

Chambers Field Tree Removal FAQs

Naval Station Norfolk has been conducting landscape maintenance on Navy property along Mason Creek to ensure Chambers Field is in compliance with federal (14 C.F.R. § 77.21) and Department of Defense (DoD) (UFC 3-260-1) regulations.. The landscape maintenance includes the clearing of trees and vegetation at both the east and west ends of Chambers Field. Commodore Park and Granby Shores are across Mason Creek from the east end of the runway. Adherence to these requirements is imperative to maintain flight safety for our pilots as well as the local community.

Timeline:

Nov 2008 – UFC 3-260-1 was released. Prior to implementation, the Clear Zone /Airfield Obstructions Management Plan (CZ/AOMP) had to be completed and an Environmental Assessment (EA) had to be performed to meet the National Environmental Policy Act requirement. Data collection was already underway to analyze the impacts of the requirements on Chambers Field and to complete the CZ/AOMP when the UFC was released.

May 2011 – Commander, Navy Installation Command conducted its first evaluation of the Airfield Management of Chambers Field and identified vegetation that needed to be cleared.

Aug 2011 – Environmental Assessment (EA) was started.

Oct 2011 – The Clear Zone /Airfield Obstructions Management Plan for Chambers Field was completed.

Mar-May 2012 – Trees within Clear Zone, outside of wetlands and archeologically sensitive areas were removed. Trees in wetland and archeologically sensitive areas remained in place pending completion of the Environmental Assessment (EA).

Nov 2012 – Environmental Assessment was completed. NSN requested funding for the clearing of the remaining trees. Due to fiscal constraints, funding was not available in Fiscal Year 2013.

Feb 2014 - Commander, Navy Installation Command conducted another airfield evaluation and determined again that, “lateral clearances are a major concern due to trees and their encroachment in the primary safety zone including the approach to Runway 28.”

Mar 2014- Funding was identified to remove remaining trees in Clear Zones and Transitional Areas to bring the airfield into full compliance. Process to request permit to remove trees in environmentally sensitive areas began.

Oct 2014 - The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality authorized coverage for this project under the Virginia Wetland Program General Permit Number WP4 in October 2014. The authorization number is WP4-14-1071.

FAQ:

Q1) Why must the trees be removed now?

A1) When the requirement came out in 2008, the long process to come into compliance was already underway. In October 2014, we finalized the process ensuring all appropriate plans, assessments, permits and funding were in place.

Q2) Are there eagle nests in the trees?

A2) No. The Natural Resource Manager inspected the property for eagle's nests on 1Oct14 and again on 5Nov14. Although there are eagles in the area there are currently no eagles nesting in any of the vegetation within the project area around Chambers Field.

Q3) Will the Navy plant low-lying vegetation in the area?

A3) No, a plan is not in place to plant low-lying vegetation in areas where we are conducting tree removal. Some of the affected tree removal areas are within the runway environment Clear Zone which requires the topography to be graded. Grading of the Clear Zone ensures it is cleared and free of abrupt surface irregularities, ditches, and ponding areas. No aboveground structures, objects, or roadways that are not mission related are permitted in the graded area. Additional areas slated for tree removal are located within other restrictive Airspace Transitional areas. The height of restriction varies based on the distance from the runway environment. These areas also must be kept clear of objects which could damage an aircraft conducting flight operations.

Q4) How is the Navy going to prevent the contractor from dumping vegetation and debris in Mason Creek?

A4) The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality authorized coverage for this project under the Virginia Wetland Program General Permit Number WP4. The authorization number is WP4-14-1071. The permit language expressly states that all debris is to be removed from the site and disposed of properly in an upland location. The Contractor is prohibited from dumping debris into Mason Creek. Additionally, the contract requires that verification is provided to the government indicating proper disposal for each tree removed. The government will provide oversight of the contractor to ensure the project is completed in accordance with the contract and permit requirements.

Q5) Will the removal of the trees cause erosion in the area?

A5) The scope of this project includes only flush cutting at the base of the trees such that there will be no (or minimal) ground disturbance. Because the root systems are not going to be disturbed we are not decreasing the stability of the current conditions and therefore wouldn't expect to see an increase in erosion. Erosion control devices such as silt fencing and drop inlet filters will be used throughout the tree removal process to ensure debris and soils are kept from entering the storm drain system and waterways.

Q6) Why do the trees out of the Clear Zone have to be clear cut?

A6) The trees in this project outside of the Clear Zones are within transitional areas. Several considerations went into the decision to clear cut those trees. The height of restriction in these areas varies based on the distance from the runway environment. Due to the number of trees in violation and the fact that they vary in size, it is cost prohibitive to measure the height of each tree and cut it down to the minimal acceptable level. Additionally, a large portion of the trees would have to be cut drastically or topped to meet compliance. The practice of topping trees is not recommended by arborists as it often leads to limb failure, damage and/or death of a tree. Dead and damaged trees create more of a safety hazard to pilots, neighboring properties and nearby personnel.

Q7) What is an archeologically sensitive area?

A7) An archaeological sensitive area is an area considered to have potential for intact archaeological resources based on historical data, land forms, limited disturbance, and archaeological investigations.