



Planning for the future, together

FINAL REPORT

April 2026 DRAFT



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Abbreviations

AARC	Alaska Railroad Corporation
AASP	Alaska Aviation System Plan
AC	Advisory Circular
ADIP	Airport Data and Information Portal
AIP	Airport Improvement Program
CSFS	Clear Space Force Station
DAAPS	Denali Area Airport Planning Study
DOT&PF	Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
LRDR	long-range discrimination radar
NPIAS	National Plan of Integrated Airport System
SAG	Stakeholder Advisory Group



Chapter 1: Introduction

The Denali Area Airport Planning Study (DAAPS) is a study of the airport system in and near the Denali Borough, Alaska. The study, funded by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), includes all airports in the region with a focus on public-use airports, as shown in Figure 1. The DAAPS was prompted by the Denali Borough [2015; 2018] and Doyon Limited [2022] interest in a regional airport and DOT&PF's need to address land ownership challenges at Healy River Airport (HRR). The aim of the DAAPS is to document the condition and use of each airport in the region, understand the needs of communities and stakeholders, and determine where DOT&PF investments should be focused to best support the region and meet FAA's goals for a National Airport System.

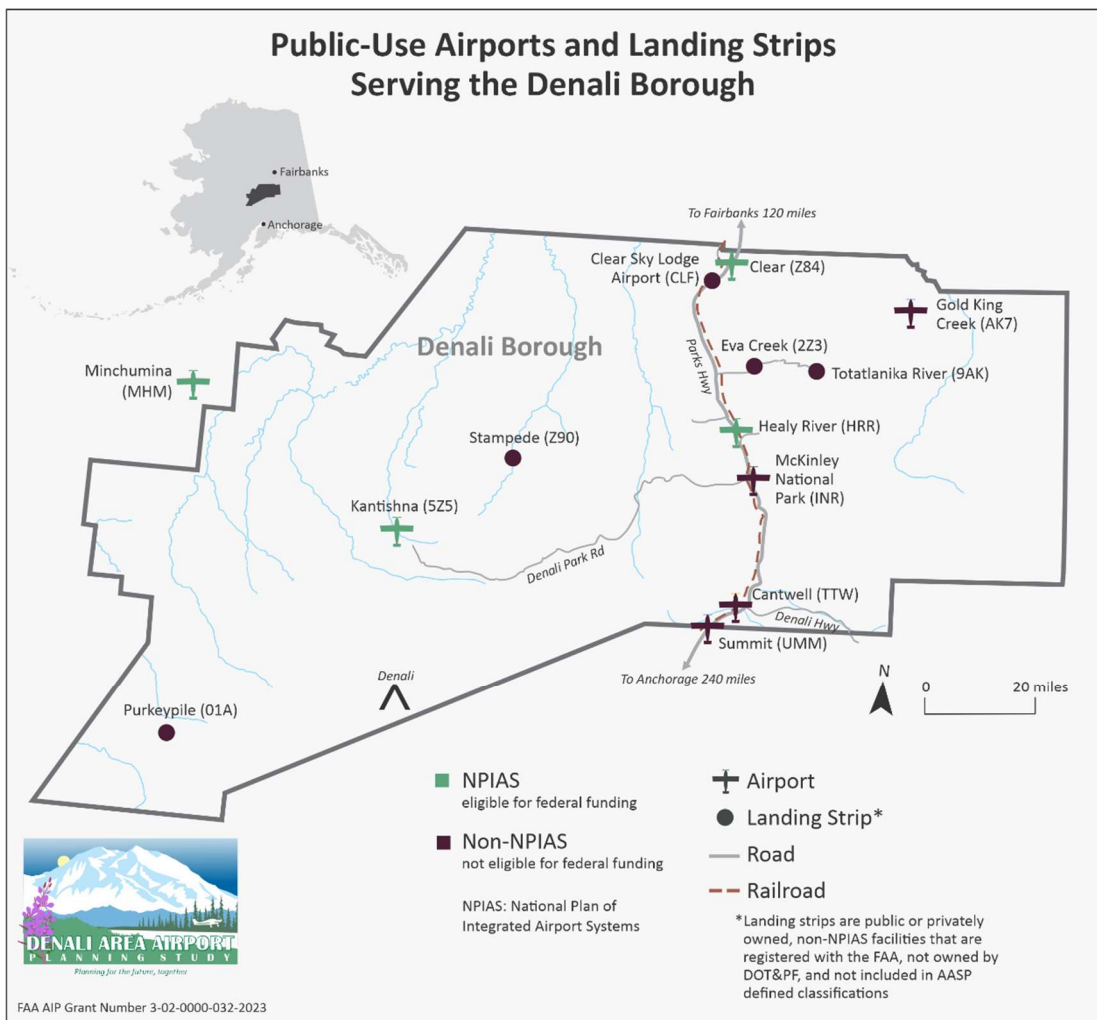


Figure 1. Public-Use Airports in and Near the Denali Borough.



The Region

Communities in the study area include Anderson, Clear, Ferry, Healy, Denali Park (McKinley Park Village), and Cantwell. All communities have access to the road system via the Parks Highway. The primary economic drivers in the area are resource development, military spending, and tourism [Denali Borough, 2018].

