

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Dell Flight Strip

Other names/site number: Dell Airport/24BE2493

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: Dell Airport Road

City or town: Dell State: MT County: Beaverhead

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

     national      statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A      B X C      D

MT State Historic Preservation Officer

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☐  
Public – Local ☐  
Public – State ☒  
Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☐  
District ☒  
Site ☐  
Structure ☐  
Object ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	buildings
<u>2</u>		sites
<u>2</u>		structures
<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	objects
<u>10</u>	<u>6</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION/air-related = airport

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION/air-related = airport

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: No Classification

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD; CONCRETE; METAL, Steel;  
ASPHALT

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

The Dell Flight Strip Historic District consists of 16 features including a runway, historic runway boundary and corner markers, airport beacon, electrical shed, privy, hangars, jet fuel station, wind cone, tie-downs, two Precision Approach Path Indicators, and two hangar pads. The flight strip sits in the Red Rock River valley of extreme southwestern Montana; the river is about one mile east of the flight strip. The community of Dell lies one-half mile east and Dillon, the county seat, is 40 miles north of the historic district. The flight strip was constructed under the aegis of the Montana Highway Department in 1943. When completed, the department relocated the beacon, beacon tower, electrical shed, and privy from an intermediary landing field built near Dell in 1935 to the new facility. The flight strip's original construction dates to its potential use as an emergency landing field for B-17 "Flying Fortress" bombers training in the state during World War II, and to its possible use as an emergency landing field during the war for bombers and other planes flown to East Base (now Malmstrom Air Force Base) at Great Falls by the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) for transfer to the Soviet Union. The flight strip is accessed off Dell Airport Road on the south side of the historic district and approached from Interstate 15 at the Dell Interchange (#23). The Dell Flight Strip Historic District is owned by the State of Montana and managed by the Montana Department of Transportation's (MDT) Aeronautics Division. The flight strip sees, on average, about 50 take-off and landings monthly. Although needing some maintenance, the district retains a high level of all aspects of integrity including the virtually unchanged rural setting since the landing field's construction in 1943.



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### **Narrative Description**

The Dell Flight Strip Historic District sits in the broad Red Rock River valley of southwestern Montana about 40 miles south of Dillon, the county seat. The closest community is the town of Dell, one-half mile to the east. The district is accessed from the Interstate 15 Dell Interchange (#23); the interstate parallels the flight strip to the east. The Montana-Idaho border lies 24 miles south of the flight strip. The historic district is reached by Dell Airport Road, which extends one mile to the west from the I-15 interchange. The flight strip consists of 147 mostly undeveloped acres that feature sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and a variety of short grasses. The flight strip property is surrounded by irrigated cultivated fields. The scenic valley is bordered by the Tendoy Mountains to the west and the Blacktail Mountains to the east. The Beaverhead Mountains are visible to the south. The property is owned by the State of Montana and managed by the Montana Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division.

The Dell Flight Strip consists of 16 features, 10 contributing and six noncontributing. These include the runway, boundary and corner markers, beacon, electrical shed, privy, a former hangar now used for storage, jet fuel station, a modern hangar, tie downs, wind cone, two Precision Approach Path Indicators, and two concrete hangar pads.

### **Runway (one contributing structure)**

The northwest-southeast-oriented runway measures 7,000 feet long by about 75 feet wide and has a paved asphalt surface. Beyond the edges of the runway proper are pavement shoulders partially obscured by weeds that have grown through them. Modern runway lights parallel the length of the runway on both sides of the main paved surface. The pavement surface was originally laid on the runway in 1943; resurfacing occurred in 1963, 1989, and 1997. When built in 1943, the runway featured a 150-foot width but because of budgetary constraints the 1989 resurfacing only extended to a 75-foot width. Consequently, the east side of the runway consists of the 75-foot paved strip abandoned in 1989 and is in poor condition.

### **Runway Boundary Markers (counted as one contributing object)**

The runway is flanked by remnants of an irregular series of historic boundary markers. Those on the west side stand about 310 feet from the runway centerline, whereas those on the east side are about 385 feet from the centerline. Originally the stands of the boundary markers supported full-length 1-inch boards that bolted to a small triangular bracket affixed to the top of the stand. In most cases, only a small section of the boards that bolted to the brackets remain, the rest having been sawn off in the past. The boards once sported orange paint to improve visibility during landing. When installed at airports during the mid-1930s, boundary markers such as these were generally set 600 feet from the other nearest marker. At the Dell Flight Strip, however, the markers often stand 1,100 feet or more apart.

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**Runway Boundary Lights** (counted as one contributing object)

In contrast to the runway boundary markers, the runway boundary lights afford active lighting rather than the passive system of reflection using orange paint described immediately above. The boundary lights also occur near the runway and generally spaced at 300-foot intervals. Two styles of runway boundary lights appear at the Dell Flight Strip. The first, and dominant style, feature a two-foot painted orange metal cone supported by a metal stand with a five-foot metal pipe with a low-watt bulb in a glass lens projecting from the center of the cone. This style of light defines both the corners and lateral long sides of the runway. Of this style of light, the majority stand west of the runway. In a few cases, the cone and light no longer remain but their former positions are evidenced by small electrical boxes once painted orange. A second style of light that is restricted to the corners of the landing strip consist of a single vertical pipe with a small lens mounted to the top.

**Airport Beacon** (one contributing structure)

The beacon stands in the northeast corner of the terminal area and consists of a 51-foot-tall steel tower that supports the beacon light. The tower and beacon light were originally erected at the Dell Intermediary Landing Field in 1935, and later moved to the current location in 1943. The tower is comprised of steel angle sections bolted at the connections and measures about 10 feet by 10 feet at the base with each corner resting on a concrete footing. The tower tapers to 4 feet by 4 feet at its top and supports two steel platforms. A type VAC-M #3 NESCO lightning rod projects from the northwest corner of the platform. A narrow steel ladder attaches to the west elevation of the tower extending to the upper platform where the beacon is situated; a steel cable ascends vertically with the ladder. A steel angle section railing, approximately 4 feet in height encloses the 6-foot by 6-foot steel grate platform. The platform once held a trap door (now missing) that provided workers access at the top of the ladder. The lower platform, located about halfway up the tower, is not original to the tower. The platform floor is constructed of expanded metal set on three 2x6-inch or 2x8-inch joists laid flat. This platform was built specifically to access a wind cone attached to the tower by a long piece of angle iron extending toward the runway to the west. The entire tower is painted orange and white.

The revolving beacon appears to be original to the structure and sits atop a steel pedestal that houses the wiring. The beacon's 36-inch rotating unit (serial #64-50-C577) rotates at six RPM and has bullseye-type lenses with sectors. The 1,000-watt lamp is activated by a photoelectric cell. No course lights exist on the tower's platform.

Common to a small number of nighttime airway beacons recorded in southwest Montana, the Dell beacon tower bears a small warning sign noting that it is a crime to deface or vandalize the structure. The sign is mounted on the south side of the tower above head-height sometime after 1959.

