



Airstrips

Backgrounder: Banff & Jasper National Parks

A Need for Change

The Government of Canada recently reversed an earlier decision to close the Jasper and Banff airstrips.

Background

- An independent Air Safety Risk Assessment determined that closing the airstrips in Banff and Jasper jeopardizes safety, increasing the risk to pilots.
- The Government of Canada is not prepared to accept this level of risk and has decided to re-list both airstrips in the *National Parks Air Access Regulations*.
- Banff's airstrip is located in an important and sensitive and wildlife corridor. In support of the restoration of the wildlife corridor, Parks Canada will restrict access at the Banff airstrip to emergency and diversionary landings; no recreational landings will be permitted.
- The Jasper airstrip is located in a wider valley and the ecological consequences of recreational aircraft are not as serious. Emergency, diversionary and recreational landings will be allowed in Jasper.
- Ecological restoration near the Jasper airstrip includes prescribed burns to restore forests and grasslands, control of non-native vegetation, and reducing wildlife mortality on roads and the railway.
- Commercial use of both airstrips will continue to be prohibited.
- Parks Canada will complete the regulatory, environmental assessment and other processes required as a result of this decision.

Existing Management Plan Direction

Banff: Section 6.2.2.1 and 2.5.3 Close the airstrip and restore it to its natural condition.

Jasper: Section 6.4.13

Carry out a comprehensive study with the intention of closing the airstrip.

Considerations

- Given the government's decision, public input is not being sought concerning the re-listing and uses of the airstrips.
- Parks Canada is seeking the public's views on managing approved use of the airstrips. This information will help define the parameters for use and provide insight for amending the regulations.
- Future environmental assessments for both airstrips will include public consultation.

Proposed Management Parameters: Banff Airstrip

- Maintain the existing 915 m by 58 m turf runway, the windsocks and the one-metre high pylons and runway markers; replace as required.
- Supply tie-downs in keeping with the use of the airstrip for emergency or diversionary landings.
- Remove the two dilapidated open-front hangars.
- Remove the three unused above-ground fuel tanks, which do not meet current federal or provincial regulatory requirements; clean up any contamination; do not provide on-site fuelling.
- Mow and plow the airstrip as needed for safety.
- Following an environmental assessment, grade the runway as required for safety.



- Limit facilities – no new infrastructure, washrooms or vehicle parking.

Proposed Management Parameters: Jasper Airstrip

- Maintain the existing 1216 m by 46 m turf runway, the windsock and the one-metre high pylons and runway markers.
- Maintain the two existing tie-down systems, with a maximum capacity of 15 aircraft.
- Consider modernizing and more clearly defining the aircraft parking/tie-down area.
- Maintain the current size of the existing vehicle parking lot.
- Remove the unused fuelling facility, which does not meet federal or provincial regulations; reclaim any contaminated land. Fuelling facilities will not be replaced due to cost and environmental considerations.
- Allow current independent on-site refuelling methods to continue.
- Maintain the existing pilot registration building and telephone shelter; consider minor modernization or replacement within a similar footprint to address issues of effectiveness and security.
- Replace existing pit toilets with one unisex, pump-out pit toilet similar to those used in day-use areas.
- Limit facilities - no new infrastructure.
- Mow turf, already heavily grazed by elk and deer, as required for safety.
- Continue winter maintenance on an as-needed basis, to ensure safety; winter recreational use is not proposed.
- Following an environmental assessment, grade the runway as required for safety.
- Restrict private, recreational use to aircraft of 12,500 [metric?] pounds or less.
- Continue to prohibit chartered and/or commercial aircraft, irrespective of class.
- Permit the airstrip to operate only from dawn to dusk.
- In keeping with the *National Parks Air Access Regulations*, require permits for landing and use.
- Determine specific protocols and procedures for administering airstrip use; examine standard practices at northern national park airstrips.
- In addition to requiring a park pass, evaluate the appropriateness of charging a fee that is consistent with the industry standard for each landing, parking and takeoff cycle/sequence, to recover the cost of a service that is of a personal benefit. Any proposal for a user fee would be subject to the *User Fee Act*.
- At the Superintendent's discretion, occasionally close the airstrip as required for environmental protection. For example, the airstrip may be closed for a short time if a wolf pair denned close-by. Pilots would be informed of a closure when they requested permission to land a private aircraft for recreational purposes. Emergency landings would remain available at all times.

Future Directions

Parks Canada welcomes public comments on the following proposed direction for the revised management plan.

Banff National Park

- Re-list the Banff airstrip in the *National Parks Air Access Regulations*.
- Allow emergency and diversionary landings only: no recreational landings will be permitted.
- Continue to prohibit commercial use of the airstrip.

- Include parameters governing emergency and diversionary use of the airstrip in the management plan as appropriate.

Jasper National Park

- Re-list the Jasper airstrip in the *National Parks Air Access Regulations*.
- Allow emergency and diversionary landings and recreational use.
- Continue to prohibit commercial use of the airstrip.
- Include parameters governing emergency and diversionary use of the airstrip in the management plan as appropriate.