The airports in the region are mainly used for flightseeing tours, recreation, and charter flights. They also support fixed-wing medevac flights—which are critical, given the limited healthcare facilities in the Denali area—and seasonal firefighting operations.

Clear Space Force Station (CSFS, formerly Clear Air Force Station) is located along the Parks Highway in the north of the Denali Borough, near Clear Airport (Z84) and the communities of Clear and Anderson. The airspace around CSFS is restricted, including an expanded temporary restriction that was put in place when a long-range discrimination radar (LRDR) was deployed.

The Study

In 2023, DOT&PF contracted a consulting team led by RESPEC Company, LLC (RESPEC) to conduct the DAAPS in accordance with FAA guidance and requirements for system planning. The study includes an inventory of airports in the region, activity and economic forecasts, an identification of needs, and an analysis of alternative scenarios, as shown in Figure 2. The recommendations are informed by public and agency input, including from public meetings, surveys, and a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG).

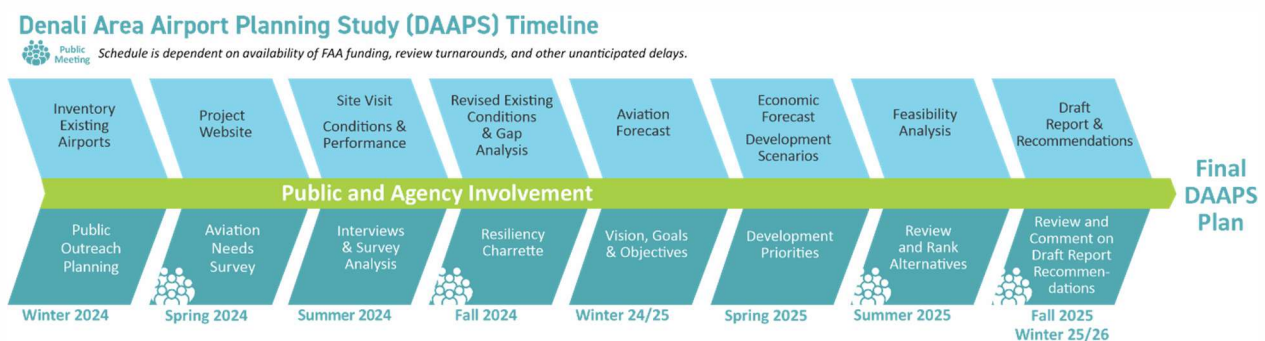


Figure 2. The DAAPS Schedule.

DOT&PF, RESPEC, and the SAG developed a vision and goals for the study, as well as goals for the regional aviation system itself. These statements, which were informed by feedback from public meetings, helped guide the DAAPS process.



Vision

The DAAPS will identify alternatives to create a regional airport system that enhances safety and access for residents and visitors.



Study Goals and Objectives

- ▶ Develop a better understanding of the regional aviation system.
 - Complete an inventory of airport and airstrip conditions.
 - Conduct interviews with key stakeholders.
 - Identify gaps in current infrastructure and services.
- ▶ Develop a better understanding of future changes and priorities.
 - Conduct aviation and economic forecasts to better anticipate future changes.
 - Identify aviation best practices from comparable areas.
 - Identify partners for future land use.



System Goals and Objectives

- ▶ Provide predictable, consistent operations.
 - Ensure a variety of runway types are present and maintained to allow year-round operations in the region.
 - Regularly maintain DOT&PF-owned airports.
 - Provide weather reporting and weather cameras at DOT&PF-owned airports.
- ▶ Balance operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
- ▶ Support regional economic development.
 - Provide sufficient lease lots at DOT&PF-owned airports.
- ▶ Prioritize the accommodation of emergency aircraft.
- ▶ Provide sufficient redundancy in the regional aviation system.
- ▶ Adapt to future needs and technologies.
 - Develop a long-range comprehensive transportation plan.

The Key Issues

Numerous challenges and gaps in the Denali area aviation system were identified through public and stakeholder engagement, engineering analyses, plan reviews, and



insight from DOT&PF staff. Each issue that has been identified falls into one of three broad categories:

1. Related to Denali area airports and suitable to an aviation system plan study
2. Related to Denali area airports, but too granular to be addressed in this study (e.g., a public-use airport that is uncharted)
3. Not directly related to Denali area airports (e.g., challenges with surface transportation)

Issues in Category 1 are the primary focus of this report, though Category 2 issues are documented and discussed. Category 3 issues were documented in interim reports for inclusion in other planning efforts.

The primary issues evaluated in this study are:

- ▶ **Healy River Airport Land Ownership:** Healy River Airport (HRR) is a DOT&PF-owned airport on Alaska Railroad Corporation-owned (ARRC) land, which presents challenges for long-term funding sources.
- ▶ **Clear Airport Airspace Restrictions:** Clear Airport (Z84) is located near CSFS, which has expanded airspace restrictions that have impacted operations at Clear Airport (Z84).
- ▶ **Systemwide Capacity:** Stakeholder feedback indicated additional lease lots or longer runways might be needed throughout the region to support general aviation, flightseeing, and medevac operations with larger aircraft.
- ▶ **Safety and Operations:** Difficult airport approaches and limited weather reporting create safety and operational challenges at many airports.
- ▶ **Access and Opportunities:** Many of the airports in the region are not maintained to standards that allow for reliable operations, and economic opportunities are limited by availability of lease lots.

