

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 24, 2003 **Subject:** Outstanding Airport Award Candidate

From: HLN-600 **To:** ANM-610/620

Laurel Municipal Airport, Laurel, Montana is put forward as a Candidate for Outstanding Airport Award to be given at the 2003 FAA / UW Conference.

The basis for the award is as follows:

Laurel airport is a general aviation airport located just west of the city of Billings, and as such is one of our busiest GA locations, currently just under 100 based aircraft. The airport is owned and managed by the Laurel Airport Authority. The chairman, Dr. John Smith, has been at the position since 1971 and has been the primary representative and "spark plug" in developing the airport to its current configuration.

In 1996, a master plan was concluded in order to address significant substandard issues that existed with the prior airport configuration. At the time, the airport's primary runway was a 3,800' by 50' paved runway severely in need of reconstruction. The runway length and configuration was inadequate to accommodate the growing fleet of aircraft that frequent the airport. The planning study and subsequent environmental assessment concluded the need for a longer and wider runway as well as infrastructure to hangar and tie-down the growing numbers of aircraft.

An arduous land acquisition project began shortly after conclusion of the planning effort. Several of the landowners affected by the airport expansion, contested the need for the project. After years of working through negotiations and district court, the authority successfully acquired the land. Construction began in the spring of 2000 of a new 75' by 5,200' runway, lighting and connector taxiways. Subsequent projects have included completion of a parallel taxiway, expansion and reconstruction of the apron and hangar access taxiways. Over \$3.5 million was granted over the course of the last three years, requiring a matching share of over \$350,000 from the local community and airport authority.

In addition to approximately 100-based tenants, Rocky Mountain Flight School has recently located at the airport, and provides significant amounts of student aviation activity for the Yellowstone County communities. The airport is now able to accommodate fleets of aircraft that would not have been able to safely operate at the airport, prior to the improvements. This was a very challenging project that through the significant efforts of a small airport administration and supporting entities, were able to successfully complete.