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**Electrical Shed** (one contributing building)

The electrical shed stands immediately south of the beacon tower and displays the standard US Bureau of Air Commerce design for airway beacon generator sheds developed in the 1930s, nearly identical to the generator house at the Homestake Airway Beacon near Butte (NR-listed June 3, 2019, NR #MP 00004037). The building was originally erected at the Dell Intermediary Landing Field in 1935 and moved to a concrete foundation at its current location in 1943. The building measures 10 feet (east-west) by 12 feet (north-south). Small openings cut into the foundation on all four sides just below floor level for ventilation are currently covered with hardware cloth. The building's walls feature cladding of standing seam galvanized metal panels, each measuring 2 feet wide. The walls are painted white, except for a wide orange band at mid-wall height. The number "6114" is stenciled in orange paint on the west wall below the orange band.<sup>1</sup> A small metal louver vent appears high in the south gable wall.

The shed's entrance in the center of the east wall is fronted by a single concrete step. The door consists of a wood cross panel unit holding a four-pane half-light window; the window is a non-original alteration. The door, however, does retain original hardware and original plain wood trim. One double-hung wood-sash window is in the north and west walls. They originally both had a 6/6 configuration, but the lower sash of the west window now holds a single pane of glass. The side gable roof is covered with the same standing seam metal panels as the walls and has a metal ridge roll. The roofing retains little of its historic orange paint.

The interior walls and ceiling are of Douglas fir tongue-and-groove v-boards, and the flooring is also Douglas fir tongue-and-groove material. The presence of flooring in the building belies its use for housing the generator to power the beacon. A large electrical panel identical to those observed at Montana's nighttime airway beacons hangs on the north wall. In this case, however, the panel resides inside the building rather than hanging on the tower near its base. A large free-standing electrical box with "RUNWAY" stenciled near the base stands inside this building and is estimated to date to the 1950s.

**Privy** (one contributing building)

The 1930s-era one-seat privy stands 55 feet south of the generator/electrical shed. It measures 4½ feet north-south by 5½ feet east-west. The privy's south side rests on a railroad tie, but no other part of a foundation was observed. This wood-frame building sports simple drop wood siding and 1x4-inch corner boards. The door is a five-panel wood unit centered in the west wall trimmed with plain x4-inch boards. There are no windows, but a crescent moon cut-out appears in the front and back gables. The gable roof features rafters composed of 2x4-inch boards with board sheathing covered with asphalt shingles. The interior walls are sheathed with 1x7-inch boards (with open spacing) and appear to have tarpaper between them and the exterior siding. The flooring consists of Douglas fir tongue-and-groove boards.

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the number "6114" is not known.

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**Hangar #1** (one noncontributing building)

This corrugated metal sheathed building was built by Byron Martinelli as a hangar in 1980 but later converted to a storage shed by MDT's Aeronautics Division. The wood frame building measures 32 feet north-south by 41 feet east-west and stands on a concrete foundation. The walls are clad in galvanized corrugated sheet panels applied horizontally on the north, east, and west sides, and vertically on the south side. The original hangar door(s) in the south wall has been removed. Entrance is via a person-door in the east wall near the southeast building corner that holds a four-panel wood unit. No windows exist but filtered light permeates the building through fiberglass panels high in the north and south walls. The shallow pitch shed roof is made of 2x6-inch rafters and purlins with plywood sheathing. The low roof slope disallows a view of the roofing material itself, though corrugated metal sheeting is likely.

**Hangar #2** (one noncontributing building)

This large hangar was constructed on site in 2014 by Gordon Smith, who leases the property from MDT's Aeronautics Division. Measuring about 75 feet north-south by 90 feet east-west, the hangar rests on a concrete foundation. The standing seam steel building faces south where a good-sized concrete apron lies between it and the taxiway. The single out-swinging standing seam steel door covers almost the entire length and over half the height of the south elevation. A steel person-door with a keypad lock provides entry in the east wall near the southeast building corner. The front gable roof has a very shallow pitch and is covered with standing seam steel.

**Former Hangar Pad 1** (one contributing site)

Two former hangar locations are marked by a short asphalt apron. The southernmost pad consists of a rectangular gravel surface that measures 41 feet north-south by 29 feet east-west, partially surrounded by a concrete foundation wall. The pad was constructed in 1950 by Bill Peterson, who leased space from the State of Montana to build a metal Quonset hangar on the property; this pad served as a foundation for the hanger. The hangar was removed around 1979 and replaced by a small wood frame building with board-and-batten siding and a low-pitched shed roof, too small to accommodate an aircraft. This building was removed in 2017 when the owner terminated the lease. Although the building no longer remains, the pad provides locational information for buildings that once stood within the district's boundary during the historic period.

**Former Hangar Pad 2** (one contributing site)

The northernmost pad is barely noticeable but its location is positively identified by reference to 2005 and 2011 satellite imagery. While difficult to discern, the highly disintegrated concrete pad measures roughly 13 feet north-south by 24 feet east-west. Gravel surrounding the north, south, and east sides of the pad help define its location and size, indicating the location of where an

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outbuilding once stood. The concrete pad was poured in the 1960s and originally supported a corrugated metal building constructed by its original owner, Bill Peterson, who leased space from the State of Montana to build a hangar on the property. The building was removed in 2017 when the owner terminated the lease. Although the building no longer remains, the pad itself provides locational information for buildings that once occupied space within the district.

**Jet Fuel Station** (one noncontributing building)

The fuel station was installed at the property in 1979 by Leon Hirsch's Canyon Ranch Company for use by his private jet. The station consists of an older, possibly historic section on the south and a newer addition on the north. The original section stands on a concrete slab, measures 6 feet by 8 feet, and is presumed to be of wood-frame construction and sided with galvanized corrugated steel siding painted tan. A single steel door in the west wall near the building's southwest corner is closed with a hasp and padlock plus a keypad lock. The shed roof is covered with the same material as the walls, which display narrow ribs. This part of the building apparently houses telephone equipment installed at the request of Byron Martinelli and other users of the flight strip.

The addition is T-shaped with the west portion measuring 6 feet by 9 feet and the shorter portion measuring 3 feet by 8 feet. The larger west portion stands up to 6 feet tall at the eaves and the latter just 2 feet. Both sections of the addition feature cinder block construction and stand on a concrete foundation. The entry is a steel door centered in the west wall. The larger west portion of the addition features a shallow pitch shed roof made of 2x4-inch steel joists covered with standing seam metal roofing. The short narrow section displays a flat sheet metal roof. The west room contains a pipe and valve to dual planes. A posted notice from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality reports that the station features a 10,000-gallon jet fuel capacity, though currently not operating.

A barbed wire fence encloses the rear of the fuel station. Inside the enclosure are two 3-foot-diameter corrugated metal pipes buried upright that mark access to the buried fuel tank(s).

