

Recreational Aviation Foundation and MPA Partnership Sets the Bar

Montana pilots will remember that the Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF) had its beginnings right here in Big Sky Country, an aviation-friendly state. In 2003 several Montana pilots were frustrated that airstrips throughout the west were under threat of closures for various reasons. They formed the RAF with the intention of approaching public land managers and private tract owners to explore opening and preserving recreational airstrips. From the very beginning, the RAF directors realized how important the state pilot organizations would be to the success of the plan.

The RAF is gaining recognition throughout the country. It now has supporters in 45 states, multiplying its fundraising efforts and results beyond Montana.

Working closely with Montana Pilots Association, RAF director Dan Prill initiated the Russian Flat proposal in the Lewis & Clark Nat'l Forest. After a three-year effort, it was successfully ushered through the public lands planning process. With the commitment of the MPA for ongoing maintenance, the main message carried that aviation is a legitimate backcountry user and the site was approved, becoming the first new airstrip on USFS land in 45 years.

MPA's Recreational Airstrip Committee had garnered donations, some of which came from out-of-state donors for projects like Russian Flat.

The RAF granted \$8,000 to MPA's Recreational Airstrip Committee; and the RAF directly provided another \$25,000 for improvements at the strip.

MPA's Central Montana Hangar members volunteered for numerous work parties; organizing other Hangar members to help. Century Companies of Lewistown contributed equipment and labor to prepare the site.

The success in Montana – now considered the flagship partnership – demonstrates how the RAF and state pilot organizations work together to preserve and in the case of Montana, create new airstrips with recreational potential. RAF President John McKenna of Bozeman sums it up by saying, “We at the RAF appreciate working with Montana Pilots Association to see this project through. We can all be proud of the successful outcome of our efforts. The RAF will use this as a template in other states with the same goal of creating new recreational flying destinations.”



Photo 1) Ranger Ron Wiseman, Tim Robertson of Century Companies, Dan Prill, Vo Robertson and Jerry Hover.



Photo 2) Just some of the hard-working volunteers involved in the Russian Flat project: Tom Davis, RAF director Dan Prill, Jon Hudson, Jeff Patnode of Century Companies and RAF Pres. John McKenna