



## NEW MEXICO AIRSTRIP NETWORK RECREATIONAL AIRSTRIP INITIATIVE

➤ **INTRODUCTION:** The New Mexico Airstrip Network (NMAN) initiative is a project to promote general aviation recreational activities in the State by fostering a working coalition of multiple state & federal agencies, organizations, and private land owners. The common goal is to increase the availability of public access airstrips (dirt, turf, and paved), thereby increasing utilization to a wide range of recreational opportunities. The NMDOT Aviation Division's involvement is centered on the development and promotion of aviation within the State as mandated by state statute.

➤ **BACKGROUND:** There is a growing national trend towards the use of recreational airstrips by general aviation due to the ever increasing cost of flying and the desire for more backcountry leisure time without having to travel a great distance. In the past local efforts have been made by members of the New Mexico Pilots Association (NMPA) in association with the Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF), to initiate an airstrip program. While there has been progress, it became apparent that there was a need for a unified effort from a variety of stakeholders. NMDOT Aviation Division (NMAD) along with NMPA has agreed to join in a cooperative effort to model a program which has demonstrated success in Idaho. The Idaho Airstrip Network (IAN) Action Plan embodies airstrip assets while bringing together state, federal and private parties to preserve, develop and improve the inventory of facilities.



➤ **PROCESS:** NMAD and NMPA members formed a planning committee which has organized a steering committee comprised of stakeholders from State, Federal, and private parties to develop a New Mexico Airstrip Network and Action Plan based on that of Idaho's. The comprehensive plan recognizes current assets and outlines a plan to enhance and conserve these while developing new airstrips. Desired participants include: State DOT, Tourism, Economic Development, State Parks, Game and Fish; USDA, USFS, BLM, BIA; NMPA, Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF), NM Wildlife Federation (NMWF), Civil Air Patrol (CAP), Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), NM Council of Outfitters and Guides, EMS organizations, NM Airport Managers Association, NM Aviation and Aerospace Association, local Chambers of Commerce, and other interested parties.



➤ **NEED:** New Mexico has a wide range of airstrips from public to private that offer excellent recreational opportunities that are not being utilized. First, a coordinated effort is needed to identify and maintain currently existing airstrips, followed by development of a plan to add new ones to the inventory. Secondly,

there is a need to formulate a marketing campaign to inform, educate, and invite not only the general public to access the unique opportunities the state has to offer but also educate potential stakeholders of the benefits that are realized by other states with a recreational airstrip network.



- **SOLUTION:** Since there is such a diverse background of interest by all the needed stakeholders, the logical solution would be to follow the example of Idaho in the formation and the structure they used in their airstrip network. By developing and following a collaborative action plan based on the proven Idaho model, including lessons learned, a viable program can be developed with fewer problems in a shorter period of time.
- **BENEFITS:** New Mexico has not taken advantage of these aviation assets as have other western states. Idaho is the model for all, but Utah, MT, CO and AZ all are working with volunteer organizations such as NMPA and RAF to improve and expand their airstrip networks. This initiative will bring about an unprecedented accessibility while fostering a greater level of cooperation between the public and private sectors.

The State has much to offer with a more moderate climate, scenery unparalleled in comparison and wilderness opportunities. In addition to the increased recreational activities (hunting, fishing, camping,



hiking, etc.), this initiative will encourage economic activity and growth at nearby portal communities and the state as a whole from more travel and tourism. Additional remote airstrips would also improve public safety and welfare by increasing access to wildfire operations and emergency medical evacuation capability. Working with the Tourism Department, a marketing plan could be developed to promote aviation tourism opportunities in New Mexico.

- **COST:** Initial cost is administrative. In the implementation of the Plan there would be expanded costs of development, maintaining and preserving these airstrips. Every effort within the Plan would take advantage of volunteer manpower such as has been provided by NMPA or other groups. The invested parties would work to organize and plan volunteer activities to educate and maintain the network. A Foundation would be organized, like Idaho, to solicit donations from private organizations such as Recreational Aviation Foundation, Wolf Aviation Fund and private individuals. State resources could be utilized at eligible locations.



- **CONCLUSION:** This is an effort that is long overdue in New Mexico and has enormous potential for improving the State's recreational assets; promoting aviation, as well as having a positive impact on state and local economies by increased tourism.