**Wind Cone** (one noncontributing object)

The lighted wind cone was installed by the Aeronautics Commission in 1989 on the east side of the flight strip boundary and northwest of the terminal area. It consists of a four-part metal pole that measures 3¼ inches in diameter at the base and tapers to 1 to 1½ inches in diameter at the top. The pole stands 30 feet in height. At the base it is bracketed for support by two 3¼-inch in diameter round metal posts and stands on a concrete pad that measures 18 inches by 24 inches. The nylon wind cone flies about 25 feet above the ground. Four small spotlights atop the pole are oriented to the four directions and pointed toward the ground, illuminating the wind cone.

**Original Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI)** [counted as one contributing object]

The original PAPI system is located about 45 feet east of the runway edge and 600 feet from the runway's north end and consists of a two-box L-881 system with the boxes situated on either side of a central electrical box. The 53345/28 type PAPI could have been installed as early as 1966. The two optical boxes stand 20 feet apart (center to center) and each box configuration

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measures about 3 feet tall. The rectangular optical box mounted at the top features a hood covering the lenses and attaches to a metal plate supported by three 2-inch diameter poles bolted to a 3-foot by 3-foot 9-inch concrete base. The metal electrical box measures 20 inches by 20 inches with a depth of 10 inches.

**Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI)** [counted as one noncontributing object]

This Precision Approach Path Indicator stands 93 feet south of the taxiway and faces toward the aerial approach paths of the runway. The PAPI functions as a visual indicator that provides guidance information to help a pilot acquire and maintain a correct approach. MDT's Aeronautics Division installed the device in the early 2000s. The PAPI sits atop a 4½-inch diameter metal post that stands 10 feet in height. The base of the post bolts to a 22½-inch square concrete pad. The PAPI device consists of a 9-inch square electrical box with one 6-inch lens each facing in opposite directions toward the north and south approach paths. The wiring to the west lens mechanism is disconnected. A radar gun is adjacent to each lens assembly.

**Tie-Downs** (counted as one noncontributing object)

The tie down area served to accommodate planes that remained at the air strip for short periods of time. Fourteen individual tie-downs exist in or near the tie-down area. One occurs southeast of the main cluster but the other 13 are in proximity, mainly defined by an associated fiberglass cone. The tie downs consist of an aviation tire painted yellow with some of the tires displaying embossed lettering, "FLIGHT CUSTOM II GOODYEAR FLEXTEN BELTED." Twelve of the 13 appear in two north-south oriented rows with each tie-down evenly spaced from the others in its row. Tie-downs were used in pairs allowing a plane to park on either side of an individual tie-down. The tie downs were installed in 1979 by Byron Martinelli under contract to the Aeronautics Commission.

**Integrity**

The Montana Highway Department designed and constructed the Dell Flight Strip in 1943. Much of the infrastructure of the flight strip originated at the nearby intermediary landing field established in 1935 by the US Bureau of Air Commerce. The highway department owned the property until 1959 when it transferred ownership to the Montana Department of Commerce's Aeronautics Commission. The commission transferred the property to the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) in 1991. Administration of the flight strip currently occurs through MDT's Aeronautics Division. Maintenance of the site has been nominal since 1943.

Runway repaving transpired in 1963, 1988, and 1997, an important and necessary maintenance task for the continued and safe operation of the flight strip. The beacon, electrical shed, privy, and lighting and marker system have been part of this property since 1943. Beginning in the 1950s, the Aeronautics Commission leased space at the flight strip for hangars. Two historic hangars have been removed and two non-historic-age hangars remain; the concrete pads

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associated with the historic hangers also remain. Although the wind cone, tie-downs, and modern Precision Approach Path Indicator are noncontributing to the district because they are all less than 50 years of age (as of 2021), they do not detract from the overall integrity of setting, feeling, association, and design of the airfield, and in fact illustrate the evolution and use of the airfield over time.

The runway, beacon, electrical shed, privy, and marker and lighting remain original to the property and in their historic locations. No change to the length or width of the runway has occurred, although its functional width narrowed to 75 feet to save money in repaving.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, only about 5,000 feet of runway is needed (although the entire length was repaved in 1997). Asphalt is no longer used to repave the runway, yet some of this material remains adjacent to the runway and taxiway. The runway displays its northeast-southwest orientation with the terminus still present, approximately 1,500 feet from the south end of the facility. The beacon, electrical shed, and privy also stand in their original locations with no alterations since 1935. Two concrete pads that once served as foundations for hangers also remain, indicating the hangers' former locations. The original beacon light and the nighttime route markers (runway markers) remain. The beacon and privy also remain functional.

The integrity of the flight strip, however, has been diminished by the presence of two noncontributing hangars at the terminus area along with the jet fuel station. Visually, the hangars are the most intrusive features at the site but stand where historic hangars once sat. Despite some loss in integrity, the layout of the flight strip still exhibits much of its historic appearance and continues to serve its historic function. While the presence of Interstate 15 to the east detracts to some degree from the rural nature and setting of the airstrip, it has followed the same alignment since its construction in 1970, within the historic period.

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<sup>2</sup> The runway was designed to accommodate B-17 bombers with a wingspan of 104 feet. Flying Fortresses required a minimum of 4,400 feet for take-off and landing.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Transportation

Military

**Period of Significance**

1943-1971

**Significant Dates**

1943, 1944

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

Montana Highway Department/Design

Barnard-Curtis Co./Minneapolis, MN

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Dell Flight Strip is eligible for listing in the National Register at a local level of significance under Criterion A for its importance serving a rural local populace with air transportation ferrying both people and goods. It is also significant for its origins and anticipated use stemming from the Second World War. Shortly after the United States entered the war, the US Army Air Force established satellite airfields in western states, including three in Montana. In addition to satellite airfields, the Army also established intermediate landing fields, including one at Dell, to serve as emergency landing fields for the training bomber crews. These flight strips were also

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intended for emergency use for the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) who flew American bombers destined for the Soviet Union to East Base in Great Falls.<sup>3</sup> The beacon, electrical shed, and privy were moved from the old intermediary landing field (located near Dell) to the Dell Flight Strip after its construction by the military.

The Dell Flight Strip gains additional significance under Criterion C, representing a rural airstrip that continues to serve the surrounding area. The property exhibits good integrity with the runway retaining its original configuration and many of the important historic features associated with its early use, including the beacon and electrical shed. The flight strip remains active, receives routine maintenance, and presents a mixture of historic features associated with its operation, along with newer equipment, important to its continued operation.

