



CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY™

Catalina Island Conservancy to Bring U.S. Marines to Catalina to Repair Airport Runway and Provide Strategic Training Opportunity

Airport in the Sky to Remain Open during Construction

LONG BEACH – (October 30, 2018) – The Catalina Island Conservancy, one of California’s oldest and largest land trusts, is proud to announce an innovative partnership with the U.S. Marine Corps to bring troops to Catalina to repair the aging main runway at the Island’s only airport and allow for strategic training of Marines.

The \$5 million runway repair project at the Airport in the Sky will be funded by donations to the Conservancy, a nonprofit organization. The project will provide the Conservancy with much-needed repairs for the airport it owns and operates for the public while also offering a unique training opportunity to prepare troops for deploying to islands and other remote destinations to build or repair airfields and other infrastructure.

The Conservancy has entered into this public/private partnership with I Marine Expeditionary Force based at Camp Pendleton, California (I MEF) as part of the Department of Defense’s Innovative Readiness Training Program (IRT), which pairs community needs with military training opportunities.

“The Airport in the Sky is an historic and critical asset, providing access to Catalina Island for first responders, travelers and more than 2 million tons of freight each year. Although privately owned by the nonprofit Catalina Island Conservancy, the Airport in the Sky is operated as a public airport serving the Island’s 4,000 residents, businesses and approximately 1 million annual visitors,” said Tony Budrovich, Catalina Island Conservancy president and CEO. “After approximately two years of working together, we have entered into this win-win partnership between the Conservancy and the Marines to repair the runway, which is aged and beyond its useful life. With this runway repair project, I would project more than 75 years of runway operations in our future.”

The main runway at the Airport in the Sky will be closed on December 9 so that contractors can remove the asphalt to prepare for its replacement with concrete. Pilots can continue to land on a temporary runway so long as they have obtained advance permission, but the number of recreational flights may be reduced. The airport restaurant, the DC3 Grill, will remain open, and tour operators, hikers and others will be able to access it, the airport’s Nature Center and nearby hiking trails during construction. The main runway is slated to reopen in April 2019.

“The repair of the Conservancy’s Airport in the Sky runway project offers an incredible training opportunity to the Marines,” said Lt. Colonel Duncan Buchanan of I MEF. “This challenging project

allows Marines to gain valuable experience in repairing damaged runways, and increases our capabilities and readiness to tackle a range of military operations across the globe. It also ensures that the community benefits from a fully operational airport for daily provisions as well as to aid in any potential recovery efforts after natural disasters."

I MEF has assigned 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (3rd MAW) from Marine Corps Air Station Miramar to support this unique training opportunity. The 3rd MAW has identified Marine Wing Support Squadron 373 (MWSS-373) to serve as the lead element for the successful repair of the runway.

The project includes the transportation of over 500 tons of military equipment to Catalina Island in mid-December. The equipment will arrive by barge to the freight dock at Catalina Harbor and use existing roads to travel to the Airport in the Sky.

More than 100 active-duty Marines are scheduled to arrive by helicopter or by boat in January to begin construction. Military personnel will establish a camp at the airport for the duration of the project.

"As we do on all of our projects on the Island, we have worked to ensure the runway repair project is designed to protect the Island's natural habitats and resources," said Budrovich. "By restoring one of the Island's historic assets, this project will help us continue to fulfill our mission of being a responsible steward of our lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation."

Built by the Wrigley family beginning in 1941, the Airport in the Sky was carved out of the surrounding landscape by leveling two mountain tops and filling in the remaining canyon to create the 3,000-foot main runway. The Airport in the Sky got its name from its location as one of Catalina's highest points, an elevation of 1,602 feet.

During World War II, the airfield and the Island itself were leased to the U.S. government to serve as a front-line in the defense of the nation's West Coast. During the war, the Office of Strategic Services, a forerunner for today's CIA, used the Island as a secret training base for intelligence agents, and the airport's runway was covered with debris so that enemy aircraft would not be able to use it as a base. The U.S. Army and Air Force also utilized the airport as a replacement training center and an alternate for March Air Force Base.

After the war, the airport was opened for public access in 1946. The Conservancy took ownership and responsibility for the airport's operations after the formation of the nonprofit organization in 1972 and has managed it as a general aviation airport.

"Our collaboration with the U.S. Marines is a rare opportunity to maintain the proud history we share on Catalina," said Budrovich. "We invite Island residents and visitors to come to the airport during construction to observe this exceptional military exercise and enjoy the beauty and the open spaces of Catalina's interior."

About the Catalina Island Conservancy

Formed in 1972, the Catalina Island Conservancy is one of California's oldest land trusts. Its mission is to be a responsible steward of its lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation. Through its ongoing efforts, the Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Santa Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land and more than 60 miles of rugged shoreline. It provides access to the Island's wildlands and 50 miles of biking and nearly 165 miles of hiking opportunities within its road and trail system. The Conservancy's Airport in the Sky was opened in 1946 and provides a unique perspective for pilots that resembles landing on an aircraft carrier at 1,601 feet. The Conservancy conducts educational outreach through two nature centers, its Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden and guided experiences in the Island's rugged interior. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is a treasure trove of historical and archaeological sites. It also contains numerous rare and endangered animals and plants. The Island is home to 60 species – and counting – that are found only on Catalina. For additional information, please visit www.catalinaconservancy.org.

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