

OH-3061, Jim Parker, 6-18-2014, Pinedale, WY In Flight

Q: Is it on now?

A: It's been here as long as the airport's been here.

Q: Yeah, well, that's the case most of the places. OK, this is Barbara Bogart, today is June 18th, 2014, I am in Pinedale, Wyoming, with Jim Parker who's the airport manager here, and we're going to talk about aviation in Pinedale. First of all, where are you from originally?

A: Originally from Indianapolis, Indiana.

Q: Oh, OK. How long have you been out here?

A: I've been in Pinedale for almost nine years. I've lived in Wyoming in the past; I lived in Wyoming for six back in the '80s over in Caspar.

Q: Oh, OK. So what brought you to Pinedale?

A: This job.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yes.

Q: OK. I was reading in your little blurb for the air classic race that the airport was founded in 1939?

A: That's correct.

Q: OK. Do you --

A: By then Jack Mudd, who was, at the time -- I don't know if he was the mayor or on the town council -- I think he was

the mayor back then, and they essentially -- they started an airport out here. I think before it was actually [00:01:00] founded it was probably just a dirt strip that people used to land at.

Q: Sure. Who would have been using it then, do you know?

A: I have no idea.

Q: OK. (laughs) OK, I lived in Wyoming since '91 and we used to live in Rock Springs and we would come up to Pinedale and it's astonishing to me how much this airport has changed in 20-some years. Can you talk a little bit about what has -- the development of the airport?

A: Well, you know, I got here almost nine years ago and at the time the plan was to lengthen the runway and the parallel taxiway to accommodate primarily the larger jet aircrafts that were coming in at the time. I think one of the biggest factors for the growth of the airport and how busy the airport is now is in direct relation to the energy development going on in the Pinedale Anticline and [00:02:00] of course in the Jonah Field.

Q: Of course.

A: A lot of the oil companies were coming in and out of Pinedale and you know, back in the 2004 timeframe, 2005 timeframe, when it was evident that we were going to do a runway extension, that they would -- those companies

assisted in getting the discretionary funding through the FAA to actually speed that development up. So I was actually here when the runway was extended and I got here the tail-end of the land acquisition for that runway extension. So that's primarily -- and obviously with that type of aircraft coming in here -- there were some ranch owners in the area that already owned large aircraft. I think there was a rancher that at one time owned a Falcon and I don't know what year, but that Falcon actually had a mishap [00:03:00] here and had to be carried out in a truck. It went off the side of the runway and it was a mechanical problem with the airplane. And they have since purchased a Gulfstream 450 which was actually just in here a few minutes ago, took on fuel and left. And that airplane's been coming in here for a number of years. And now there's some -- a couple of other ranchers that fly in here frequently with a Global 5000 and a Gulfstream 550 and then there's another rancher -- well, a small ranch, I don't know if you can actually call him a rancher -- but there's another gentleman that has a Global 5000 that actually has a hangar here.

Q: Now the ranchers that you're talking about, are they residents here or they just own the property and come in to

see it every once in a while or are they actually working ranches?

A: Well they own the property, obviously, they don't live here year-round. Most of the ranches are still working ranches; they still have cattle on them and they still have ranch manager that takes care of that. [00:04:00] They own them, they come in. The two latest ones, I'm not sure, again, they are cattle operations, but you know, they've got, obviously, a lot of money and now they have invested some of that money in real estate in Wyoming and the real estate is more or less paying for itself, I guess, with ranch operation. But they're not "ranchers" per se. They made their -- they made their fortune in other entities and have invested in real estate in Wyoming and they enjoy the area. Obviously a number of them -- well, some of them have been here for you know, 10, 20 years.

Q: OK. Do they fly themselves or do they have pilots?

A: All of those have professional pilots that are on their payroll that fly their airplanes for them. And in some cases if their airplane's busy they'll charter a NetJets or a Flight Options or one of [00:05:00] the other charter companies to bring them in. Or family members. Sometimes the airplane's somewhere else and each one of these

airplanes can literally fly to Europe out of here without stopping.

Q: How many passengers can that size plane carry?

