



COUNTY OF SISKIYOU

Board of Supervisors

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October 7, 2025

Via Electronic Mail Only

The Honorable Doug LaMalfa
408 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
ErinMarie.Ryan@mail.house.gov

Subject: Requesting your Leadership in Preserving Siskiyou County Airport Runway

Dear Congressman LaMalfa,

As the governing body for Siskiyou County, the Board of Supervisors is writing to express deep concern about the future of Siskiyou County Airport (SIY) and the consequences for regional fire safety. This airport is a critical public safety asset, as it is utilized by the U.S. Forest Service and CAL FIRE for large firefighting tanker operations in Northern California and Southern Oregon. It also serves other special-use aircraft, medical flights, military operations, and general aviation. Its 7,490 by 150-foot runway allows for rapid wildfire response and other emergency operations and is capable of accommodating Very Large Air Tankers (VLATs), such as the DC-10 and Boeing 737, as well as C-130 aircraft equipped with Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems (MAFFS). This capability saves lives, protects property, and reduces costs by allowing agencies to operate locally rather than relying on distant bases in Redding, California or Medford, Oregon.

SIY has consistently proven its value during wildfire season as a base for CAL FIRE and the Forest Service. Currently, the Forest Service operates an air tanker base at SIY with a Phos-Chek LC-95A retardant filling system. CAL FIRE also utilizes this tanker base and operates a Type 1 helibase. Together, these operations provide coverage for Siskiyou's 6,300 square miles, five national forests, neighboring California counties, and parts of Southern Oregon.

Jess Harris
District 1

Ed Valenzuela
District 2

Michael N. Kobseff
District 3

Nancy Ogren
District 4

Ray Haupt
District 5

Despite SIY's essential role in fire and other emergency operations, the FAA has indicated it cannot identify funding to maintain the full 7,490 by 150-foot runway and has suggested reducing it to as little as 4,100 by 50 feet. Such a reduction would prevent CAL FIRE and the Forest Service from utilizing VLATs and C-130 aircraft for firefighting. These aircraft are deployed every year in vital wildfire operations lasting most of the summer months, and their use is expected to grow. While they may not meet the FAA's "critical aircraft" threshold of 500 annual flights, they remain indispensable during wildfire season to protect the property and lives of our citizens. In response to increasing demand and future operational needs, the County is actively working with CAL FIRE and the Forest Service to bring additional VLATs to the region. The County is also planning investments in infrastructure, such as water pumps and increased power and communication capacity at SIY, to better support these aircraft.

VLATs and C-130 aircraft equipped with MAFFS provide rapid, large-scale retardant delivery. A shortened runway would prevent SIY from supporting these aircraft, leading to delays in response times and forcing reliance on more distant bases. This would increase suppression costs, reduce operational effectiveness, and permanently limit the County's ability to expand commercial, industrial, or general aviation services. Once runway length is lost, it will likely never be restored, and the region would permanently lose this capability.

This issue goes far beyond Siskiyou County. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the western United States experienced double the number of large fires between 1984 and 2015, and increasingly extreme, nearly year-round fire seasons are expected to continue, underscoring the urgent need to invest in firefighting infrastructure. While Redding and Medford airports expand commercial services, SIY is uniquely positioned to serve as a hub for wildfire response and as an operational overflow site for Medford Airport. If the runway is shortened, this critical role will also be lost. Maintaining the full runway is essential for the airport to continue safeguarding surrounding counties, neighboring states, millions of acres of natural resources, and our communities listed as "Communities at Risk" under the federal Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

Given the heavy wildland fire exclusive use each summer since 2015, Siskiyou County requests this airport be added to the NWCG Airtanker Base Directory as a federally designated and operated Airtanker Base. We respectfully request your congressional support to make this happen in protection of our fire-prone landscape and its citizens.

Doing so will ensure the funding necessary to preserve the 7,490-foot runway at Siskiyou County Airport, create much needed jobs in our county and stimulate our local economy. A rural county cannot carry this financial burden alone, especially when the benefit extends across the region and to federally owned lands, which make up a significant portion of Siskiyou County.

Sincerely,

Nancy Ogren
Chair
District 4

Michael Kobseff
District 3

Jess Harris
District 1

Ray Haupt
District 5

Ed Valenzuela
District 2

CC: Congressman Cliff Bentz
 Congressman Doug LaMalfa
 FAA Director Airports Division Western-Pacific Region Favi Garcia
 FAA Administrator Bryan Bedford
 FAA Deputy Administrator Chris Rocheleau
 Siskiyou County Director of General Services Adam Filippone
 Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors
 Rural County Representatives of California
 Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange
 Senator Megan Dahle
 Assemblymember Heather Hadwick
 CAL Fire State Director Joe Tyler
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