



## **New Mexico Airstrip Network Partnership Agreement Signed**

It was a momentous day for backcountry and recreational aviation in New Mexico with a joint signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), formalizing a collaborative partnership. USFS Regional Forester, Calvin Joyner, BLM New Mexico Director, Amy Lueders, NMDOT Deputy Secretary Loren Hatch, Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF) president, John McKenna, New Mexico Pilots Association (NMPA) president Jerry Donovan, and executives from additional statewide organizations were present to share perspectives on mutual benefits of this agreement.

The New Mexico Airstrip Network (NMAN) steering committee started two years ago to identify airstrips with unrealized recreational potential on BLM, USFS, state, and private lands. The MOU establishes a framework for cooperation to establish and implement a strategy and action plan. “MOUs create an understanding of how we can work together and share roles, responsibilities, and resources to achieve common goals”, said Region 3 Forest Service Director of Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness, Francisco Valenzuela, when asked about his organization’s involvement.

The NMAN began through a team effort involving the NMDOT Aviation Division, NMPA, and the RAF. Steering committee member and NM Aviation Director, Steve Summers, stated that “NMAN hopes to replicate the similar collaboration achieved in Idaho, which advanced aviation and produced positive economic impact for rural communities throughout the state.”

To illustrate what could be accomplished, Mark Spencer, RAF Arizona Liaison shared a video of volunteer efforts to restore the historic cabin at Double Circle Ranch and restore Grapevine airstrip asphalt. “Volunteer involvement is key to long term success. 83 volunteers from the aviation community turned out to make the Grapevine project happen”, Mark explained.

New Mexico’s aviation volunteer base is growing, through five years of successful NMPA organized work parties and fly-ins to the Negrito airstrip in the Gila National Forest, plus private airstrips including Champion Ranch, Murrow Ranch on the Divide, Mystic Bluffs, Whitewater Mesa, and the newly charted Taos – Grant Besley airstrip. Volunteers have moved rocks, installed tie-downs and windsocks, mowed, and cleared brush.

Although New Mexico has a wide range of airstrips that offer excellent recreational opportunities, more could be done to promote aviation assets and tourism, especially as they relate to hunting, fishing, outfitting, hiking,

biking, and camping. New Mexico offers unparalleled scenic opportunities combined with a moderate climate and an average of 280 days of sunshine per year. In an open letter, El Paso resident and back country aircraft pilot Brock Benjamin wrote “There are few things that surpass flying right up to your campsite and being in the middle of a national forest looking at the stars that night.”

For more information, visit [New Mexico Airstrip Network](#).

**Photo:** Seated from Right to left: Calvin Joyner, Forest Service (FS) Region 3 Regional Forester; John McKenna, RAF President; Amy Lueders, BLM New Mexico State Director; Loren Hatch, NMDOT Deputy Cabinet Secretary; Bob Hudson, NM Airport Managers Association President; Jim Welles, NM Council of Outfitters and Guides (NMCOG)President

Standing from Right to left: Mark Spencer, RAF Public Lands Liaison and Arizona Liaison; Jim Upchurch, FS Region 3 Deputy Regional Forester; Kerrie Romero, NMCOG Executive Director; Joyce Woods, New Mexico Pilots Association (NMPA) VP; Rol Murrow, RAF Board Member; Francisco Valenzuela, FS Region 3 Director of Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness; Steve Summers, New Mexico Aviation Director; Ron Keller, USPA VP and NMPA Board Member; Bill Shuert, NM Aerospace Aviation Association President; Les Nokes, NMPA Board Member; Jerry Donovan, NMPA President; Debby Lucero, BLM Realty Specialist; Kyung Koh Willis, FS Region 3 Recreation Planner; David Hamann, NMPA Backcountry Committee.

Additional partners not pictured: Matt Geisel, NM Economic Development Cabinet Secretary Designee; Rebecca Latham, NM Tourism Dept Cabinet Secretary; Erica Saccoia, AOPA Senior VP; and Jack Reynolds, US Pilots Association President.