A: Well, it's not all about how many, it's about the comfort of the passengers. They're all configured for you know, 12 or 15 people. They're not -- they're large aircraft but they're not configured like a commercial airplane.

Q: Of course, yeah. OK, so the -- the expansion of the airport, let's say, are the extension of the runway, you think was driven primarily by the energy industry then?

A: Uh, I -- you know, it was obviously in our master plan, you know, it got pushed forward primarily because of the energy development in the area. It might have [00:06:00] taken a few more years for that development. I mean, it was in our master plan, but the funding was the issue and with the assistance of the energy companies they -- they got the funding advanced so that we could get the discretionary money to do that project.

Q: OK. Who was using the airport, do you think, before then, in terms of general aviation?

A: Oh, well I think the energy companies were using the airport at that time as well. They'd probably been doing it, you know, from almost the get-go of the expansion in both the Jonah and the Pinedale Anticline.

Q: Right.

A: And there were quite a few general aviation pilots, small airplane pilots, in the area. There were a number of hangars already here and every one of those people had an airplane so there was quite a bit of local activity from local pilots.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: And in the last few years, we've seen an increase in that activity as the number of [00:07:00] pilots have -- that, you know, live here have learned how to fly and have purchased aircraft. And you know, we probably got five, six, seven, eight aircraft that are here now that were not here when I first got here nine years ago. Almost nine [years ago?].

Q: Oh, that's interesting. Is there flight instruction here?

A: Yes and no. (laughter) There's no -- there are no flight instructors that I would say are here taking -- actively taking students. In fact, several of the people that now have gotten their pilot's license and purchased airplanes actually purchased their airplane before they were pilots and the instructor basically said, "OK, you got an airplane, I know you're committed, I'll teach you how to fly." And a couple of them -- in fact there's one guy that owns three airplanes -- well, I take that back -- he owns

two airplanes and he still doesn't have a pilot's license. He bought an airplane [00:08:00] to learn to fly and then he bought another airplane because he wants to transition into a third airplane and this one he's learning to fly and he's actually -- because this is a Beechcraft Bonanza and he's not going to take his check ride in a Beechcraft Bonanza, he's going to use his instructor's 172 to take the check ride.

F: Do you know if -- that [Pukowski?] is quitting?

A: They just left, [they flew by Go?].

Q: They turned the wrong way and Jim was wondering if they were just --

F: Oh, they're probably trying to stay out of the clouds.

Q: (laughs) Where would they get flight instruction if not here?

A: I think the closest place may be Driggs, Idaho. I know one of the pilots lives here, got his instruction in Driggs and actually purchased an airplane it's also in a hangar here, so as I said, there's been a number [00:09:00] of new pilots over the last four, five, six years.

Q: That's interesting because the other -- some of the other places I've talked to -- where I've interviewed the people associated with the airport, have reported a reversal of that. That there are fewer and fewer general aviation

people who own their own planes. So, I wonder, is there something different about this community, maybe?

A: I'm not so sure I could say it's a difference in the community. You know, most of the pilots that are hangar owners here and have airplanes are fairly active, in fact, several of them own more than one airplane. And, you know, there are some people that -- I call them, you know, "summer residents" -- they winter in Arizona or someplace else and they fly their airplanes up here in summer and they're here all summer.

Q: Oh, I see. Oh, OK.

A: So I've got one, two -- two or three that do that, and [00:10:00] I've got some that are in the process of moving here from other states that they still don't have their airplanes here but, you know --

Q: So those are recreational?

A: Oh yeah. I just -- almost all of the aircraft -- the general aviation aircraft are recreational. I don't think anybody -- in fact I know nobody is currently using any for, you know, commercials. And we do have a helicopter that's on the airfield which is commercial. It's -- Wyoming Helicopters does ag spraying and pesticide spraying and also he works for Game and Fish, for you know, like, I don't even know what they term it, they go out and shoot

coyotes -- predator, I guess predator control is the word I'm looking for.

Q: Sounds better than "shooting coyotes," doesn't it? (laughs)
Are there any other commercial services like that, like [00:11:00] eggs spraying or anything else like that out of this airport?

