



## *Technical Memorandum*

# Clear Airport Challenges

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Subject: Denali Area Airport Planning Study: Clear Airport Challenges

Date: August 5, 2025

## Introduction

Clear Airport (Z84) is a public-use airport owned by DOT&PF located approximately 3 miles from the community of Clear. The airport is near Clear Space Force Station (CSFS), over which there is restricted airspace (1 nautical mile west of Z84). The restricted airspace over CSFS was expanded in recent years to protect aircraft avionics from high-intensity radiated fields (HIRF) created by the Long-Range Discrimination Radar (LRDR) at CSFS.

Z84 is commonly used as a backup airport when Healy River (HRR) is inaccessible, but the restricted airspace and temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) near Z84 (see Figure 1) limit use of the airport. These restrictions make Z84 inviable as a replacement for HRR.

## Airport Description

Z84 is accessible by road via the Parks Highway, Clear Road, and Anderson Road. The airport is 31 miles north of Healy. The runway is 4,000 feet long by 100 feet wide, paved, and was in good condition when inspected in 2020. It receives less snow than nearby airports, making it easier to maintain for year-round operations. Local air operators described Z84 as a critical airport, especially for medevac operations, because of its long runway and year-round accessibility.

## *Airspace Restrictions*

There are seven Restricted Area segments in the airspace near Z84, some of which operate continuously while others are only active during specific periods (see Figure





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2). The airspace is restricted to protect aircraft avionics from the high-intensity radiated fields (HIRF) created by the Long Range Discrimination Radar (LRDR) located at Clear Space Force Station (CSFS). The LRDR was deployed in response to a congressional mandate. Two Environmental Assessments (EAs) were conducted after CSFS was selected from 50 candidate sites in Alaska. The first EA was conducted in 2016, resulting in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and the commencement of construction in July 2017. The 2016 EA developed under the understanding that CSFS would “maintain the LRDR in a readiness posture with limited operations,” which would not have required changes to airspace restrictions.<sup>1</sup> Following the FONSI, MDA modified the operational plans for the LRDR to require continuous operations. The 2020 EA evaluated the effects of performance testing and associated temporary flight restrictions during a limited timeframe; this also resulted in a FONSI.

During the 2020 EA process, several aviation organizations expressed concerns<sup>2</sup> about the Restricted Area modification and the fact that construction was already underway during the EA process. The Denali Borough Planning Commission also submitted a comment requesting that the MDA “fund both a site selection study and the relocation of Clear Airport” if the Restricted Area was expanded and Z84 was rendered unusable. A subsequent resolution<sup>3</sup> passed by the Planning Commission further explained that Z84 is critical for emergency life flights and HRR is ineligible for federal funding, making its future uncertain, so if Z84 becomes unusable “the combined loss [of Z84 and HRR] would present a public safety crisis for the residents and visitors of the borough.”

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Transportation Federal Aviation Administration, July 6, 2021. *Adoption of the Missile Defense Agency's Final Environmental Impact Statement for Long Range Discrimination Radar (LRDR) operations, Clear Air Force Station, Alaska (CAFS) and Record of Decision for Federal Aviation Administration Actions to Accommodate Testing and Operation of the LRDR at CAFS under the Missile Defense Agency's Modified Operational Concept.*

<sup>2</sup> On May 31, 2019, a joint letter was sent to the MDA from the Air Medical Operators Association, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, Alaska Airmen Association, Alaska Aviation Safety Foundation, Experimental Aircraft Association, Helicopter Association International, and National Air Transportation Association.

<sup>3</sup> Denali Borough Planning Commission, October 16, 2019. *A Resolution Supporting a Site Selection Study to Inform the Possible Relocation of Clear Airport.*



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It is likely that the one-mile TFR will become permanent once all long-term testing of the LRDR is complete.

The airspace restrictions preclude using Z84 as a replacement for HRR due to:

1. Traffic patterns are severely limited.
2. Future growth would be hampered by the limited airspace and traffic patterns.