The period of significance begins in 1943 with the construction of the flight strip and ends in 1971, the end of the historic period. Significant dates include 1943, the year the flight strip opened, and 1944, when the flight strip's potential use by the military ended and years of service as a public entity began.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Dell Flight Strip is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C at a local level of significance. The origins of the flight strip date to the Second World War when the US Army Air Force established satellite airfields in western states, where B-17 Flying Fortress crews trained before deployment to Europe and the Pacific theaters. Lewistown, Glasgow, and Cut Bank, Montana hosted satellite airfields during the war. The Army designated Dell as the location of an intermediate landing field for emergency landings by the bombers in 1942. The location of the flight strip on the air lane from Salt Lake City, Utah to Great Falls, Montana, provided opportunity for use by WASP pilots who flew bombers to East Base (now Malmstrom Air Force Base) destined for the Soviet Union during the war. The beacon, electrical shed, and privy were moved to the flight strip from an older nearby intermediary landing field. After the war, the Dell Flight Strip assumed use, and continues to function today, as a small rural public strip, which is illustrated well through resources present on the property. Outside business-as-usual operations, the air strip has occasionally served to assist local efforts in times of need. The flight strip remains active and routinely maintained. The property exhibits good integrity: the runway retains its original configuration and many of the original associated features remain, such as the beacon, generator shed, and boundary markers.

**History**

Dell is situated in the Red Rock River valley of southwestern Montana. Historical development in the valley began in the 1850s when father and son cattlemen, Richard and Johnny Grant, began pasturing cattle in the valley. The men traded healthy cattle for worn-out animals on the Overland Trail – at a ratio of two worn-out animals for one healthy cow or ox. The animals fattened up on the grasses of southwestern Montana and then were driven back south for trade.

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<sup>3</sup> No documentation has been located verifying such a need ever occurred.

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The Grants represent Montana's first cattle ranchers, and this valley proved important to their operation (they also ran cattle in the Blacktail and Deer Lodge valleys).<sup>4</sup>

The Helena branch of the Montana-Utah (called the Corinne Road after 1868), passed through the valley about a half-mile east of the flight strip's future site. The route was pioneered by fur trappers in the 1830s, but became better established by stockmen, like the Grants, in the 1850s. Brothers Granville and James Stuart traveled the route in 1857 and reported on the Red Rock River as a "beautiful clear little stream." With the discovery of gold on Grasshopper Creek in July 1862 and the resulting stampede to the diggings, the route from Utah became a critical supply line to the mining camp of Bannack, Montana. Additional strikes on Alder Creek and Last Chance Gulch in 1863 and 1864, made the Montana-Utah Road the most important route for supplies and pilgrims to the territory.<sup>5</sup>

Just after crossing Monida Pass into Montana, the trail separated into three branches. One led to Bannack, another ultimately terminated in Virginia City, and the middle branch—the road near the future airfield site—proceeded on to Helena.<sup>6</sup>

On March 15, 1880, the Utah & Northern Railroad crossed over Monida Pass into Montana Territory. Construction, funded at first by Mormon entrepreneurs, began at Brigham City, Utah in 1872 and slowly proceeded north until lack of funds caused the termination of construction in 1874. In 1878, the Union Pacific Railroad took over the company, renamed it the Utah & Northern Railroad, and resumed construction of the line with the ultimate goal the booming mining camp of Butte. In the summer of 1880, the head of construction reached the Dell area. The railroad established a construction camp there, named Red Rock, and then moved on. It gave the same name to the next construction camp on the line. It halted construction for the season north of the present site of Dillon in 1880. Work resumed in the spring of 1881, and the last spike driven at Butte on December 26, 1881.<sup>7</sup>

The railroad established a station near the former site of the first Red Rock construction camp. Rechristened Dell, because of the topography, it became an important trading center and shipping point for cattle and sheep ranches located in the area. The post office opened in 1890. In addition to the depot and section house, the Dell townsite included the Patterson Hotel, a substantial brick schoolhouse, water tank, residences, and corrals. Although an active place, the population never surpassed 100 people.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, (Helena: State Publishing Co., 1942), pp. 263-264; Michael Malone, Richard Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, Rev. ed., (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, pp. 136, 137; Granville Stuart, *Prospecting for Gold*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> Robert G. Athearn, "Railroad to a Far-Off Country: The Utah and Northern," *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1968), pp. 4, 18; Malone, et al., *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, p. 175.

<sup>8</sup> Rich Aarstad, Ellie Arguimbau, Ellen Baumler, Charlene Porsild, and Brian Shovers, *Montana Place Names from Alzada to Zortman: A Montana Historical Society Guide*, (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2009), p. 67; Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana: The Story of Montana's Place Names*, (Missoula:

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**World War II in Montana—Precursor to the Construction of the Dell Flight Strip**

*The United States Enters the War*

The United States entered World War II on December 8, 1941, when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) asked Congress for a declaration of war the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Nazi dictator Adolph Hitler and fascist dictator Benito Mussolini declared war on the United States three days later. At the Arcadia Conference at the White House from December 22, 1941 to January 14, 1942, FDR and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill adopted a “Germany First” policy to initially concentrate allied forces on the defeat of Nazi Germany and then turn to the defeat of Imperial Japan. Although FDR and the US military anticipated being drawn into the conflict, the US military was woefully unprepared for the task before it.<sup>9</sup>

The United States Army Air Force (USAAF), known as the US Army Air Corps until June 1941, had a small light and heavy bomber force and few fighters that could compete with the German Luftwaffe. The USAAF’s supreme mission during the war was to “conduct a sustained and unrelenting air offensive against Germany and Italy, to destroy their will and capability to continue the war, and to make an invasion either unnecessary or unfeasible without excessive cost.” To accomplish that goal, the USAAF significantly expanded the production of B-17 and B-24 heavy bombers. From 1936 to 1945, the United States manufactured 31,213 B-17 and B-24 bombers for use in the European and Pacific theaters of war.<sup>10</sup>

In January 1942, the War Department and USAAF chief Lieutenant General Henry “Hap” Arnold formed the Eighth Air Force and placed it under the command of Major General Carl Spaatz. In May 1942, the first Eighth Air Force B-17 bombers reached Great Britain and launched its first raid against railroad yards in Rouen, France in August of that year. Flying from bases in England from October 1942 to March 1943, the unit concentrated its bombing runs on German submarine pens in occupied France. In January 1943, the Eighth Air Force launched an intense daylight bombing campaign deep inside Germany, attacking targets at Wilhelmshafen, the Ruhr, Berlin, Hamburg, among others. Over a five-month period, from January to May 1945, Eighth Air Force bombers dropped thousands of tons of explosives on German military and civilian targets. For the Eighth, one of the costliest attacks occurred on August 17, 1943, when a force of 376 B-17 bombers attacked ball bearing plants and airplane factories at Schweinfurt-Regensburg. During that attack, the Germans counted 60 planes destroyed and 95 heavily damaged with a loss of 587 airmen (killed, wounded and POW). Bombers and crews who trained at the Glasgow Army Airfield (Glasgow AAF) participated in the Schweinfurt raid. The strategic bombing campaign ended with the surrender of Nazi Germany on May 8, 1945. Historians continue to debate the effectiveness of the Combined Bomber Offensive and whether it fulfilled the intended function.<sup>11</sup>

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Mountain Press Publishing, 1990), p. 71; Federal Writers’ Project, *Montana: A State Guidebook*, (New York: Hastings House, 1939), p. 292.