A: No, that's essentially the only one. We have no charter flights out of here. There's one gentleman -- owns a Piper Navajo Cheiftan -- that uses his airplane a lot for his business. He also owns a 210 and it's used quite a bit for his business, but other than that, you know, it's all pretty much recreational flying.

Q: OK, there's no air taxi service here, or --

A: No.

Q: OK. Just curious. Is it -- of course when you drive into the airport, it says 7,000 however-many feet --

A: Eighty-five feet. Well, actually the sign is incorrect. (laughter) The [fill?] elevation is 7,085 feet.

Q: Does that -- does that present -- I don't fly so -- does that present a particular set of challenges?

A: Well, during those hot summer months [00:12:00] you have a higher density altitude which, if you have an aircraft that is a poor-performer at altitudes, you know, you -- not necessarily want to take off with a full load of fuel and

passengers and baggage with an airplane that does not have pretty good performance, although we've got an 8900 foot runway and a pretty open bally it still takes and, you know, a pretty open valley, it still takes quite a while to climb to altitude to get in where you want to go.

Q: Now I know -- maybe not here so much, but I know in other places in Wyoming the prevailing wind is from the wind is it -- but, you look like you're oriented north/south generally? --

A: Well, this is northwest/southeast.

Q: -- Oh, OK.

A: And you know, probably 90 -- 98 plus percent of our prevailing winds are out west so you know, runway two-nine is the runway that's used, again, 98% of the time.

Q: OK. [00:13:00] When have you seen change over the nine years? You said you got here just when that expansion was underway? About to be underway --

A: The expansion hadn't started. The actual construction hadn't started. But we were finishing up the acquisition of the property for the expansion and in the -- you know, in the nine years -- almost nine years that I've been here, that runway extension has been done, we've put -- added blast pads to both ends of the runway, you know, those are projects that we've done. We've added a new taxi-way for

an area -- for hangar expansion and hangar construction. You know, we've seen activity from the air-- from the gas and oil exploration here go up and come down and kind of level out [00:14:00] because of -- primarily because of the cost of natural gas and how that effects the market and the exploration in North Dakota. We've seen an awful lot of those companies pull out and move to North Dakota.

Q: Well of course. Yeah. Now you mentioned a blast pad. What's a blast pad?

A: Well, when they -- on the end of each runway, if you don't have basically a paved area on the end when the jets take off, when they throttle up that jet blast will blow gravel and -- you know, so you have a blast pad, they call it, it's just a, you know -- essentially it's just a flat piece of pavement on the end of each runway so that that -- that jet blast doesn't kick up dirt and dust and throw gravel and erode the ground. And that's -- you know, that's what was occurring here because, you know, we've got a large number of yet aircraft that come in here, more so than did a few years ago.

Q: Right, right. Now, the land acquisition, was it [00:15:00] private ownership, was it public land, what was the surrounding land that had to be acquired?

A: All the land that was purchased for the runway extension was privately owned and you know, we -- we obviously went through the proper procedures, appraisals, and offers, and acquired land without any [imminent?] domain.

Q: Is it a municipal airport, owned by the city?

A: It's owned by the town of Pinedale.

Q: Oh, OK, alright. And supported by it? So are you a town employee then?

A: I am.

Q: OK. Alright. And then -- but there's also an FBO here?

A: Well, there's a fixed-base operator that's a tenant of the, you know -- and I'm the airport manager. There's an airport board, which is a [linely?] joint-power board that's responsible for operating -- you know, managing and operating, repairing, doing every-- all of the -- everything you need to do at this airport. The leases, everything goes through the airport board. And I report to the airport board and [00:16:00] I am a town employee but my supervisor is primarily the airport board.

Q: Sure. Well that's one thing that I was a little uncertain about: what's the relationship between the management of an airport and an FBO, but an FBO is a private entity and you said leases things?

A: They lease this building, they -- you know, their lease requires them to main-- you know, do maintenance on aircraft, fuel aircraft. They purchase fuel -- we own fuel tanks, they purchase the fuel. They pump the fuel, they do all of the aviation services for the transient and based aircraft.

