



International Council of Air Shows
205 Van Buren Street, Suite 120
Herndon VA, 20170
Phone: 703-779-8510
Email: icas@airshows.aero
Website: www.airshows.aero

Statement on
National Cherry Festival Air Show
by John Cudahy, President, International Council of Air Shows
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During the last 35 years, the staff and volunteers of the National Cherry Festival Air Show have built an air show in northern Michigan that is known as one of the elite air shows in the world. Within Traverse City, the event has become part of how Traverse City defines itself...a community that, among many other things, hosts a world-class air show each summer for the benefit of residents and visitors. There are more than 200 air shows held in the United States each year; the National Cherry Festival Air Show is unquestionably among the top ten percent in how the show is planned and operated.

But today, the future of the show is threatened by pre-conditions unilaterally imposed by representatives of the Northwest Regional Airport Authority...stipulations that would handcuff the organizers of the National Cherry Festival Air Show from organizing and conducting the event as they understand it must be organized and conducted...requirements that would inevitably lead to the end of the air show in Traverse City. There is not a single air show in all of North America that is planned and executed under the kind of policies proposed by the Northwest Regional Airport Authority.

Although the airport authority has raised a number of concerns related to the air show, most of them focus on issues related to a supposed disruption of airline operations at Traverse City's Cherry Capital Airport during air show weekend. Despite the protestations of the airport authority, there is nothing particularly unique about the small adjustments and scheduling changes required during the air show weekend; they are commonplace at dozens of air shows throughout the United States.

Resolution of airline scheduling issues in Traverse City and many other communities that host air shows requires close coordination and communications, but these small adjustments on just four days of the year are routinely made by the airlines in consultation with air show management at many air show venues around the country. One member of the National Cherry Festival Air Show team has decades of experience making exactly these kinds of small scheduling adjustments at airports all over the United States. Indeed, because the actual air show is conducted over the waters of West Bay (rather than on airport property), the changes and adjustments needed for the National Cherry Festival Air Show are actually less complicated and fewer in number than the changes made for other air shows at commercial airports with scheduled airline service.

The National Cherry Festival Air Show is a community treasure that has evolved and matured over multiple generations. As one of the largest spectator events in northern Michigan each year, it is a valuable source of entertainment, inspiration and patriotism for hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors. It has an economic impact on Traverse City and the surrounding area that is measured in millions of dollars.

Unfortunately, the decades of hard work and careful cultivation of the show by dedicated staff and hundreds of volunteers can be undone and destroyed almost overnight by those who do not understand the value that the show has for the Traverse City community or how unlikely it is that the show could ever be resurrected if it is crippled by ill-considered, unnecessary and heavy-handed requirements and stipulations.

The International Council of Air Shows urges the Northwest Regional Airport Authority and the people of Traverse City and its surrounding communities to recognize the devastating damage that will be done if the airport authority does not amend the requirements and restrictions it is placing on air show management. The future of the show is in jeopardy and resolution of the current impasse requires the involvement of all those in the community who value the event and want to see it continue.