

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

For Release June 2, 1978

Levitt 202/343-5634

ENDANGERED SPECIES WILL NOT HALT CONSTRUCTION OF TRAINING RUNWAY AT FLORIDA REPLACEMENT JETPORT

A biological opinion by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has found that the location of the training runway of the proposed Florida Replacement Jetport in south Florida does not pose any known threat to endangered species and can be constructed if proper safeguards are followed.

The opinion was the result of consultations with the Federal Aviation Administration which were required by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Under that section, Federal agencies must consult with the Interior Department to ensure that they do not authorize, fund, or carry out any action that could jeopardize the continued existence of a species or adversely affect its critical habitat. The FAA was notified of the opinion June 1.

The location under consideration is a replacement site for the Everglades Jetport, presently used as a commercial training facility. This training facility has been the subject of environmental concerns since the late 1960's. As a result of these concerns, an agreement was made between the Secretaries of the Interior and Transportation, the State of Florida, and Dade County to find a suitable new location for the Everglades Jetport. The new site, called "site 14," is about 15 miles northwest of Miami.

(over)

When the site was initially selected in March of 1977, the FAA requested a formal Section 7 consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service. At that time the Service was particularly concerned with the facility's impact on the Everglade kite, an endangered species of bird of which only about 160 individuals survive. Subsequent meetings between the staffs of the involved agencies identified further studies which were needed and later completed so the Service could render a biological opinion. A special consultation team was appointed to review all appropriate information. The studies included overflights of the proposed runway site and observation of the behavior of kites. In addition, studies were reviewed of the impact on the snail kite, a closely related species which nests adjacent to runways at the Barranquilla Airport in Colombia, South America.

The biological opinion rendered by the Service is strictly related to the impact on endangered species by the construction and operation of the first phase development of the Florida Replacement Jetport which would be a training runway for commercial jets. The opinion does not deal with the development of a full airport and support facilities at the site.

In its opinion the Fish and Wildlife Service suggested that the proposed training runway be located about one-half mile south and three-fourths mile east from the presently planned location to further reduce possible effects on kites using a prime feeding and nesting area on a small island nearby. In addition FAA should ensure the prevention of developments north, south, and west of the jetport which could indirectly result from operation of the training facility. The Service also suggested that the FAA conduct a monitoring program, which would detect environmental changes such as air, noise, and water pollution that could harm the kite.