Q: OK, alright. And I know -- again, in the past 20 years, it seems like hangars just keep popping up and popping up and it looks to me like a lot of hangars here for a little tiny airport. Well, not a tiny airport, but a tiny town.

A: Well, yeah, as I said, it's reflective of the number of aircraft that are typically here and I [00:17:00] -- you know, this air-- this hangar has you know, at any one time it could have six or eight airplanes in it and be full. It's not the largest hangar that, you know, we could use, but it's there and a number of those aircrafts are owned by people that live here in Pinedale.

Q: Now before you came here, were you in aviation someplace else?

A: Yes.

Q: Where were you?

A: Well before I came here, I was in Hayden, Colorado at the Yampa Valley Regional Airport --

Q: I know that, I was just --

A: -- I was the manager there.

Q: -- OK, I have a sister in Craig and she's flown in and out of --

A: I'm [suited?] in Craig.

Q: -- Hayden, yeah, yeah. How would you compare -- well that -- that has commercial-scheduled flights, right?

A: Right, yeah Hayden was a commercial-service airport. It primarily provided the -- everything for the Steamboat Springs ski area and all of the commercial airlines that went in there [00:18:00] -- or go in there during the winter months, and they still have, you know, commercial service in the summertime, but on a much lesser scale.

Q: Is there every talk of having commercial service in Pinedale?

A: I hope not. (laughing) You know, a lot of people think that because we have this airport and the facilities here that it would a natural for an airline to want to bring service but you know, when you got a population that's, you know, less than 2500, and you take a look around at larger communities in Wyoming that are, you know, in many cases struggling to keep their commercial service, and the cost of, you know, providing the facilities that are required for commercial service, it -- you know, I just can't make the numbers work.

Q: Yeah, it doesn't make any sense --

A: I would be really disheartened if a commercial airline says, "We want to start service next week," and I says, "Good [00:19:00] luck with that," but...

Q: (laughs) What kinds of facilities are you talking about?

A: Well, you know commercial service, they have to have primarily 150 foot wide runway -- ours is only 100 -- they have to have crash-fire rescue during the time that they're operating, and they have to have law enforcement officers and the transportation security administration performing all their functions --

Q: Oh, of course.

A: -- and to be honest with you, I don't want to see any of that. And that's my personal -- and, you know, when people ask me that, I tell them. I says, "I don't want to see it." Primarily, if an airline came and here and said, "We want to start service," I says, "Well your landing fees are going to be, you know, \$3,000 a landing, you know, just to make it pay." Why should this community put all those amenities down just to find out the airline's here and they're going to go broke in a few months or a year...

Q: Exactly. And you're close enough to Jackson, certainly --

A: Eighty-nine miles to Jackson, 99 miles to Rock Springs, both of them have commercial [00:20:00] service and they both have year-round transportation.

Q: Yeah, so what's the point? So when -- so what's the prognosis from here as far as -- is the airport pretty much in -- any plans for expansion further, or anticipating changes in usage, especially by the energy companies?

A: Well, we don't have any -- you know, we don't have any immediate plans to expand the runway in any way. We probably -- we do have in the plan to add an approach lighting system to both ends, which will be a visual aid for the pilots coming in, particularly during, you know, lower minimums -- lower weather conditions. We do have plans to -- as the meter rises -- to increase the number of taxiways coming off the parallel for future apron-- or, hangar expansion. And we also have in our plans [00:21:00] to expand the apron so that we can accommodate those large jets more so than we are able to now. We've got a limited number of spaces out here for the large jets and if we get, you know, four or five on the ground at the same time, it really gets tough. So we've got -- in the immediate, we've got to phase the expansion program -- phase the size of the apron towards taxiway [Charlie?] to the southeast and fill all that in and then obviously, once that apron area is

there to add additional han-- excuse me, hangars, and even probably a new fixed-base operator hangar much larger.

Large enough to accommodate some of those large aircraft that come in here now that can't fit in this hangar.

Q: OK. Do you just have the one runway?

A: Yes.

Q: Is that kind of typical for an airport -- a municipal airport -- to just have one?