The following chapters describe the outreach, research, and analysis conducted during the DAAPS to identify and understand these issues and recommend strategies to address them.



Chapter 2: Public and Agency Involvement Summary

The DAAPS team conducted extensive outreach to community members, businesses, industry stakeholders, and relevant agencies to collect input from all impacted and interested parties. The planning process was designed to be open and inclusive, engaging residents, Tribal groups, businesses, government agencies, and others. Special attention was given to making participation possible for people who did not have internet access or could not attend meetings in person.

Engagement included in-person and online public meetings, surveys, flyers, and digital resources like websites and social media. The DOT&PF and consultant team also met regularly with the SAG to provide progress reports and request input.

The aim of the public and agency involvement efforts was to ensure future airport investments reflect the needs and values of the community and stakeholders.

Public Meetings

DOT&PF held three public meetings about the future of airports in the Denali area. These meetings gave residents, business owners, and other interested parties an opportunity to share their thoughts, ask questions, and help shape the direction of the study. The feedback collected at these events was used to guide decisions and make sure the airport system meets the needs of the people who use it.

- ▶ **April 18, 2024:** The team introduced the project and gathered initial ideas from the community. People discussed what is missing at current airports, voiced concerns about expanding or building new ones, and shared their local knowledge. Approximately 50 people attended in person and 20 joined online.
- ▶ **October 10, 2024:** The team focused on the community's vision for the airport system and what challenges might come up. Seven people attended in person and 15 joined online. The input from this meeting helped set the main goal for the study, which is to create a safer and more accessible airport system for everyone in the region.
- ▶ **August 21, 2025:** The team presented three possible ways to develop the Denali area aviation system, all aimed at keeping the current level of service. Both online and in-person sessions were held, and attendees were asked to give feedback on the different scenarios. Five people attended in person and 14 people attended online.
- ▶ **May 27, 2026:** The team provided a summary of the study's process and draft recommendations and encouraged attendees to ask questions and share feedback. Thirteen people joined the virtual meeting, including some members of the SAG.



Stakeholder Advisory Group

The DAAPS team sought to include a broad range of perspectives in the SAG, including government agencies, communities, Tribes, aviation industry organizations, and business interests. The SAG met five times throughout the project and SAG members were invited to all public meetings.

During the SAG meetings, the project team reviewed kickoff survey findings; refined the study's vision, goals, and objectives; confirmed stakeholder participation; and presented existing conditions and inventory information for 15 facilities, relevant plans, land ownership mapping, and aviation forecast updates. The SAG also helped identify information gaps and supported coordination and outreach for public meetings. Later meetings focused on discussing polling results, refining evaluation criteria, and reviewing the decision tree and proposed recommendations, including both systemwide needs and facility-specific considerations such as weather reporting, vegetation clearing, surface maintenance and improvements, and windsocks.

- ▶ **September 24, 2024:** The DAAPS team explained the context of the project, discussed the role of the SAG, and reviewed kickoff survey results. The SAG brainstormed vision and goal statements for the study.
- ▶ **November 7, 2024:** The DAAPS team provided a summary of the first SAG meeting; presented revised vision, goals, and objectives; reviewed survey results; and provided an overview of the project's next steps.
- ▶ **May 6, 2025:** The SAG reviewed the existing conditions and inventory report and DOWL's updated aviation forecast. The group also discussed a framework to categorize and rank issues (e.g., safety, emergency response, redundancy, preparedness, public sentiment, and amenities), as well as coordination and publicity for the next public meeting.
- ▶ **October 21, 2025:** The SAG discussed the feedback received during the third public meeting (August 21, 2025) and draft scenario evaluation criteria.
- ▶ **March 11, 2026:** The group reviewed the draft decision pathway framework and discussed preliminary recommendations, including what to do with Healy River Airport (HRR) and individual airport needs, such as weather reporting, vegetation clearing, surface maintenance and improvements, and windsocks.

Surveys

Survey efforts complemented public and stakeholder meetings by capturing both qualitative and quantitative perspectives on current airport performance and future development. The project team conducted multiple surveys throughout the project to identify interested stakeholders, identify issues and concerns, and solicit feedback.



Kickoff Survey

The Kickoff Survey was conducted early in the study to gauge the level of airport development Denali area residents, business owners, and airport users felt was warranted.

- ▶ 52% of respondents self-reported that they lived in the Denali Borough
- ▶ 58% of respondents fly to Denali area airports at least once per year
- ▶ 55% of respondents fly for sightseeing or recreation

The survey results indicated that most respondents wanted the minimum level of development or improvements needed to maintain existing airports at their current levels of operation.