<sup>9</sup> Donald L. Miller, *Masters of the Air: America’s Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, *Ibid*, 45, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, *Masters of the Air*, pp. 45, 47-48, 74-75, 114, 115-116, 148, 192-206, 250.

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*Training the Crews*

The USAAF satellite airfields established B-17 and B-24 bomber Organizational Training Unit (OTU) formations throughout the western United States to train B-17 pilots and crews in bombing techniques, flying formation, gunnery practice, the use of the top secret Norden bombsight, and for the crews to develop as cohesive units.<sup>12</sup>

Training B-17 bomb squadrons occurred over a three-month period. Air crews trained day and night in varying weather conditions and largely flew to six bombing ranges in Montana. Extended flights included training exercises over Washington and Minnesota. Dummy bombs used in training exercises consisted of sand filled M-38s. Training combined navigation, bombing and gunnery practice, to familiarize crews with all aspects of the B-17, with the intent that each crewman learned the responsibilities of the other crew members. A spokesman for the Army's Second Air Force stated, "The crews at the four Montana fields will be engaged in regular training flights to check on the accuracy of navigators and to promote teamwork among the crews. Much of their time will be devoted to practice bombing." The dispersed airfield permitted simulation of conditions in combat zones. One person compared flying over central and northeast Montana with its lack of clearly identifiable landmarks to flying over blacked out England. Another Army spokesman explained that, "Many of the flights will be in precise formation, simulating battle conditions, when ships must be so spaced as to cover one another with guns." In late 1942 and 1943, the skies over central and northeastern Montana were filled with B-17s flying between the airfields, partaking in bombing practice, and testing long-range navigation skills.<sup>13</sup>

In total, four bomb groups completed OTU in Montana, but only one bomb group at a time trained there. These were the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 385<sup>th</sup>, the 390<sup>th</sup>, and the 401<sup>st</sup>. Four bomb squadrons were attached to each bomb group. In Montana, a total of 16 bomb squadrons trained at the four AAFs, and four bomb squadrons trained at a time. The four bomb squadrons stationed (in chronological sequence) at the Glasgow AAF were the 9<sup>th</sup> bomb squadron of the 2<sup>nd</sup> bomb Group, the 549<sup>th</sup> bomb squadron of the 385<sup>th</sup> bomb group, the 568<sup>th</sup> bomb squadron of the 390<sup>th</sup> bomb group, and the 614<sup>th</sup> bomb squadron of the 401<sup>st</sup> bomb group. As a point of interest, the first bomb group to train at Glasgow was sent for duty to North Africa, but all others went to England. The attrition rate among B-17 bomb groups was notoriously high and few who joined lived to see the end of the war. As one example, only a single crew among Glasgow's 568<sup>th</sup> squadron survived the war. In lives and dollars, approximately 600 men perished and \$20 million in B-17 bombers were lost. As the tide of the war changed, the need for the satellite airfields diminished.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The airfields were referred to as satellites to the primary airfield at Great Falls' East Base. The three Montana satellite airfields were located at Cut Bank, Lewistown, and Glasgow.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Rennie, Cultural Resources Inventory of the Glasgow International Airport Property, Valley County, Montana (September 2005), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT; Patrick Rennie, Lewistown Satellite Airfield Historic District (Boundary Increase II) National Register nomination (NR #No. 6001247, listed 1/17/2007), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

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*The Women's Airforce Service Pilots*

Because of manpower shortages after the United States entry into World War II in December 1941, the US Army Air Force recruited women to serve in the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) and the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS). Formed in September 1942, both organizations consisted of federal civil service employees recruited into the military. The female pilots tested and ferried aircraft, and trained other pilots. In this way, they freed up men for combat in Europe and the South Pacific. The WAFS ferried bombers, cargo planes, and fighter planes from factories to airfields. In August 1943, both organizations merged to form the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). In Montana, WASP pilots flew military aircraft to East Base (now Malmstrom Air Force Base) in Great Falls. From there, male pilots ferried the planes to Alaska where the planes were picked up by Russian pilots to assist in the Soviet Union's war against Nazi Germany. WASP provided an invaluable service to the US war effort until the US Air Force disbanded the organization in December 1944, the same month and year the USAAF deactivated the Montana airfields.<sup>15</sup>

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In September 1935, the US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Air Commerce began improvements on the National Parks Airway route between Dell and Helena. The agency established the airway route in 1928 but had only developed it as far as Monida Pass by 1931. The improvement of the route in Montana coincided with the delineation and lighting of the Northern Transcontinental Airway route in 1935. Improvements to the National Parks Airway included the installation of 10 beacons, and the construction of intermediate airfields to provide landing areas for aircraft in trouble or because of adverse weather conditions. The Bureau of Air Commerce built an intermediate runway and beacon near Dell in early November 1935.<sup>16</sup>

*Construction as an Emergency Flight Strip*

In the wake of the US entry into World War II, the US Army established East Base in Great Falls and satellite airfields at Cut Bank, Lewistown, and Glasgow in 1942. The purpose of the satellite bases was training B-17 Flying Fortress crews in high altitude pinpoint bombing techniques that would be used in the European and Pacific theaters of operation. Improvements at the satellite airfields included hangars, barracks, mess and recreation halls, Norden bombsight vaults, and structures to support training operations.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick Rennie, Cultural Resources Inventory of the Glasgow International Airport Property, Valley County, Montana (September 2005), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT; Patrick Rennie, Lewistown Satellite Airfield Historic District (Boundary Increase II) National Register nomination (NR #No. 6001247, listed 1/17/2007), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT; "Reliving WWII Lend-Lease Flights," *The Great Falls Tribune*, June 16, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Jon Axline, Canyon Resort Airway Beacon National Register of Historic Places Nomination (NR# 100004403, listed September 19, 2019), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT; "National Parks to Have Beacons from this City to Dell," *The Helena Independent*, September 26, 1935; "Additional Beacons are Now Installed," *The Helena Independent*, November 3, 1935.

<sup>17</sup> Rich Aarstad et al., 167; Jon Axline, Glasgow Army Airfield Norden Bombsight Storage Vault National Register of Historic Places Nomination (NR# 11000824, listed November 18, 2011) on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

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In addition to satellite airfields, landing fields in outlying areas that bomber crews could use in case of emergency were also constructed. One of those emergency landing fields for B-17 bombers was just outside the community of Dell in southern Beaverhead County.

