make aerospace sites more attractive to potential developers.

"The beauty of this is we're not really proposing any specific thing, we're just saying 'here is what the zoning code says we could do here!'" Bishop said. "What would the impact be to the environment if we did that?"

The action plan gives the port a competitive edge by getting a jump on the SEPA permitting process - putting the port on the same footing as states and countries that do not have this type of permitting process.

"That's incredibly important because they (developers) are in the business of making money and producing products, and certainty is a precious commodity," Bishop said. "The more certainty you can have in siting a facility the more likely you are to take the path.

The path of least resistance is fundamental to human nature."

Currently the EIS is in draft and the port is ready to finalize it. What happens next is the city of Moses Lake and Grant County will begin adopting ordinances that will implement the planned action, Bishop explained. The port has spent a year on the project, placing any potential developer that much ahead of the game.

"I really think in the long run this is a tremendous benefit for the community that we have the tool available (early permitting)," Bishop said. "We can walk in now to a company and say 'look we've already done all the analysis, you're ready to go,' and this is as close to shovel ready we can get in Washington."

Other moves that the port has made to secure further interest from businesses and developers include attending the Paris Air Show in June – a premier aerospace event with more than 350,000 visitors, 2,300 exhibitors and 130 aircraft. The show had 296 foreign delegations from 91 countries and Bishop said it was the "be all, end all of the aviation world – anybody who is anybody is there."

The port was able to gather important intelligence about what was going on in the aerospace industry and conduct several meetings with Mitsubishi and other companies. They even found out

that a large European developer has a presence in Ellensburg.

"Our primary focus was what could we make of the show?" Bishop said. "Is there a role for us there? Does it provide us with benefit? We came back saying yes."

The Port of Moses Lake and Grant County have a history for taking risks with an eye to the future. The action plan depends upon the port being able to attract partners for it to realize its true potential. Traveling to air shows and other events is only of value if the port can bring something home from it – new partners or ideas to implement. But then who knew that building dams on the Columbia, installing fiber optics, or rail infrastructure would pay off for Grant County? It seems the people of Grant County have a bit of an appetite for risk, Bishop said.

“
The idea behind it, quite succinctly, is to speed the development process by analyzing the environmental impacts before developers have to...Basically we envisioned what we could do any way that is permitted under the regulations and impacts.
”

- Jeffrey Bishop
Executive Director, Port of Moses Lake

Kunkle spoke of the importance of being proactive rather than reactive when it comes to attracting new business.

Having work done ahead of time makes the area more attractive when businesses come looking, he added.

For those interested in reading the draft EIS it can be found at http://www.grantcountywa.gov/planning/Current_Events/International_Airport_Employment_Center_Project/Draft_EIS_GC_International_Airport_Employment_Center_Project.pdf

MOSES LAKE IRRIGATION & REHABILITATION DISTRICT

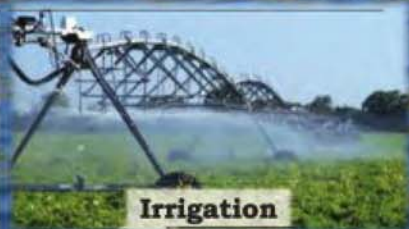
~ Serving Moses Lake since 1928 ~



Water Quality



**WELCOME
MLIRD
Moses Lake Irrigation & Rehabilitation District's
RECREATION FACILITY**



Irrigation



Weed Harvesting



Dredging



Recreation



**MOSES
LAKE**



Weed Treatments

MLIRD works hard each day to improve lake water quality as we build a stronger Moses Lake! Please consider petitioning your property into the District to help keep Moses Lake a thriving community!

www.mlird.org

(509) 765-8716