

Homestead Air Reserve Base Position Statement

March 12, 2021

A Coalition of stakeholders collectively voices support for Homestead Air Reserve Base (HARB) to continue serving only military and governmental uses in perpetuity.

We oppose ALL non-military aviation use of HARB.

Our Coalition is a broad-based alliance of homeowners, national park supporters, anglers, business owners, and environmental organizations with serious concerns about Miami-Dade's actions regarding HARB.

Along the same lines, many of our groups successfully opposed the effort to convert HARB to a private commercial airport over 20 years ago.

In 2001, after extensive studies, the US Air Force determined that private commercial use of HARB would pose unacceptable adverse consequences. **Those adverse consequences are a greater threat today than 20 years ago when the Air Force Record of Decision (ROD) rejected a commercial airport at HARB.**

The Air Force ROD was specific: HARB represents “special circumstances”; it is “proximate to and located between two national parks.”, “The parks are under assault from urbanization and other pressures.”, “There is a huge national and state investment being made in protecting and restoring the south Florida ecosystem.”, “the Air Force will not allow the environmental impacts of a commercial airport in this unique location between two national parks.”, “...the development of a commercial airport ... in such close proximity to Biscayne and Everglades National Parks...poses unacceptable risks to these natural resources.”, “...a commercial airport would not be consistent with the purposes of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan”, “Neither land banking nor commercial airport development nor use to support commercial airport development will be permitted.”

Our opposition to any non-military use of HARB is based on the following:

- The County is pursuing a “limited general aviation use” of HARB, but commercial cargo would not be banned. Long-established legal precedent restricts the right of local government to limit or control air traffic.
- Some Miami-Dade County Commissioners made clear their intent to promote HARB for extensive cargo operations.
- MD Aviation projects nearly twenty thousand enplanements within five years.
- Capacity to meet general aviation needs is only a few miles away, at Miami Executive Airport (Tamiami).
- County correspondence indicates that a Fixed-Base Operator (FBO) at HARB is not needed or financially feasible.

The authorization of any non-military aviation use of HARB is a slippery slope that will eventually lead to extensive commercial cargo, jeopardizing South Florida's precious natural resources and the economic value of Biscayne Bay, the Everglades and other farmland and natural areas in the southern part of Miami-Dade County.

Our opposition to any non-military use of HARB also reflects:

- Natural resources: The proposed operation is in close proximity to threatened Biscayne and Everglades National Parks and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary including fragile coral reefs, vibrant fisheries and critical habitats for federally listed endangered species, which attract several million national and international visitors annually and otherwise serve as the foundation for billion-dollar tourism and fishery industries.
- Water threats: Stormwater management at the site is extraordinarily challenging because of a groundwater table just beneath the surface. The Air Force has been engaged, for decades, in a comprehensive clean-up of the air base according to federal rules; an effort which would inevitably be compromised by the addition of commercial, private aircraft activities.
- Immediately downstream of the Base are mangrove forests, wetlands and near-shore seagrass that are highly sensitive to changes in surface water flow and quality, such as pulse flows that disturb salinity regimes. The current ecological crisis in Biscayne Bay has highlighted the problems created by stormwater runoff into the Bay.
- Agricultural resources: The site is surrounded by scarce agricultural land, wetlands and critical wildlife habitat, which federal, state and local law seek to protect from urban uses.
- Noise and air pollution impacting neighbors as well as wildlife.

Non-military use of HARB will undermine the legislative and regulatory commitments by local governments including Miami-Dade County, the state of Florida, and the federal government to protect our national parks, Biscayne Bay and Florida Bay, as well as restore and protect the broader Everglades ecosystem.

Non-military use of HARB would inevitably lead to the negative impacts and would irrevocably compromise the intent of the 2001 Air Force ROD, which was itself the result of many years of heated controversy.

It is incumbent on Miami-Dade County to safeguard our national parks, Biscayne Bay, Florida Bay and the broader Everglades ecosystem for the benefit of our economy, our residents and future generations. The risk of irreparable damage to these precious natural resources presented by opening the door to “limited general aviation” at HARB – and starting down the slippery slope towards full commercial aviation and cargo operations – is simply not worth those costs. The Air Force recognized this 20 years ago when it determined that a commercial aviation facility at HARB was unacceptable and recommended the County adopt a mixed-use plan.

We ask Miami-Dade County to remain steadfast to protect our neighborhoods, our communities and to focus on expanding economic opportunities as a result of our proximity to Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park, Biscayne Bay, Florida Bay and the broader Everglades ecosystem.

For these reasons, we oppose ANY non-military aviation at HARB.

Coalition Members

- *Audubon Florida*
- *Bonefish Tarpon Trust*
- *The Everglades Foundation*
- *Everglades Protection Alliance*
- *Florida Bay Forever*
- *Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association*
- *Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Foundation*
- *Friends of Pennekamp State Park and Dagny Johnson State Park*
- *Friends of the Everglades*
- *National Parks Conservation Association*
- *Ocean Reef Conservation Association*
- *Tropical Audubon Society*