



LAUREL AIRPORT WINS AWARD—MT

Congratulations to the Laurel Airport. Recently the airport was awarded the "Outstanding Regional Airport" at the annual Federal Aviation Administration's Northwest Mountain Airport Conference in Seattle, Washington. The coveted award is given to an airport in recognition of recent exemplary work. Individuals within the FAA management, without the airports knowledge, nominated the candidates for the award. After a field of candidates is selected, the FAA chooses only a select few to receive this award. The written nomination for the award acknowledges the manager's commitment to the airport since 1971, and his ability to act as a "spark plug" for airport development. Laurel Airport is one of the busiest GA airports in the state with just under 100-based aircraft. It is also past host airport of Laurel Aviation & Technology Week with over 15,000 students participating in the program.

After a 1996 master plan was concluded, significant changes were in the works. At the time, the airport's primary runway was 3,800' x 50', and severely in need of restoration. 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 the hangar and tie-down area.

An arduous land acquisition began shortly thereafter, which was hotly contested by adjacent landowners. After years of working through negotiations, construction finally began in

2000 on a new 5,200' x 75' runway. Subsequent projects have also included a parallel taxiway, apron and hangar expansion and other improvements. Over \$3.5 million was granted over the course of the last three years, requiring a match of over \$350,000 from the local airport authority. In addition to approximately 100-based tenets, Rocky Mountain Flight School has also 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 improvements.

The nomination went on to explain that "This was a very challenging project that through the significant efforts of a small airport administration and supporting entities, were able to successfully complete." The engineer for the project was Craig Canfield of Interstate Engineering, Inc. We would like to extend our congratulations to Dr. John Smith, the dedicated airport manager, who was on hand to receive this award for all of his hard work and effort. ♦

Courtesy of:
Montana and the Sky,
MDT—Dept. of Transportation,
Aeronautics Division

