

**Jonathan Schechter – “Corpus Callosum” Column**  
**Jackson Hole News&Guide– December 28, 2011**

*“Carbon Emissions Fees for (European) Flights Upheld.”*  
– December 21, 2011 *New York Times* headline

Like it or not, we live in a carbon-constrained world. One consequence is that, in January, the European Union will implement a cap-and-trade system requiring major airlines to offset the greenhouse gas emissions produced during their European flights.

Such measures are clearly the wave of the future. Knowing this, Jackson Hole has a choice. One alternative is to drag our feet and/or fight the inevitable. The net result will be that, in a decade or so, we'll become a “me too” airport, eventually buying the carbon credits needed to offset the greenhouse gases emitted by planes using the Jackson Hole Airport.

The other is to make that future work to our advantage by becoming the world's first carbon-neutral airport.

Here's hoping we choose the latter. To that end, my wish for the new year is to see the Jackson Hole Airport issue a statement along the following lines.

Dear Jackson Hole Airport user,

On June 1, 2012, the Jackson Hole Airport will begin charging every plane using the airport a fee sufficient to offset at least 100 percent of the greenhouse gases it generates flying to and from the airport. This fee will apply to all aircraft, both commercial and private, and will be used to buy high-quality carbon credits.

With this step, the Jackson Hole Airport will become the first airport in the world to completely offset the greenhouse gas emissions of all its flights. Idealistically, we are taking this step because, as the only commercial airport in a national park, it is the right thing to do. Pragmatically, we are taking this step because we feel that every airport in the world must eventually become carbon-neutral. By going first, we'll enjoy the first-mover advantage of seeing all other airports adopt what will become known as the “Jackson Hole standard.”

Three basic facts underlie our action.

First, the planet is warming, and human activity is the cause. Those who argue otherwise are on the wrong side of history, as wrong today about climate change as the Catholic Church was 400 years ago about the sun revolving around the earth. Belief is essential to being human, but even the most impassioned belief doesn't trump physical realities.

Second, environmental quality is the foundation of Jackson Hole. Everything this community values – our scenery, wildlife, character, economy and more – is predicated on a healthy natural environment, which in turn is predicated on a healthy global ecosystem.

Yet because Jackson Hole's climate is so extreme, we are exceptionally vulnerable to the consequences of global warming. We are already seeing evidence of this vulnerability, ranging from the decimation of the region's whitebark pine forests to the steady shrinking of the Tetons's glaciers. If these trends continue, global warming will put at risk, and perhaps destroy, all that we value. Rather than allowing ourselves to be passive victims of global warming, we've chosen to act on behalf of that which we love.

Third, Jackson Hole is a conservative community in a conservative state. To us, being conservative means respecting systems which have stood the test of time, and taking personal responsibility for the consequences of our actions.

From that perspective, nothing could be more conservative than respecting the longest-lived, most successful, and most fundamental of all systems: the natural processes which form Earth's ecosystems. Similarly, nothing could be more conservative than taking responsibility for the consequences of the greenhouse gases produced by flights into and out of our institution, the Jackson Hole Airport. In this spirit of true conservatism, we have chosen to act.

How will the program work?

For every flight using the Jackson Hole Airport, we'll determine how much greenhouse gas it generates, and how much it costs to offset that gas. Landing fees for each flight will be raised accordingly,, and we'll use that surcharge to buy high-quality carbon credits. While we acknowledge it would be better not to generate any greenhouse gases at all, we also recognize that, given current technology, our only two choices are to completely close the airport or buy carbon offsets. In our view, half a loaf is better half than none at all.

How will the carbon credit surcharge be paid for? For commercial flights, we expect airlines will raise ticket prices to cover the cost of the surcharge. Please know, however, that we will closely monitor the airlines to ensure they do not use the excuse of the surcharge to gouge their customers. For private planes, the surcharge will be added to their airport usage bill.

We anticipate the carbon offset fee will raise the cost of travel by no more than one percent, and in most cases less. For example, in 2008, completely offsetting the greenhouse gases emitted by every commercial flight into and out of the Jackson Hole Airport would have cost \$468,372, or \$1.65 per passenger. Assuming an average ticket price of \$500, this would amount to a 0.33 percent surcharge, an especially nominal amount in light of the two percent lodging tax visitors pay on their hotel bill. Continuing the comparison, the carbon offset surcharge becomes even more appealing given that a) the lodging tax yields no environmental benefits, and b) becoming the world's first carbon-neutral airport will generate millions of dollars worth of free publicity for Jackson Hole.

We're taking this action for three reasons.

The first is economic self-interest. As noted above, becoming the world's first carbon-neutral airport will create extraordinary amounts of free publicity for Jackson Hole, not only giving Jackson Hole a huge initial public relations jolt, but also producing on-going benefits as airports around the world adopt the "Jackson Hole standard." In addition, creating the "Jackson Hole standard" will be a big boost to the community's efforts to market itself as a premiere eco-tourism destination.

The second, is environmental self-interest.

The simple reality is that Teton County produces 0.001 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. As a result, and as is the case with the Arctic, Antarctica, and low-lying Pacific Ocean nations, there is a huge gulf between our minuscule contribution to global warming and our extreme vulnerability to its effects.

Yet unlike most extremely vulnerable places, Jackson Hole has the chance to actually make a difference in the battle against global warming. This is because, of the hundreds of thousands of people using the Jackson Hole Airport every year, a disproportionate number are influential in finance, industry, culture, government, and the like. As a result, any action Jackson Hole takes will be noticed not just locally, but in centers of power around the world. In this way, Jackson Hole can not only look out for our own

interests, but in our interconnected world, become champions for those vulnerable places which don't occupy as prominent a place on the world's stage.

The third reason is that environmental stewardship is a key component of Jackson Hole's heritage, culture, and character.

Dating back to the founding of the world's first national park, the Tetons region has been extraordinarily influential in shaping how conservation is thought about and practiced worldwide. However, because the world has grown and changed, so too must its approaches toward conservation.

To that end, 21st century stewardship will take a far different shape than its 19th or 20th century predecessors. But just as the ideas generated in this region over the last 150 years have made themselves felt around the world, so too do we anticipate that carbon-neutral air travel will, within a few decades, become the global norm. Hence, making the Jackson Hole Airport the world's first carbon neutral airport is this generation's chance to continue the conservation legacy established by our forebears.

In closing, the 20th century was the "American Century," a period in which America's systems and values shaped not just what the world became, but what it aspired to. Today, there is concern that America's influence is waning, for some of the decisions made in the last 30 years have created profound problems for ourselves, other nations, and most critically, future generations and the planet which will support them.

As a nation, we now face a choice. On the one hand, we can continue doing things as we have, and in so doing further push off the day of reckoning. That approach may continue working for a while, but ultimately some generation must deal with the consequences. Regardless of which generation it is, a strategy of avoidance is not the mark of a true leader.

Alternatively, we can perform a clear-eyed assessment of where we are, and act to steward that which we most value. Such an approach will be the hallmark of whichever nation leads the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we feel that nation should continue to be the United States. To that end, we feel we can make a small contribution toward our nation's continuing world leadership by asking the airport's customers to be responsible for addressing the consequences of their actions.

This is the spirit animating our emissions offset fee. Doing anything less would be an abdication of the legacy we've inherited from our forebears, and the responsibility we owe to future generations.

Whether resident or visitor, enjoy your time in Jackson Hole, and thank you for using the Jackson Hole Airport.

Sincerely yours,

The board and staff of the Jackson Hole Airport.