In June or early July 1942, "at the instigation of the [US] Army," the federal Public Roads Administration (PRA) asked the State Highway Commission to obtain the right-of-way necessary to construct an emergency flight strip at Dell in Beaverhead County. The federal government would pay for the project, but the design of the runway and the property itself would be under the highway commission. To that end, the Montana Highway Department's Right-of-Way Bureau acquired the land in July 1942, and secured agreements from surrounding landowners regarding height restrictions for agricultural buildings, "that might endanger planes using the strip." In late August 1942, the Army announced plans to construct roadside flight strips in Montana. The Army intended to build the airstrips adjacent to strategic highways, such as US Highway 91. A location near Dell was one of the first.<sup>18</sup>

On December 17, 1942, the highway commission awarded \$155,057 to the Minneapolis-based Barnard-Curtis Company to build the airfield. The company relied primarily on out-of-state labor for the project, but a fair number of local men, including teenagers, worked on building the airfield. Highway department engineer Sam Thompson supervised construction of the strip. The Army and highway commission imposed a deadline of June 30, 1943 to complete the project. Work on the airstrip didn't begin until May 1943, and Barnard-Curtis finally completed work on the airfield the first week of October 1943, over two months past the deadline. Using readily available resources from the area, much of the infrastructure at the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) nearby intermediary landing field was relocated to the newly constructed flight strip. This included the beacon tower and light, electrical shed, boundary markers, and lighted delineators.

From 1943 to 1944, the flight strip's intended use included that as an emergency landing field for military aircraft ferried to East Base in Great Falls by female WASP pilots. In 1944, the military suspended the B-17 training operations in Montana. While the airstrip did occasionally accommodate emergency landings by private aircraft, no accounts were found indicating the flight strip ever witnessed an emergency landing by a Flying Fortress. By 1949 the highway department lacked military support of the flight strip and Right-of-Way Bureau supervisor A.G. Swaney reported that he did not "believe that very much had been done by way of maintenance on the strip by state forces."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Memorandum, A. G. Swaney, R/W Supervisor, to W. O. Whipps, Admin. Eng. And Commission Sec., August 12, 1949. Photocopy on file at Montana Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Division, Dell Airport file; "Army will Build Flight Strip near Dillon Road," *The Montana Standard*, August 26, 1942; "Will Build Roadside Flight Strips in State," *The Billings Gazette*, December 18, 1942, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid; Glasgow Army Airfield; "Flight Strip Ready," *The Montana Standard*, September 10, 1943, p. 13; "Airport Project at Dell Completed," *The Dillon Examiner*, September 8, 1943, p. 4; "Lima Services," *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, May 21, 1943, p. 2; "Flight Strip Ready," *The Great Falls Tribune*, September 27, 1943, p. 3; "Thompson Returns from Lima Job," *The Missoulian*, September 6, 1943, p. 3; "Dell Air Strip to be Taken Over by MAC," *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, June 16, 1959, p. 1; Dell Airport File, MDT Aeronautics Division; Memorandum, Swaney to Whipps.

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*Use as a Public Flight Strip*

While the Dell Flight Strip was constructed anticipating possible use by the military, its service to the general local community proved much more important throughout its history. After World War II ended in 1945, the flight strip was utilized primarily for recreational purposes, as a base for search and rescue operations, by crop dusters, as a location for aircraft instructional classes, and analogous to its original historic intent, as a convenient emergency landing opportunity. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the flight strip provided the impetus for the construction of the Dell Airport Bar, a popular meeting place for dancing and other social events. In the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the flight strip was used by absentee landowners to access their landholdings. Indeed, the jet fuel station installed at the flight strip in 1979 stored fuel for one landowner's charter jet.

Newspaper references to the Dell Flight Strip are infrequent in the post-war years though clearly the rural airport was significant to Dell's small economy. Within a few years of the end of World War II, the *Dillon Daily Tribune* ran an advertisement from Beaverhead Flying Service offering flying lessons at the flight strip for "anyone flying under the GI Bill or privately."<sup>20</sup> Boy Scout groups frequently met at the flight strip to climb aboard private aircraft for free rides around the upper Beaverhead Valley. Evidence also suggests that the flight strip was a popular landing spot for recreationalists accessing the area's hunting and fishing resources. In May 1948, Butte's *Montana Standard* reported that pilots and passengers from Montana, Idaho, and Utah had to wait their turn to land at the Dell air strip on opening day of fishing season. From the runway's tie-down area, they walked a mile to the Beaverhead River to try their luck at angling. The average monthly total for pilots landing at the Dell Flight Strip currently stands at 50, with most use occurring during the summer months and hunting season.<sup>21</sup>

The airport served as a base for search and rescue operations on at least two occasions in 1957. In March of that year, five people from Dillon, that included an attorney and his wife and daughter and a Dillon automobile dealer and his son, perished in a small plane crash near Monida Pass, south of Dillon. The Dell Flight Strip served as an operational base, in addition to the Dillon Airport, hosting a search party, equipment, and gasoline trucks to refuel search planes.<sup>22</sup>

July of the same year witnessed a spray plane, a converted navy torpedo bomber, out of Dell crashing in the Beaverhead National Forest. The exact circumstances of the crash remain unknown, but the pilot was spraying for spruce budworms and under contract to the Forest Service. Initially, all searchers could find was a brain-spattered crash helmet and part of the pilot's jaw.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Advertisement, *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, September 10, 1948.

<sup>21</sup> "Anglers Scatter Far, Many Fly, and Catch Some," *The Montana Standard*, May 24, 1948; Dell Airport File, MDT Aeronautics Division.

<sup>22</sup> "Interstate Region Shocked by Tragic Accident That Claims Lives of Five," *The Dillon Examiner*, March 6, 1957, pp. 1 and 9.

<sup>23</sup> "Spray Plane Goes Down in Area South of Dillon," *The Independent Record*, July 11, 1957, p. 1; "Flyer's Body Sighted at Lake Bottom," *The Montana Standard*, July 13, 1957, p. 1.



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While the airstrip served as a hub for rescue missions for the surrounding area, it did infrequently serve in its original planned historic capacity— as an emergency landing field. In December 1965, a Dell area pilot took off from the flight strip in his private plane destined for Ogden, Utah. Soon after he developed engine trouble and attempted to make it back to the air strip. Unfortunately, he “failed to make a successful emergency landing at the Dell airport.” The pilot died in the crash. The Civic Aeronautics Board determined that the crash was due to pilot error and inadequate maintenance of the plane.<sup>24</sup>

Another example of the use of the flight strip for emergency landings appeared in an October issue of the *Dillon Examiner* newspaper: “The Leslie McNinches sometimes wish they didn’t live so close to the Dell airport especially when a plane comes in for a forced landing like the one did Tuesday.”<sup>25</sup>

The airport expanded into a social role in May of 1949, when the founders of the Dell Airport Social Club incorporated as a non-profit. Unfortunately, little is known about the group other than it organized as a public benefit corporation; it ceased operations by 1981.<sup>26</sup>