- ▶ 62% said Denali area airports currently meet their needs
- ▶ 58% said they would **not** benefit from regularly scheduled air service

There were 180 electronic responses and one hard copy response during the 6-month survey period. This included six self-identified categories of stakeholder:

- ▶ Personal recreators (129)
- ▶ Pilots, air carriers, or members of an aviation organization (73)
- ▶ Employees of a local, state, or federal government agency or entity (33)
- ▶ Hospitality-related business owners or managers (32)
- ▶ Non-hospitality-related business owners or managers (18)
- ▶ Other (29)

Survey results showed divided opinions on whether Denali area airports meet community needs: some respondents indicated existing airports are adequate, and others cited gaps related to limited regional commercial air service, fuel availability, maintenance deficiencies, and constrained medevac options, with Healy River Airport (HRR) frequently referenced for weather and safety concerns. When asked about future airport development, respondents again expressed mixed views—supporting improvements that would enhance safety, medevac reliability, and operational capacity, while also raising concerns about potential lifestyle impacts, environmental effects, infrastructure strain, noise, and whether expanded development is necessary or justified.

Open-ended comments frequently emphasized a preference for maintaining and improving existing facilities rather than pursuing major new development, while still underscoring the importance of reliable access, affordability, and consideration of weather and location constraints.

A complete survey analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data and identified themes is included in Appendix A.



Scenarios Poll

The online and in-person meetings on August 21, 2025 included a Scenarios Poll, which was subsequently made available online alongside the meeting presentation. The online poll was open from August 28 through September 19 and was announced via email, social media, and flyers posted around the Denali Borough. Respondents were asked to prioritize airport characteristics (e.g., proximity to Healy, room for runway expansion) and indicate their preference for three potential development scenarios; 136 responses were received.

Together, these survey and poll responses informed the study's understanding of needs and tradeoffs and helped shape the evaluation framework and recommendations.

Stakeholder Interviews

Forecast Interviews

In January 2025, Information Insights conducted interviews with 20 stakeholders to support the Population and Economic Forecast. The stakeholders represented neighboring communities and landowners, Denali community organizations, visitor industry businesses and development organizations, and aviation service providers. The interviews used a semi-structured format and were recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify recurring themes across stakeholder groups.

Themes included:

- ▶ **Transportation Infrastructure Gaps:** Stakeholders described limited access and “last-mile” mobility constraints, including lack of scheduled air service into the region, requiring connections through Anchorage or Fairbanks, and very limited local transportation capacity.
- ▶ **Housing Crisis as a Growth Barrier:** Housing shortages were consistently identified as a primary constraint on business operations and growth, with stakeholders citing the conversion of long-term rentals to short-term accommodation, and the resulting inability to hire sufficient seasonal workforce during peak periods.
- ▶ **Seasonal Extremes:** Interviewees highlighted summer peak constraints and winter underutilization, noting that limited winterized services and facilities restrict the ability to grow shoulder-season and winter visitation despite increasing interest in winter activities.
- ▶ **Aviation Infrastructure Limitations:** Stakeholders noted safety and reliability constraints at existing aviation facilities, including wind-related concerns at Healy River Airport (HRR) and a lack of winter maintenance at Summit Airport (UMM), which can affect access and emergency response reliability.
- ▶ **Park Access Constraints:** Stakeholders reported that the Pretty Rocks landslide-related Park Road closure has concentrated visitation near the park



entrance, affecting visitor dispersal and creating localized infrastructure pressures.

Simultaneously, DOWL conducted seven interviews with aviation industry and related stakeholders. Interviewees were generally opposed to developing a new airport in the Denali area and instead favored maintaining existing infrastructure. Interviewees suggested that DOT&PF purchase the Healy River Airport (HRR) land from ARRC to allow airport leaseholders to build permanent structures on their lease lots. The lack of weather reporting throughout the region was also noted as a critical issue.

Medevac and Firefighting Interviews

The DAAPS team interviewed fixed-wing and rotary-wing medevac program managers and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Division of Fire and Forestry to understand their aviation needs. All discussions indicated that the current Denali area aviation system is adequate to support medevac and firefighting needs, though additional weather reporting, lighting, and runway maintenance would better support fixed-wing medevac operations. Specifically, Healy River Airport (HRR) and Summit Airport (UMM) would benefit from these improvements, and an alternative airport to Healy River Airport (HRR) (such as Summit Airport [UMM] or Denali Airport [AK06]) would help medevac flights when weather makes Healy River Airport (HRR) operations more challenging.

Other Outreach Strategies

The project team used several additional outreach tools to maximize awareness of the study and ensure interested parties could easily find project details and contact information.

- ▶ Project **branding** created a unique and recognizable look to provide consistency across all digital and printed materials.
- ▶ The **project webpage** provided information about the project, planning process, timeline, and engagement opportunities, as well as FAQs.
- ▶ The **Esri StoryMap** shown in Figure 3 provided detailed information about the region, specific airport locations, and other applicable project and contact information.
- ▶ **Business cards** were designed to align with the DAAPS branding, as illustrated in Figure 4. The cards included the DAAPS logo, unique project email address, project website, and a QR code for quick web access.
- ▶ A **project-specific email address** (DenaliAirportStudy@respec.com) ensured questions and comments were directed to a centralized location and accessible by multiple team members.
- ▶ The **project overview one-pager** shown in Figure 5 provided a general summary of the DAAPS purpose and process. The one-pager included the project logo,



link to the DAAPS website, and QR codes for both the project website and Esri StoryMap.

- Members of the project team also conducted periodic **small group briefings** to interested stakeholders, including the Alaska Travel Industry Associates Board, the FAA Flight Safety Office, Doyon Limited, and the Denali Borough Planning Commission.



