



PENSACOLA AIRPORT COULD START KEEPING BEES

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Honeybees around the world are finding unlikely new homes at airports, and the Pensacola International [Airport](#) could be next in line to host local hives.

The hives are typically kept along the outskirts of airport property, far from the runways, air traffic controllers and baggage carts.

"It would be beneficial for both the bees and the community," Interim Airport Director Dan Flynn said.

The green space of an airport provides a prime location for honeybee hives because of the vast amount of space, lack of human disruption and minimal pesticide usage.

"Now is not the right time of the year to put the bees in," Flynn said. "It will most likely be in the later winter months when we approach local beekeepers about the possibility."

The first airport to incorporate honeybee hives onto their property was Germany's Hamburg Airport in 1999. Since then, St. Louis, Seattle and Chicago have incorporated hives into the green spaces of their major airports with positive responses from both the community and the hives.

"There is a need in the community to have more bees," Flynn said. "We just are not seeing the wild hives like we used to."

Many commercial honeybees are used in pollination services for farmers around the country, allowing crops to flourish, aiding in the production of more than one third of the food Americans consume each year.

According to a study conducted by the Bee Informed Partnership -- a collaborative group of universities and research labs -- the number of honeybee deaths in the U.S. has significantly increased since 2014.

The cause of the rise in deaths in the bees is still uncertain, but many think neonicotinoids could be a contributing factor, in addition to Colony Collapse Disorder.

The Environmental Protection Agency released their results of a long-term study last summer, deeming the effects of neonicotinoids to cause a wide range of effects on pollinators and to be a driving factor in the decline of bee populations.

Careful and preventative pesticide measures will need to be taken into consideration if honeybees are housed within the Pensacola Airport's 1,400 acres. Much of the property lies beyond the fenced in portion closest to the runways and taxiways.

"While inside the fence is best to keep other people away from the hives, we have a lot of activity going on inside the fence," Flynn said. "We have a good bit of grounds maintenance that takes place and I would need to take that into account."

Flynn is planning to reach out to local beekeepers around December, which will allow ample time to prepare for the bees and discuss location options for the hives.

President for the Escarosa Beekeeper's Association, Shelby Johnson, thinks adding honeybee hives to the airport could be a great step, but with the right steps taken.

"I think it would probably work best to have a commercial beekeeper out there, you're going to want to have someone that knows how to move the bees in a hurry," Johnson said.

In the event of a hurricane or a major storm, a commercial beekeeper would have the knowledge and equipment to move the bees to a safe location as quickly as possible. A commercial keeper would also have a significantly larger amount of hives than a hobbyist keeper, which would provide more bees to continue pollinating local plants and flowers, and more honey to harvest.

"Then it'd be the full circle," Johnson said. "They could sell the local honey that was made at the airport, right inside the airport."

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