### *Later Ownership and Operations*

The Montana Highway Commission retained ownership of the Dell Flight Strip until August 1959 when it turned ownership over to the Montana Aeronautics Commission “for administrative purposes.” Although small in scale, the airstrip gained some statewide notoriety as the *Billings Gazette* called the Dell Flight Strip one of the best in Montana. However, by 1960, the runway faced substantial neglect, with large cracks in the asphalt and weeds growing up through them. Potholes and frayed edges were also significant problems on the runway. Although the flight strip employed a caretaker, he was apparently not up to the maintenance task.<sup>27</sup>

In September 1960, the commission announced plans to improve the facility. Indeed, the state committed \$15,000 to spend on the strip. Supplemental funds provided by the CAA were earmarked for the installation of new beacons and radar at the site. The agency’s justification for the expenditure, which never came to pass, was because of “mounting demands of civil and military aviation.” In May 1961, the state Board of Examiners opened bids to seal coat the runway; the state never awarded the contract. Two years later, in May 1963, the state awarded a contract to Idaho Falls contractor Robert Burgraf to repave the runway. The work cost \$15,083. The project, however, specified that only 5,000 feet of the 7,000-foot runway be repaved.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Pilot’s error blamed in air crash near Dell,” *The Montana Standard*, December 4, 1965, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> “Dell News,” *The Dillon Examiner*, October 14, 1953.

<sup>26</sup> Little is known about the official operation of the Dell Flight Strip from 1949 to 1959. “Dance at Dell Saturday Eve,” *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, March 31, 1959, p. 1; “Firms, Non-Profit Clubs File for Incorporation,” *The Billings Gazette*, May 20, 1949, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> The caretaker was under contract to the county to maintain the airport. He received a monthly salary of \$85 from the county commissioners. “Co. Board Proceedings,” *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, May 15, 1961, p. 3; Dell Airport File; “Dell Air Strip to be Taken Over by MAC,” *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, June 16, 1959, p. 1; Dell Air Strip Change Ordered,” *The Billings Gazette*, June 12, 1959, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> The Civil Aeronautics Administration became the Federal Aviation Administration in August 1958. Dell Airport File; “Will Spend \$15,000 on Airport at Dell,” *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, September 2, 1960, p. 1; “State

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From the 1960s into the 1990s, the Dell Flight Strip was the subject of much discussion between the Aeronautics Commission, Beaverhead County, and users of the airport. The slurry seal of the runway lasted for only a limited time and the deterioration resumed by the 1970s. While owned by the Aeronautics Commission, it left much of the maintenance of the facility to caretakers. The commission also began leasing space to pilots for hangars at an undetermined time, adding to the wear-and-tear of the strip. Large cracks once again appeared in the runway with great stands of sweet clover and other weeds making use of the runway quite hazardous. In 1977, the commission (now under the aegis of the Montana Department of Commerce), reached an agreement with Beaverhead County to spray the weeds. The caretaker's (Byron Martinelli) responsibilities included removal of weeds around the lighted delineators, which by this time barely functioned, weed control along the perimeter of the flight strip, replacing burned out light bulbs on the delineators, reporting when the beacon stopped functioning, or when unsafe conditions (i.e., potholes) developed.<sup>29</sup> In return, the aeronautics commission granted him permission to construct a hangar on his property adjacent to the airport property in 1979. That year, Martinelli also installed tie downs west of the beacon. Clearly, the flight strip teetered on the verge of abandonment when a few years later a "sugar daddy" arrived on the scene and saved it.<sup>30</sup>

The construction of nearby Interstate 15 also impacted the flight strip. In March 1969, the highway department notified Aeronautics Commission engineer James Monger that right-of-way was needed at the northeast corner of the property. The roughly 40-foot by 25-foot right-of-way triangle of land included an irrigation ditch that required realignment. The highway department agreed to relocate two end boundary lights and two unlighted day markers. The highway commission and Montana Aeronautics Commission agreed to the transaction at the highway commission's March 13, 1969 meeting.<sup>31</sup>

In 1988, US Surgical Supply Company executive Leon Hirsch purchased a sheep ranch near Dell. Based in Connecticut, Hirsch flew to his Montana ranch in a chartered Lear jet. The Dell Flight Strip, however, was in such poor condition that his pilot was reluctant to land. To rectify the problem, Hirsch offered to pay for the necessary maintenance and upgrades to the landing field that included paving the strip in 1989, installing 10,000-gallon jet fuel storage tanks, and the installation of the lighted wind cone. Through a series of agreements with the State of Montana, Hirsch took over the operation and maintenance of the flight strip on the condition that it remain open for public use. Weed control continued under the umbrella of the county and caretaker. Another paving project occurred in 1997. Improvements to the lighting (excepting the beacon) occurred in 1989 with rewiring the lighting system and upgrading of the bulbs from 25-watts to 40-watts. Still, with the repaving projects, the tie down area was left largely inaccessible because of the steep drop-off from the runway. Problems with livestock and wildlife on the

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Improvement at Dell Airport," *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, October 24, 1960; "Legal Notice," *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, April 27, 1961, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> One third of the property purchased in 1942 by the highway commission in 1942 was acquired from the Martinelli family. Dell Airport File.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid; "Strodtman Chairman Airport Board," *The Dillon Daily Tribune Examiner*, April 13, 1977, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Dell Airport File; Montana State Highway Commission Meeting Minutes, Book 8.

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runway led to the installation of the enclosing fence in 1990. All these improvements have kept the flight strip open and, in 2019, it handled on average 948 flights per year.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Easterner Who Owns Dell Ranch Offers to Pay \$200,000 Airport Bill," *The Montana Standard*, April 1, 1988, p. 1; Dell Airport File; Billie Peterson, "County Nixes Airport Offer, But State Jumps at it," *The Montana Standard*, April 6, 1988, p. 5; Dell Airport File.

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Rennie, Patrick. Lewistown Satellite Airfield Historic District (Boundary Increase II) National Register nomination (NR #No. 6001247, listed 1/17/2007). On file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

"Spray Plane Goes Down in Area South of Dillon," *The Independent Record*, July 11, 1957.

"State Improvement at Dell Airport." *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, October 24, 1960.

"Strodtman Chairman Airport Board." *The Dillon Daily Tribune Examiner*, April 13, 1977.

Stuart, Granville. *Prospecting for Gold*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977.

"Thompson Returns from Lima Job." *The Missoulian*, September 6, 1943.

Wiley, Frank W. *Montana and the Sky: Beginning of Aviation in the Land of Shining Mountains*. Helena: Montana Aeronautics Commission, 1966.

"Will Build Roadside Flight Strips in State." *The Billings Gazette*, December 18, 1942.