Figure 3. The DAAPS StoryMap. (The map included information and photos of the communities and airports in the Denali area.)



Figure 4. DAAPS Business Card.



Project Overview

The State of Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is conducting an aviation system planning study for airports serving the residents, visitors, agencies, and businesses of the Denali Borough. The purpose of airport system planning is to assess the public-use airports, determine if they meet the needs of the area, and recommend future airport infrastructure investment that aligns with federal priorities and state and local objectives.

The FAA recommends the following elements for inclusion in the process:

- Significant, inclusive, and meaningful collaboration with stakeholders throughout the process
- Exploration of issues/concerns impacting aviation in the area
- Inventory of the current system, assess existing conditions and constraints
- Identification of air transportation needs and evaluation of system resiliency
- Aviation and economic forecasts
- Exploration of alternatives to the existing airport system
- Recommendations for airport development, priorities, and funding strategies
- Implementation plan and final report

This dynamic process depends on active participation from all stakeholders to gather accurate information, identify issues, address concerns, document needs, and explore alternatives.

Learn more at <https://dot.alaska.gov/nreg/denaliairportstudy/>



Project Website



Story Map

DENALI AREA AIRPORT PLANNING STUDY

Figure 5. DAAPS Project Overview.



Chapter 3: Denali Area Aviation System Conditions

The Existing Conditions and Data Gap Analysis in Appendix B includes a review of relevant transportation and economic development plans and airport-specific data.

The plan review highlighted the importance of aviation to the region's safety and economy because airports are key infrastructure for medevac, firefighting, and tourism operations. The Denali Borough plans indicated that planning efforts should be flexible and support growth.

Airport-specific data included inspection reports, DOT&PF performance measures, the FAA Airport Data and Information Portal (ADIP), airport master plans, airport layout plans (ALPs), and pilot feedback. These sources, in conjunction with subsequent public outreach, were used to identify airport conditions and needs and the overall function of the regional aviation system.

System Airports

Fifteen airports were included in the analysis to understand the overall function of the Denali area aviation system. The study's recommendations focus on DOT&PF-owned airports but include considerations for other airports as appropriate.

The initial assessment included identifying each airport's classifications within the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) and the Alaska Aviation System Plan (AASP). Inclusion and classification within the NPIAS indicates whether the airport may be eligible for the FAA Airport Improvement Program (AIP), and AASP classification indicates the airport's role within the statewide aviation system¹.

Table 1 identifies the owner, NPIAS classification, and AASP classification of each airport. Of the four NPIAS airports, only three are within the study area (Minchumina Airport [MHM] was included as a potential diversion airport). Clear Airport (Z84) is listed as General Aviation (GA) Unclassified, limiting its eligibility for AIP funding.

¹ See the [AASP National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems white paper](#) for more information about the relationship between the AASP and the NPIAS.



Table 1. Study Airport Details.

Airport Name (FAA LocID)	Ownership	NPIAS Classification	AASP Classification
Amos Lake	Alaska DNR	Non-NPIAS	Private (Not Classified)
Cantwell (TTW)	Private	Non-NPIAS	Private (Not Classified)
Clear (Z84)	DOT&PF	GA-Unclassified	Local Low Activity
Clear Sky Lodge (CLF)	Private	Non-NPIAS	Private (Not Classified)
Denali (AK06)	Private	Non-NPIAS	Closed to the Public
Eva Creek (2Z3)*	Alaska DNR	Non-NPIAS	Not Classified
Gold King Creek (AK7)	DOT&PF	Non-NPIAS	Local Non-NPIAS
Healy River (HRR)	DOT&PF	GA-Basic	Community On-Road
Kantishna (5Z5)	DOT&PF/NPS	GA-Basic	Local Low Activity
McKinley National Park (INR)	NPS	Non-NPIAS	Not Classified
Minchumina (MHM)**	DOT&PF	GA-Basic	Local Low Activity
Purkepile (01A)	Alaska DNR	Non-NPIAS	Not Classified
Stampede (Z90)	NPS	Non-NPIAS	Not Classified
Summit (UMM)	DOT&PF	Non-NPIAS	Local Non-NPIAS
Totatlanika River (9AK)	Public Domain	Non-NPIAS	Not Classified

*Local reports indicate Eva Creek is closed.

**MHM is a public-use airport owned by DOT&PF and located outside the Denali Borough; it is listed as a possible diversion airport because of its proximity—it is not considered part of the study area.

NPS = National Park Service

Amos Lake (Uncharted)

Amos Lake is an uncharted airstrip located at Amos Lakes on land managed by the Alaska DNR Division of Mining, Land, and Water. Pilots use the airstrip for local flights, but it lacks formal recognition and basic infrastructure. Comments received during the DAAPS indicate pilots hope it will be officially recognized and improved in the future.



Cantwell (TTW)

Cantwell Airport (TTW) is a privately owned, public-use, turf-dirt airstrip near the junction of the Parks and Denali Highways. The runway is unattended, and conditions are not regularly monitored. The airport serves the local area but has very limited facilities. There is no weather reporting, fuel service, or dedicated parking, which makes it less convenient and safe for pilots and travelers.

