

# Dispute May Put End to Airport Services

## Mono County Will Stop Operating Mammoth-June Lakes Facility

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Unless there are last-minute developments, the Mammoth-June Lakes Airport north of Bishop will be left without services to air traffic as of 7 p.m. Friday, it appeared Wednesday.

That is the hour and day which Mono County has chosen to relinquish its permit to operate the Eastern Sierra airport on U.S. Forest Service Land near Mammoth Lakes.

The county's decision means that the half dozen employees who operate the airport—handling communications, clearing snow from the 6,500-foot runway and dispensing fuel—will be withdrawn.

The airport is used by pilots of private aircraft and operators of two commercial airlines. As many as 60,000 travelers have used the airport in a single year.

Not only do users face the loss of services, there also remained a possibility Wednesday that the complicated—and possibly litigious—airport affair could lead to the facility's closure, at least temporarily.

The decision on what steps may be taken next to keep the airport open rested with the U.S. Forest Service, which would be holder of the aviation use permit for the airport in the county's absence.

"We feel that it is in the best interest of the public that the airport stays open," Terry Clapham, lands officer for Inyo National Forest said Wednesday in Bishop. "We are investigating various alternatives.

"We have not yet come up with a course of action that we are going to take. Right now, it will close unless some alternative action is taken, and that (closure) is possible."

Clapham added that the Forest Service is trying to work out an accommodation by the county's Friday deadline, but he declined to discuss what steps are being considered.

However, it appeared Wednesday that one of the alternatives could be a Forest Service decision to take over the airport and—after proper notification—leave it open, but unattended.

Yvonne Gibson, spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration's regional office in San Francisco, said the state Division of Aeronautics had advised the Forest Service of that possibility.

There seems to be wholehearted agreement among county, state and federal officials about the need to keep the airport open for public convenience, safety and use, as well as the benefit to the area's recreationally based economy.

But the Mammoth-June Lakes Airport has been the center recently of an increasingly bitter quarrel between Mono County and Mammoth Skylodge Corp., the private firm that built the airport in 1965 and still owns its facilities.

The county and Mammoth Skylodge, headed by Flave George, a Los Angeles-area resident, agreed to a sales contract in November, 1978, and entered escrow in April, 1979.

Operation of the airport was taken over by Mono County on Jan. 1, 1979, and subsequently the county obtained an operating permit from the Forest Service in its name.

But escrow never closed and the Mono County Board of Supervisors, meeting in Bridgeport, directed the county treasurer-tax collector to withdraw \$100,000 plus interest from an escrow account with the Bank of America.

The county also notified the FAA in a mailgram Tuesday that it will discontinue operation of the airport by Friday.

Each side in the heated dispute blames the other for the failed negotiations leading to the present situation and George indicated in a telephone interview this week that Mammoth Skylodge is considering filing a lawsuit against the county.