A: Well, I guess it's typical [00:22:00] if you're winds -- you know, the prevailing winds are primarily, you know, along that runway alignment. Most airports that have two runways, the second runway's going to be a crosswind runway. And we get crosswinds and sometimes they're harder than other days but again, there's no justification to put that kind of investment in for the small percentage of those crosswind days -- those days that crosswinds are right across our runway.

Q: Sure, you don't have commercial service anyway, so I think it would be more of a concern for them maybe.

A: Well a crosswind runway, you know -- anywhere we put it, we'd end up having to buy land on either end of that and across the highway, and you know, it would just be so costly that it's just not -- you know, the amount of times

it would be used would not justify the expense to put it there.

Q: Right. Now I'm going to change the subject completely here almost. The Air Classic Race [00:23:00] that's coming through here, how did you get on the route?

A: I don't know. (laughter). You know, I found out actually that they plan their routes as many as two years out, but I heard about this -- you know, they contacted me, I'm trying to remember now when I got the first call, I think it was last fall. You know, "Pinedale is on our list for a route, you guys OK with that?" more or less. And I said, "Yeah, we're not -- we don't have a problem with that." So, you know, primarily you-- we've had to have a lot of volunteers for stop chair, head timer, and volunteers for timers and then the fixed-base operator, you know, basically had to bring additional people in because you just don't get that many airplanes coming in almost on top of each other and all needing fuel or some services.

Q: Right. Now I saw on the little map that this is a fly-by, it's not [00:24:00] one of the major stops, it's a minor stop? Refueling stop mainly?

A: Well, they're all -- they all have to fly-by for their time. This is a stop. And today, so far, every aircraft that's come in here today has flown -- done their fly-by

for time, turned around, landed, and came in for fuel. Every one of them -- there was, the nine aircraft to come in here so far today. Monday -- the rest started on Monday in California -- we had -- Monday night we had 21 airplanes on the ramp, all on the race. And it took, essentially most of the day, and of course Tuesday, everybody sit here because the weather was bad all day -- well, I shouldn't say everybody. Of the 21 airplanes, all b-- 17 of them got out Tuesday morning. There were four still under apron this morning that got out and thi-- they waited until the weather got low enough where they could not feel comfortable enough to leave [00:25:00] and then there's still six or seven airport on the other side of the [Wyoming?] Range waiting for some kind of a break in that cloud cover to come over.

Q: Right. So the benefits to the airport is basically fuel sales and exposure?

A: Well, the air field certainly has sold -- I can't say how much, because you know, each airplane's going to take, you know, 10, 20 gallons, but they sold fuel to each one of them that came through today and obviously all the ones that landed here Monday, and I'm sure they'll sell fuel to any more that get here today. The economic benefit to the FBO -- and there was an economic benefit to the town

because all 21 of those planes that were in here each had at least two -- pilot, co-pilot -- and some -- many of them had three, so they'll all -- those ladies spent the night in Pinedale. They ate dinner in Pinedale and some of them ate lunch in Pinedale and they all ate breakfast in Pinedale. [00:26:00]

Q: (laughs) That's all good. And then --

A: Some of them had to go buy clothes because (laughter) they came in here wearing shorts and short sleeves and it was, you know, in the thirties yesterday and rainy, so they had to run and get some warmer clothes.

Q: -- yeah, I understand that part. (laughs) Oh, gosh. I can't think of anything else but I can -- specifically to ask about. Anything you wanted to add about kind of perspective on the past ten years, or what you see maybe coming down the line?

A: Well, I guess, you know -- I don't know if you've talked to other airports in Wyoming -- all the airports in Wyoming are classified as a commercial service, a general aviation business class, [you know?] aviation intermediate, or general aviation local. Pinedale is a general aviation business class airport which primarily -- when the state [00:27:00] looks at projects at different airports, they look at the state system plan, which is the airport system