Clear (Z84)

Clear Airport (Z84) is a public-use airport owned by DOT&PF in the unincorporated community of Clear. The runway surface is asphalt; the runway is unattended, and conditions are not regularly monitored. It is used as an alternative landing site and faces several challenges. The expansion of restricted airspace around the CSFS has significantly impacted operations at Clear Airport (Z84), according to general aviation pilots that frequent the region.

Clear Sky Lodge (CLF)

Clear Sky Lodge Airport (CLF) is a private airstrip near the unincorporated community of Clear. The airport, which is a small facility with limited infrastructure, may be closed.

Denali (AK06)

Denali Airport (AK06) is closed to the public. It is a privately owned airport that serves private charter and flightseeing operations. The runway surface is gravel; the runway is unattended, and conditions are not regularly monitored. A medevac operator noted that they avoid using this airport after a plane got stuck in an unreported soft spot in the runway.

Eva Creek (2Z3)

Eva Creek Airport (2Z3) is listed in the AASP database and FAA ADIP as active/operational, but comments from residents indicate the airport is closed.

Gold King Creek (AK7)

Gold King Creek Airport (AK7) is a public-use airport owned by DOT&PF in the northeast portion of the Denali Borough. The runway surface is gravel and dirt in fair condition; the runway is unattended, and conditions are not regularly monitored. Identified needs include weather reporting, runway repairs, and a better parking area to support local aviation needs.

Healy River (HRR)

Healy River Airport (HRR) is a public-use airport owned by DOT&PF, located along the Parks Highway on land owned by ARRC. The runway surface is asphalt in fair condition; the runway is unattended, conditions are not regularly monitored, and approach is difficult because of wind and terrain. Healy River is the most used airport in the area. Identified needs include weather reporting, repairs to parking and runway, fuel service,



and lighting system upgrades. DOT&PF's lease with ARRC has been in hold-over status since September 2017.

Kantishna (5Z5)

Kantishna Airport (5Z5) is an unattended public-use airport located within Denali National Park and Preserve. The runway surface is gravel and dirt, and it was in good condition during its 5010 Inspection in 2021, though the condition is not regularly monitored. The airport is near Denali Park and is used for tourism and local flights. Identified needs include weather reporting, navigation aids, better maintenance, and a longer runway for safe landings in bad weather.

McKinley National Park (INR)

McKinley National Park Airport (INR) is an unattended airport located within Denali National Park and Preserve. The runway surface is gravel, and it was in good condition during its 5010 Inspection in 2020. The airport is used to access the park but has limited facilities and the approach is constrained by mountains. Identified needs include weather reporting, ground transportation, runway clearing and markings, and better access for commercial operators.

Minchumina (MHM)

Minchumina Airport (MHM) is a public-use airport owned by DOT&PF. The airport is located outside the study area but was included in the system analysis because of its potential as a diversion airport. The runway surface is gravel in good condition, but it is unattended and not regularly monitored. Identified needs include weather reporting and runway surface improvements.

Otto Lake (Uncharted Location)

Otto Lake was identified by the SAG as a location used by float planes. The lake does not have defined parking areas, and feedback noted that pilots would benefit from better parking options and clearer organization at the site.

Purkeypile (01A)

Purkeypile Airport (01A) is a public-use airport owned by the Alaska DNR. The runway surface is gravel; it is not maintained and is in poor condition. The airport is attended May through September during daylight hours. It is a small strip with minimal facilities. Identified needs include weather-reporting equipment.

Stampede (Z90)

Stampede Airport (Z90) is a public-use airport owned by the NPS and located within the Denali National Park and Preserve. The runway surface is turf; it is in good condition, but it is unattended and not maintained or regularly monitored. It is a small strip with limited infrastructure. Identified needs include weather-reporting equipment.

Summit (UMM)

Summit Airport (UMM) is a public-use airport owned by DOT&PF and located along the



Parks Highway. The runway is gravel in good condition; the airport is unattended and is not maintained in the winter. It is used as an alternative landing site and has open terrain. Identified needs include weather reporting, vegetation clearing, and better approaches.

Totatlanika River (9AK)

Totatlanika River Airport (9AK) is a public domain airport located east of Eva Creek. The runway surface is gravel in poor condition; the airport is unattended and should be used only in emergencies. It is a small strip with minimal facilities. Identified needs include weather-reporting equipment.



Healy River Airport Land Ownership

Healy River Airport (HRR) is managed and maintained by DOT&PF, but the land is owned by ARRC. DOT&PF previously leased the land from ARRC under a long-term agreement, but the lease transitioned into hold-over status on September 14, 2017. The land ownership status of Healy River Airport (HRR) presents a significant challenge to continued investment in the airport. Also, limited room exists for runway expansion if a longer runway is required in the future, and the airport approach is difficult because of nearby terrain. The airport does not include on-site weather reporting, so pilots must rely on reporting from McKinley National Park Airport (INR).

Clear Airport Airspace Restrictions

Clear Airport (Z84) has historically been used as a backup when Healy River Airport (HRR) is unavailable, but the expansion of the restricted area over CSFS 1 nautical mile west of Clear Airport (Z84) has limited the airport's use. The airspace is restricted to protect aircraft avionics from the high-intensity radiated fields (HIRF) created by the LRDR located at CSFS. Despite two Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI), the deployment of the LRDR is reported to have significantly impacted operations at Clear Airport (Z84). The first Environmental Assessment that received a FONSI was for limited operations that would not require changes to airspace restrictions [Department of Transportation Federal Aviation Administration, 2021], and the second was for time-constrained performance testing that would require temporary flight restrictions [Department of Defense, Missile Defense Agency, 2020].

