Airport fumbles on game traffic

Runway extension won't be completed in time for opener

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Oconee County Regional Airport staff is bracing for a busy Saturday when the Clemson University Tigers host their first game of the season against North Texas at Death Valley.

Historically, the local airstrip is a hub of busy activity as Cessnas, Pipers and other personal aircraft land and fuel long before the opening kick-off at 3:30 p.m.

This is the time of the year when revenues pick up at the Oconee airport.

Airport Director Kevin Short can only shake his head and wonder what might have been had the $4.2 million runway extension project been completed as scheduled.

The 600-foot extension project, which was supposed to have been completed three weeks ago, is intended to give the airport a 5000-foot runway to allow larger aircraft such as Learjets, Rockwell Sabres and Mitsubishi Diamonds to land and take off.

Accommodating bigger aircraft at the local airport translates to more revenue from fuel sales.

Unfortunately, the runway project could be delayed many more months because engineers dropped the ball by signing off on erosion control work that had not been permitted by state regulators.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said

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Workers were missing in action again at the Oconee County Regional Airport on Thursday. JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

AIRPORT: Project lags

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Thursday that no new work would be done on extending the runway until all additional soil erosion work required under a permit issued by the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control is completed.

At its last meeting Aug. 17, the Oconee County Council approved spending $981,451.50 on the additional work.

"That money won't be disbursed until the required work is completed," Moulder said.

The new Change Order has increased the total cost of the project to $4,467,133.

Moulder said a preconstruction meeting between the project engineer and contractor was held Monday.

Neither Moulder nor Short could say when the runway project would be completed.

In the meantime, South Carolina Aeronautics Commission Executive Director Paul Werts confirmed Thursday that Oconee County Regional Airport and Aiken County Municipal would be sharing a $121,580 grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Werts said Oconee would use its portion of the money for surveying services for once the runway project is completed. He said the goal is to make sure that pilots who use instruments for landing are free of any obstacles on their approaches.

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