

NEW RECREATIONAL AIRSTRIP OPENS IN MONTANA Pilots put finishing touches on Russian Flat



Armed with hand tools, sunscreen, insect repellent and a lot of enthusiasm, 40 volunteer pilots, families and guests spent the August 21-22 weekend putting the finishing touches on America's newest public landing strip. Now open for use, Russian Flat is in Montana's Lewis and Clark National Forest and is ideal for recreational flying purposes. It's adjacent to a tree-sheltered USFS, leave no trace campground and vault toilet.

Russian Flat was just a twinkle in the eyes of many recreational flying enthusiasts seven years ago. The addition of an airstrip at Russian Flat was included in the October 2007 Travel Management Plan of the Lewis and Clark Nat'l Forest. Through the efforts of the Montana Pilots Association, (MPA) and with a grant from the Recreational Aviation Foundation, (RAF) the airstrip is now open to the public. MPA President Wade Cebulski said, "This is a precedent-setting event." Cebulski added, "I was ecstatic at this weekend's turnout at Russian Flat. I've been pleased at the exceptional turnout of volunteers throughout Montana this year. Dan Prill, Century Company, Tim Robertson and Jeff Patnode especially are to be commended for their dedication to Russian Flat. It wasn't an easy project."

MPA volunteer Dan Prill has helped lead the effort from its beginning stages of identifying the location, and shepherding the project through the public planning process, working closely with Judith District Ranger Ron Wiseman. Prill – who also serves as board member and vice president of the Recreational Aviation Foundation – explained that the project fit into the mission of the RAF, which provided funding for materials, purchase of the vault toilet, a runway roller and grass seed.

Ranger Wiseman said, "From the very beginning of this project, it has gone as well as I could have envisioned, especially the last two years of implementation. We appreciate the high level of cooperation from all different aspects of the pilots. The volunteers respected our requests for low-impact access, and minimal disturbance to the land."

He continued, "I was impressed with the attitude that in spite of not getting everything they requested in the Travel Plan, the pilots put their best efforts into carrying out this project. We look forward to cooperating on the last few details yet to be done."

Century Companies of Lewistown donated labor and equipment to the project under the supervision of Tim Robertson. Central Montana Hangar provided breakfast on Saturday and Sunday and a steak and corn BBQ on Saturday. The RAF provided a bratwurst lunch on Saturday. Special guests were Ron Wiseman,

USFS Judith District Ranger; Wade Cebulski, MPA president; John McKenna, RAF President; Pete Smith, Central Montana Hangar President; and Don and Marilyn Derks, the USFS permittees who graze their cattle on Russian Flat. Taking honors for farthest distance was MPA member Richard Benton, DVM of Jackson, Mississippi.

Cebulski concluded, "The RAF has really hit the nail on the head getting the world to recognize that aviation is part of recreation."

RAF President John McKenna said, "Montana is seen nationally as a recreation destination, and Russian Flat airstrip serves to enlarge opportunities for recreational aviation. It's collaborative partnerships like this that will ensure the ongoing success of recreational flying destinations."

Wiseman added, "Saturday evening was quite a sight . . . people sitting around a fire together, really enjoying the opportunity."

A formal dedication ceremony is planned for summer of 2011.

Russian Flat (N 46° 43' 28.24" W 110° 24' 41.07") is approx. 6400' elevation and 3000' long. Bring tie downs and park in the corral, as there could be cattle grazing. Recommend landing uphill to the west; takeoff to the east, conditions permitting. 122.90. As always, pilots are responsible for their and their airplane's capabilities. Practice "no trace" camping; no fire rings; Portable firepit lock combo: CTAF