Other System Needs

Additional needs were identified at each airport in the study area. These are documented in the Airport Issues from Public Comments document provided in Appendix C. The needs that can be addressed by DOT&PF are included in the Capital Improvement Plan, which is provided in Appendix D, and should be incorporated into the AASP Needs List². Also, the interactive Pathways to Addressing Denali Area Challenges in Appendix E outlines how DOT&PF could address the key systemwide issues of capacity, safety, and access.

² https://www.alaskaasp.com/media/6251/airport_needs_white_paper_final.pdf



Chapter 4: Denali Area Aviation System Alternatives

Scenarios for Meeting the Needs of the Area

Healy River Airport (HRR) is the most used airport [DOWL, 2025] in the Denali area by commercial air taxi operators, general aviation pilots, and medevac outfits. The airport is managed and maintained by DOT&PF, but the land is owned by ARRC. DOT&PF has been leasing the land from ARRC, which makes it difficult to commit to federal grant assurances that have long time frames. This report evaluates three development scenarios that address the land ownership challenges of Healy River Airport (HRR) and the airport's importance to Denali area aviation.

Scenario 1 - commits DOT&PF to continued investment in Healy River Airport (HRR), requiring DOT&PF and ARRC to agree on a long-term solution to the land ownership situation that satisfies federal requirements.

Scenario 2 - involves short-term investment in HRR to keep it operational until DOT&PF has completed improvements to an existing airport that will take over Healy River Airport's (HRR's) role in the Denali area system.

Scenario 3 - involves short- to medium-term investment in HRR to keep it operational until DOT&PF has constructed a new airport to take over Healy River Airport's (HRR's) role in the system.

Evaluation Criteria

The following unweighted criteria were used to help compare the three scenarios.

- ▶ Environmental impact (wetlands, wildlife)
- ▶ Economic feasibility (funding availability, public-private partnership opportunities, maintenance costs)
- ▶ Operational efficiency (minimums, approaches)
- ▶ Community impact (noise, traffic, land use)
- ▶ Land-use compatibility
- ▶ Implementation timeline
- ▶ Proximity to population and user groups
- ▶ Future expansion opportunities (runway length, lease lots)
- ▶ Safety (compliant safety areas, better approaches)
- ▶ Ability to accommodate emergency response (wildfires, medevacs, natural disasters)
- ▶ Community sentiment



Scenario 1 - Invest in Healy River Airport

In this scenario, DOT&PF establishes a long-term solution to the land ownership challenges at Healy River Airport (HRR). This solution would require buy-in from ARRC, which owns the land where HRR is located, and concurrence from the FAA that the solution is sufficient to allow the use of federal funds at the airport.

Although this scenario requires action from DOT&PF, from the public's perspective, it is effectively the "no change" scenario. DOT&PF would continue to own and maintain the airport as it has done in the past.

This scenario is only viable if DOT&PF and ARRC can agree to an FAA-approved long-term solution to the land ownership challenge.

Pilot and Community Considerations

- ▶ No changes for airport users
- ▶ Limited capacity for future growth
 - Few or no new lease lots; all lease lots are currently occupied

DOT&PF Considerations

- ▶ Limited capacity for future growth
 - Few or no new lease lots; Healy River Airport (HRR) revenue currently outpaces expenses
- ▶ Land owned by ARRC
 - Requires negotiations with ARRC

Scenario 2 - Divest from Healy River Airport

In this scenario, DOT&PF continues to maintain Healy River Airport (HRR) in the short term while investing in improvements to a different airport, which will ultimately replace Healy River Airport (HRR). This scenario requires DOT&PF to identify an existing airport that can take over Healy River Airport's (HRR's) role in the Denali area aviation system. DOT&PF would stop renewing leases at Healy River Airport (HRR) once the replacement airport was prepared and would close Healy River Airport (HRR) after all leases expired.

Summit Airport (UMM) is the most likely candidate for a DOT&PF-owned replacement for Healy River Airport (HRR). Summit Airport (UMM) has available lease lots, room for expansion, and a cleaner approach than Healy River Airport (HRR). Further investigation is required to evaluate the optimal orientation for a runway expansion because the nearby railroad and Parks Highway may constrain options.

Clear Airport (Z84) is not viable as a replacement for Healy River Airport (HRR) because of airspace restrictions 1 nautical mile west of the airport.



Pilot and Community Considerations

- ▶ Cleaner approach
- ▶ Room for more lease lots
- ▶ Further from park entrance
- ▶ 30-minute drive from Healy (similar to the drive from North Pole to Fairbanks for medical services)

DOT&PF Considerations

- ▶ DOT&PF owns the land
- ▶ Longer implementation timeline
- ▶ Potential community opposition
- ▶ Greater investment cost

Scenario 3 - Divest from Healy River Airport

In this scenario, DOT&PF continues to maintain Healy River Airport (HRR) in the short term while developing a new airport in the Denali Area. This scenario requires significant investment in a site selection study, planning, design, and construction. DOT&PF would stop renewing leases at Healy River Airport (HRR) once the new airport was operational and would close Healy River Airport (HRR) after all leases expired.

