



The 30 Year Anniversary of the Closing of Kincheloe Air Force Base..The Good, the Bad and the ugly

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In December 1965 the Department of Defense announced its decision to close Kincheloe Air Force Base by October, 1971. According to the Strategic Air Command website, The 507th Fighter Group was deactivated in October 1968, the 438th Fighter Interceptor Squadron was relocated to Griffiss AFB, New York, and the 4609th Air Base Group was activated to support the 449th Bomb Wing. In May, 1971, the decision to close the base was reversed. In an Air Force-wide realignment program, Kincheloe would be kept open and come under the control of the Strategic Air Command. On 01 July 1971, the 449th Bombardment Wing (SAC) assumed command of the base. That 1971 reversal proved to be only a six-year reprieve. The base was inactivated on September 30, 1977, and declared excess on November 15, 1977.

With the closing of the base in 1977, 887 acres fee, 2,817 acres lease, 3.65 acres license, and 1,951 acres easement, for a total of 5,658 acres, was excessed to GSA by SF-118 dated 2 September 1977. Prior to the closing, 1.05 acres lease, 1.10 acres license and 1,639 acres easement had been terminated at various dates, of which 28.75 acres lease and 5 acres easement had been reacquired for a net of 1,607 acres. Of the 5,658 acres excessed to GSA, 3.65 acres were retained by GSA, 2,817 acres were conveyed to the State Base Closure Authority, and the remaining 2,834 acres were conveyed directly to Chippewa County (1,014 acres), the State Department of Corrections (13.8 acres), Pickford Township (127 acres), American Kinross, Inc. (424 acres - previously owned by Nevis - Pauly - Hauss until bankruptcy and foreclosure proceedings occurred in March 1986), and the State of Michigan (1,259 acres).

The deed conveying the airport property to Chippewa County reserved the Government right to have exclusive or non-exclusive use of the airport facilities during a declared emergency. The Government was released from liability for restoration or other damage under any lease or agreement involving the airport. Restoration clauses contained in leases between the Government and the State of Michigan were waived.

Success stories abound at vacated base sites, like in Kinross Township on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The closing of Kincheloe AFB removed 10,000 military personnel and dependents, 700 civilian jobs and a total payroll of \$28 million. Within 12 years after the closing, however, four prisons and one work camp were installed at the base, along with 12 industrial companies and 15 retail businesses. In all, the local tax base had doubled, and the civilian payroll created by the new ventures had reached \$110 million.

30 years later Kincheloe is an unincorporated community, Chippewa County International Airport, Kinross Correctional Facility, and Kinross Charter Township are now located on the property. Additional portions of the site are owned by the State of Michigan. Usage of the land is for public housing, businesses and the airport. Sounds like one heck of a success story. But if you look at what has happened in the past three years under the current Township Board you see a picture of possible disaster. With businesses leaving, schools being closed down, deputy Treasurer stealing thousands of dollars under the Treasures nose, several lawsuits pending including a possible lawsuit against the Supervisor for sexual harassment, thousands of dollars spent on buildings built without proper planning and currently vacant, abandoned buildings everywhere with no money to demolish them we face an uncertain future. We need to act fast to save this community. We need new representation capable of protecting our future. Many people have worked hard to build this community. People like John Gaines now 80 years old he came to Kincheloe Air Force base in the 60's and has been involved as both civilian and elected Township Supervisor (16 years service) since then. John is the one who reminded me of the 30th anniversary. He is not too happy these days. He feels insulted by the current Township government who has told him he is too old to be of any use to them. He has plenty of stories to tell about how things were back then and what a mess we have now.