

**Award Application**  
**Big Sky Airport Improvements**  
**Ennis/Madison County, Montana**

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Seventy-five miles northwest of Yellowstone Park, in the heart of Madison County, sits Ennis, Montana, a small community where history runs deeper than the nearby Madison River. For many years, a simple grass runway and wind cone served as a landing strip for locals piloting small planes and for the occasional visiting barnstormer.



*Big Sky Air Park 1985*

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In the mid-1980's, Madison County Commissioners envisioned developing a General Aviation Airport that would not only fulfill the community's aviation needs but also stimulate the local economy, since Ennis was already a popular tourist destination.

The culmination of the commissioner's 20-year effort was realized this year when Big Sky Airport finished the reconstruction of its 4,700-foot runway and construction of a 1,900-foot runway extension. This important work brought the runway to the full length originally intended on the Airport Layout Plan (ALP). Other project elements in 2008 included replacement/upgrade of runway lighting, pavement maintenance, and increased runway pavement strength. The airport's high elevation necessitated a longer runway to take off with a full load. The longer runway better accommodates sophisticated jet aircraft SEATs (single engine air tankers) used to help fight forest fires, and twin-engine fixed wing air ambulances for emergency medical transportation.



*Big Sky Airport 2006*

The 20-year journey for improved aviation services first began in 1985, when the Madison County Commissioners selected Robert Peccia and Associates (RPA) to assist with a controversial Master Plan / Site Selection Study and an Environmental Assessment (EA). Not everyone in the community was in agreement about the proposed changes; however, progress continued after the studies concluded that the existing Big Sky Air Park was the best location to develop a full-blown General Aviation Airport to serve the Madison Valley.

A Master Plan / Site Selection Study was completed and following the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) approval, an EA was undertaken resulting in the FAA issuing a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) in 1988. Madison County, with the FAA's assistance, then acquired additional land to supplement some donated land for the initial airport development. Original improvements saw the construction of a new asphalt runway, taxiway, and apron. The project also included the installation of a new lighting system, beacon, lighted wind cone, and navigational aids to improve flight safety. A few years later a parallel taxiway, additional apron space, and lighted taxiway guidance signs were added to the modern airport.

Since these earlier developments, Madison County Commissioners have worked diligently to maintain and improve their aviation facility. Projects successfully completed since the first construction projects include:

- ✓ Master Plan and EA Update;
- ✓ Pavement maintenance;
- ✓ Purchase of a truck with a quick hitch and a reversible snowplow along with a hydraulic sweeper for snow removal;

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- ✓ Automated weather reporting equipment installation;
- ✓ Construction of a 30' x 38' steel-sided, heated building to serve as a snow removal equipment storage building; and
- ✓ Land acquisition to facilitate the runway extension and protect approach areas.

With the completion of this year's projects, Madison County Commissioners and the FAA have invested over \$4 million on ten airport improvement projects over 20 years!

Long-term vision, combined with the commitment of the FAA and the Montana Aeronautics Division, not only provided an economic boost to the local economy but enhanced the safety of the airport, increased its ability to handle emergency services operations, and improved the quality of life for all its citizens.



*Big Sky Airport - December 2008*