The DAAPS has evaluated two locations for a new airport in the Denali area. Potential Site North (P.S. North) is located near Clear, farther west than Clear Airport (Z84). An airspace analysis of this site showed no airspace obstructions.

Potential Site South (P.S. South) is located just north of Healy and was identified as a site for exploration in the *Denali Borough Land Use and Economic Development Plan* [Denali Borough, 2018]. An airspace analysis of this site identified concerns with missed approach heights, winds funneling through the valley, and crosswinds. The site is on State of Alaska land that is swampy with suspected permafrost. The site is also approximately 100 feet below the highway elevation. P.S. South is not a good candidate for a new airport.

Pilot & Community Considerations

- ▶ Clean approach
- ▶ Ample space for lease lots and room for expansion
- ▶ P.S. North is a similar distance to the park entrance as Clear Airport (Z84)

DOT&PF Considerations

- ▶ DOT&PF would own the airport land
- ▶ Would allow DOT&PF to account for current and anticipated needs of the Denali area
- ▶ Requires significant investment in infrastructure
- ▶ Long-term commitment and planning
- ▶ Potential community opposition



Chapter 5: Conclusion

Recommended Scenario

Based on our analysis and public input, we recommend that DOT&PF invest in Healy River Airport (HRR) rather than invest in a new airport. This is a lower cost investment and does not interrupt aviation activities. The components of this recommendation include:

- ▶ Acquiring the land under Healy River Airport (HRR)
- ▶ Rehabilitating the runway and taxiway pavement and striping
- ▶ Extending the taxiway to the north
- ▶ Removing the two northernmost tie-downs and designating two additional lease lots at the north end of the apron
- ▶ Clearing brush and vegetation throughout the Object Free Area and the Runway Protection Zones
- ▶ Installing FAA-approved weather-reporting equipment
- ▶ Updating the ALP



HRR Near-term Needs

Land Acquisition

Land ownership is the critical path item for investment in Healy River Airport (HRR). ARRC has acknowledged a willingness to sell to or swap land with DOT&PF. Either method would be acceptable because both get the land under Healy River Airport (HRR) under DOT&PF control. This would satisfy FAA desires for Healy River Airport (HRR) to be on land owned by DOT&PF.

ARRC has identified potential land for a land swap. DOT&PF should begin discussions with ARRC as soon as possible to begin the land transfer process.

Runway and Taxiway Rehabilitation

The runway and taxiway pavement conditions have deteriorated and are currently identified as needing rehabilitation. This warrants a repaving of all airfield surfaces, as well as re-striping.

Taxiway Extension

Extending the taxiway to the north is needed to accommodate additional lease lot development.

Expand Lease Lots/Remove Tie-downs

Removing the two northernmost tie-downs and delineating two new lease lots adjacent to the taxiway extension provides new opportunities for private lease lot development.

Brushing/Clearing

Vegetation is encroaching on the runway and taxiway and needs to be cleared. This is a routine maintenance item that should occur every 5 to 7 years as needed.

Weather Reporting

FAA recently installed a 360-degree camera at Healy River Airport (HRR) and footage is available for viewing online. This is a significant improvement in flight planning for pilots; however, the camera is not certified for weather reporting (currently listed as advisory only). DOT&PF should seek certification of the camera system.

ALP Update

The ALP will need to be updated with the proposed recommendations to show updated current and future conditions.



HRR Longer-term Needs

Runway Extension

The Healy River Airport (HRR) runway is just short of 3,000 feet. The aviation forecast identified runway needs for the aircraft using the Denali area airports. Many of the aircraft need at least 3,000 feet and could operate under more weather conditions with 3,200 feet. Extending the runway to 3,200 feet is likely the maximum distance that can be expected without significant cost because of the adjacent bluff.

We recommend extending the runway 200 feet to the north to reach 3,200 feet. The runway could potentially be extended to the south, but that would require moving the road and the railroad, both of which would be expensive.

Additional Recommendations

In addition to the specific need and recommendations for Healy River Airport (HRR), we have recommendations for considerations across the study area.

Make Minor Improvements Across the Region

Many minor needs were identified throughout the study, including fixes such as windsock replacement, brush clearing, and minor runway improvements. A complete list of recommendations is attached as Appendix D.

Get Summit Airport on the NPIAS

Summit Airport (UMM) was identified as an important facility for medevacs and general aviation activities. Its location on the Parks Highway lends itself well to medevacs for vehicle crashes that occur along this remote stretch of the road. Summit Airport (UMM) is also convenient for general aviation pilots to land and wait for weather in the mountains to clear before continuing north toward Healy and Fairbanks. By getting Summit Airport (UMM) on the NPIAS, DOT&PF will be eligible for AIP funding.

Revisit Clear Airport Airspace Restrictions with the Military

Appendix F includes an assessment of the airspace issues around Clear Airport (Z84). An opportunity may exist to discuss the impacts with the military and find a way to get federal funding to help replace Clear Airport (Z84) or invest in another airport to help defray the impacts from the LRDR.



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