

# **In Our View: Don't Tread on Pearson**

## **Feds' badgering of museum must stop; partnership has worked well for years**

As of Tuesday, February 5, 2013

The decision by the National Park Service to terminate a partnership with local groups for managing the Pearson Air Museum signals an unwarranted abandonment of three long-standing principles. If federal officials cannot restore the partnership as it has thrived for years, Congress should intervene. U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Camas, on Tuesday adamantly declared she is willing to pursue such action.

The first principle to be abandoned is found on the NPS' own website: "We are proud that tribes, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individual citizens ask for our help in revitalizing their communities, preserving local history, celebrating local heritage, and creating close to home opportunities for kids and families to get outside, be active and have fun." Yet, by denying permits to multiple groups to use Pearson Air Museum, the NPS — specifically, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site Superintendent Tracy Fortmann — has turned its back on that very guideline.

Pearson Air Museum has been essentially evicted from the building where Fort Vancouver National Trust staff and volunteers have provided superb management and stewardship skills for years. Current plans to move museum exhibits and other equipment to a nearby hangar are unacceptable.

Second, the agreement among the NPS, the city of Vancouver and the Fort Vancouver National Trust for management of Pearson Air Museum has splendidly served all stakeholders since it was signed in 1995. Yet the NPS now suddenly says many local events that have long been held at the museum do not fall within federal permit guidelines.

Third, the principle of smooth collaboration between federal and city agencies, which in this case has thrived for 18 years, now appears at risk. We cannot find a single reason for this partnership to be threatened or drastically altered. Skeptics who doubt that multiple layers of government cannot work well together now find fuel for their cynicism. This is a classic example of a problem that never existed until it was created by federal officials.

The preferred solution is for the NPS and the National Historic Site officials to re-establish their emphasis on public access, managed by local entities. Herrera Beutler said on Tuesday she has discussed the matter with the House Resources Committee, and a congressional hearing is possible for the Park Service to explain its stance. She also has scheduled a meeting with the chair of the House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee and NPS officials.

If those efforts do not succeed, we urge Herrera Beutler to follow this strategy: "I'm also drafting a bill to turn management of the Pearson Air Museum and surrounding land over to the City of Vancouver and Fort Vancouver National Trust."

It doesn't have to come to that, but Herrera Beutler said in an email statement: "While I've been working diligently to foster a local solution, the Park Service's actions are now leaving me little choice but to pursue a Congressional initiative."

The path to resolution may appear murky, but this much is crystal clear: The federal badgering of Pearson Air Museum must stop, and local public access must be returned to its former high levels.