plan, and how that airport's classified, and what the airport needs and, you know, how it -- how important it is to aviation in the state and in the region and in the interstate. So, you know, that whole thing, you know, kind of dictates the way the airports are funded, you know, how important the project, and how -- how, you know, important it is for the state to assist with funding those things. So, that's kind of important because there are two airports in Sublette County. You know, there's the Big Piney Airport, which is a general aviation intermediate airport. And so, the state, when they look at matching funds, or funding grants to those and to matching the funds that are available to those, they look at the needs of the airport - - [00:28:00] as an example: if an airport is requesting to do a runway extension or something like that and it's not in the plan, the airport -- the state is going to say, "We really don't see the justification for that and funds are tight, so we're not going to fund that project." Obviously if funds were no problem, they'd say, "Yeah, go ahead and do that, we've got everything else funded," but you know, funds are not -- you know, they just -- we just don't go pull it off the trees. So that's kind of one of the things that, you know, the state looks at, and they look at the -- you know, what the airport's classification is, what

projects they have, and how much funding's available, and they, you know, they fund those airports that are classified and in need of those projects over and above some of the others. This is a tough call on -- you know, I wouldn't want to be in the shoes of some of the people in the state that are making those decisions, but, you know being on the [00:29:00] receiving end of it, I'm all for it.

Q: Now, I'm curious about the relationship between Jackson and Pinedale. Do you think that there's some overflow traffic here? People -- general aviation -- avoiding Jackson?

A: (sharp exhale) The people that fly into Jackson, they're flying charters, NetJets and stuff, they're going to go there. We do have some -- occasionally we get some pilots that have aircraft up there that will, you know, bring them down here for the winter, because they don't have any place to put it in the hangar up there, that type of thing. We don't -- I don't -- you know, if Jackson is weathered-in, sometimes we'll get some of that GA traffic. Both corporate and, you know, the small ones. They're coming here because they can't get in there. They'll either use us or Driggs. So, you know, and Driggs is closer, so a lot of times they're going to Driggs, particularly if they've got passengers that [00:30:00] they can just go over the

pass and get into Jackson. You know, that's a lot -- a lot quicker. But, you know, for the most part, if Driggs is down, then they're -- they're going to come in here. And we'll get them in here. We get some that -- you know, some pilots that are coming in from the south or the east that are in route to Jackson, if Jackson's, you know, below minimums, they'll land in here and wait until it raises. We don't really -- I don't perceive that we compete with Jackson for a lot of traffic. They're either coming to Pinedale or they're going to Jackson.

Q: Right, right. Each is a destination. Yeah. I was just curious if there was any, kind of overflow -- but you're far enough away that that really doesn't really make any sense. Driggs makes more sense. OK, I should probably go over and talk to the people in Big Piney at some point? Who's the --

A: Good luck with that.

Q: (laughs) Do they have a full-time manager or --

A: Big Piney currently does not have an FBO, and they currently do not have an airport manager. [00:31:00] They have an airport manager. They have an airport board over there that I -- and I can't even tell you how to get a hold of one of the board members. You know, they've got a nice facility over there, but the problem with that is that I

don't think they have enough traffic to warrant having a full-time, fixed-base operator and a manager.

Q: I know that's happened in Kemmerer because I talked to somebody up there too and they don't have an FBO there or a manager anymore.

A: Right. And that's unfortunate, you know, that's what we're seeing in some of these -- some of these communities. And, you know, they have self-service in Big Piney. You know, I said, they have a nice facility -- they got a beautiful hangar that -- I wish the hangar was here, but and -- and then they don't have that many based aircrafts so it's -- you know, it's one of those communities that's probably struggling a little bit. And, you know, I think that, if you've interviewed a lot, [00:32:00] you know, that the economy didn't help with a lot of that. You know, people that were flying and more so are doing less now because of the expense to do that.

Q: Right, right. And I have heard that over and over again. It's getting prohibitive to -- to fly a plane -- private plane.

A: Well, I own an airplane and I know that, you know, every time I take it up, it costs me about 60 bucks an hour to fly it our -- our flight plans were 10 gallons an hour and fuel's about six bucks a gallon so, you know, I don't go up

and play just to do it, you know because la-- if I'm going to go somewhere in it, that's one thing, but if I'm just going to go up and fly it around for the fun of it, I'm thinking, "Eh, do I really want to spend \$60?"

Q: (laughs) Yeah, yeah. Well I appreciate your time on --

A: Oh, you're welcome!

Q: -- on a day that -- where your schedule kind of got blown to pieces here. Um...

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