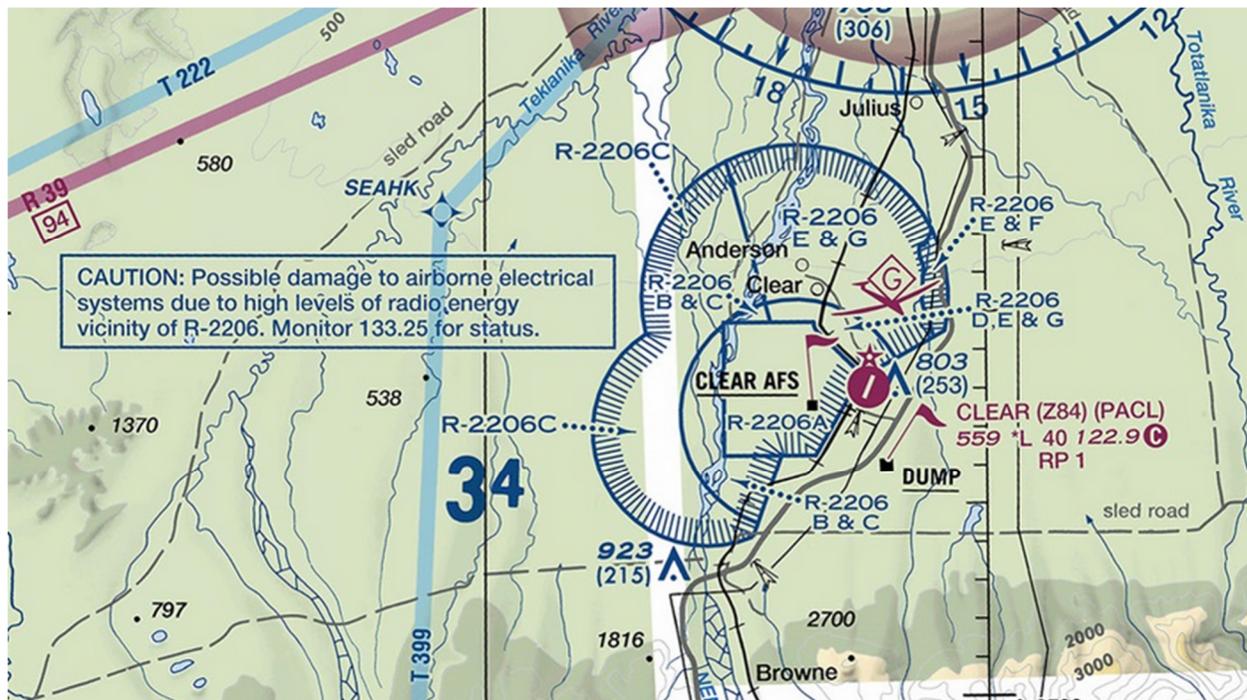


Figure 1 - Anchorage Sectional Aeronautical Chart showing the restricted airspace around Clear AFS.



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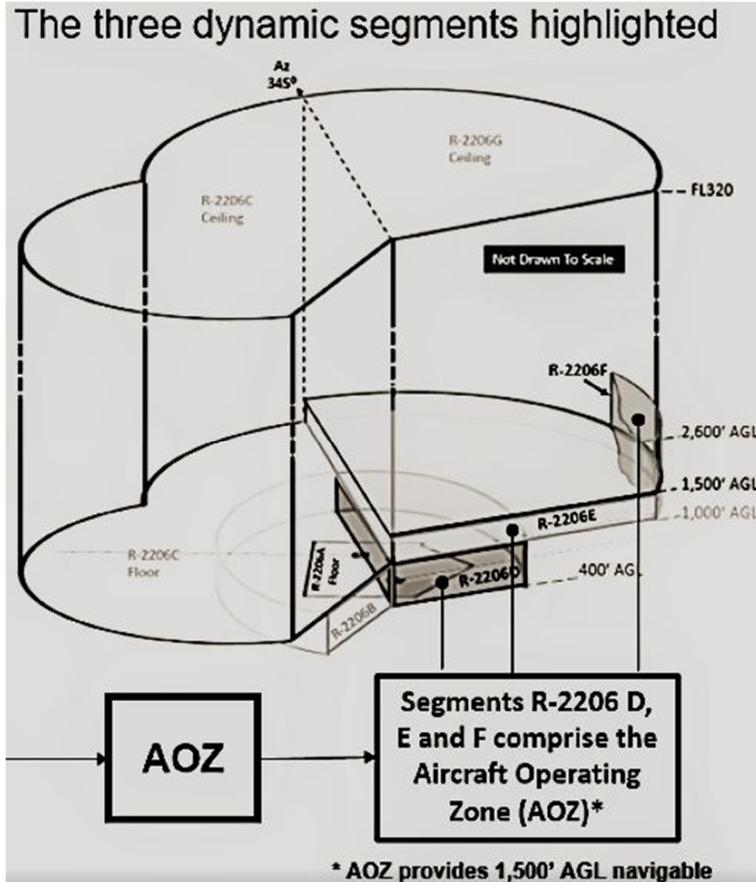


Figure 2 - Airspace restrictions around Z84. Graphic courtesy of FAA.

### Operations

There were 100 operations and one based aircraft at Z84 in 2022. During summer 2025, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) used Z84 to fight forest fires in the area.

### Lease Lots

Z84 has two lease lots, both of which are currently under contract. DNR - Forestry holds both leases, one of which is temporary for the summer 2025 fire season.





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There are 15 tie-downs at Z84. DOT&PF does not manage the tie-downs through their tie-down program.

There are also 4 helipads at Z84.

### *Grant Assurances*

Z84 is listed in the 2025–2029 National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) as General Aviation – Unclassified, meaning there are strict limitations on how Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funds can be used at the airport. Z84 last received AIP funding in federal fiscal year 2007.

## Conclusion

Use of Z84 is significantly limited by the restricted airspace above CSFS, one nautical mile west of the airport. Additionally, the airport is listed as Unclassified in the NPIAS, limiting the use of federal funds at Z84.

There are only two lease lots at the airport. Additional lease lots could be delineated, however they would require significant development from a tenant.

These factors make Z84 inviable as a replacement for HRR operations.