Dell Flight Strip  
Name of Property

Beaverhead, MT  
County and State

“Will Spend \$15,000 on Airport at Dell.” *The Dillon Daily Tribune*, September 2, 1960.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☒ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other  
Name of repository: Montana Department of Transportation

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 192.181

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1) Lat. 44.745550	Long. -112.726450
2) Lat. 44.746370	Long. -112.723540
3) Lat. 44.739890	Long. -112.720040
4) Lat. 44.739940	Long. -112.719570
5) Lat. 44.739200	Long. -112.719640
6) Lat. 44.732680	Long. -112.716150
7) Lat. 44.732680	Long. -112.714430

Dell Flight Strip

Name of Property

Beaverhead, MT

County and State

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 8) Lat. 44.725550  | Long. -112.712380 |
| 9) Lat. 44.725510  | Long. -112.717670 |
| 10) Lat. 44.734500 | Long. -112.721970 |
| 11) Lat. 44.734680 | Long. -112.720620 |
| 12) Lat. 44.739940 | Long. -112.723440 |
| 13) Lat. 44.740000 | Long. -112.724590 |
| 14) Lat. 44.741910 | Long. -112.724420 |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Dell Flight Strip Historic District sits in Beaverhead County, Montana. It lies in the S1/2 of Section 32, T12S R9W, the E1/2 of Section 5, T13S R 9W, and the SW SW of Section 4 T13S R 9W. The boundary roughly measures 1000 feet east-west at its greatest extent by 7800 feet north-south, encompassing the features associated with the operation of the flight strip from 1943 to 1971. The flight strip occupies 192.181 acres of land owned by the Montana Department of Transportation. Except for a segment on the west side of the property, the majority of the boundary is marked by the presence of a barbed-wire fence. See attached map Section 9, page 30; reference to the topographic map confirms this boundary.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes all the resources associated with the operation of the flight strip from 1943 to 1971. These resources sit on land owned by the Montana Department of Transportation defined per the Montana Cadastral as "S32, T12S, R09W ACRES 47.28, PT OF ES2SW4 & W2SE4" and "S05, T13S, R09W, ACRES 144.901, PT OF W2NE4, E2NE4 & W2SW4 SEC 4."

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Jon Axline/Historian  
organization: Montana Department of Transportation  
street & number: 2701 Prospect Avenue  
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59620-1001  
e-mail jaxline@mt.gov  
telephone: (406) 444-6258  
date: January 2021



Dell Flight Strip

Name of Property

Beaverhead, MT

County and State

**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Montana Dept. of Transportation, Aeronautics Bureau

street & number 2630 Airport Road/PO Box 2005078

telephone (406) 444-2506

city or town Helena

state MT

zip code 59620

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**

**Photo Log, All Photographs**

Name of Property: Dell Flight Strip

City or Vicinity: Vicinity of Dell

County: Beaverhead State: MT

Photographer: Mitzi Rossillon

Date Photographed: October 2019 and April 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of \_\_\_\_.

Please see Continuation Sheets

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

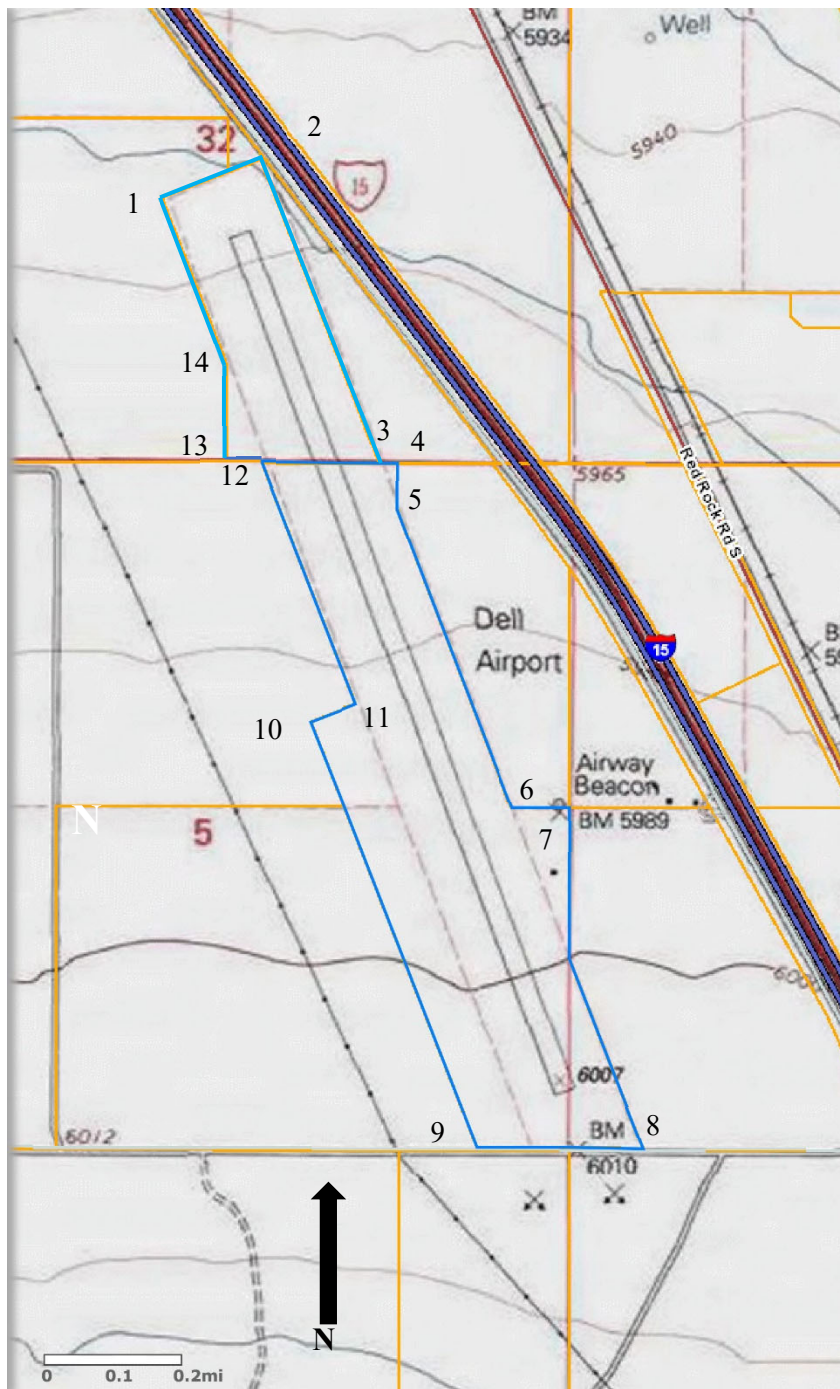
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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Dell Flight Strip
Name of Property
Beaverhead County, Montana
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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- 1) Lat. 44.745550 Long. -112.726450
- 2) Lat. 44.746370 Long. -112.723540
- 3) Lat. 44.739890 Long. -112.720040
- 4) Lat. 44.739940 Long. -112.719570
- 5) Lat. 44.739200 Long. -112.719640
- 6) Lat. 44.732680 Long. -112.716150
- 7) Lat. 44.732680 Long. -112.714430
- 8) Lat. 44.725550 Long. -112.712380
- 9) Lat. 44.725510 Long. -112.717670
- 10) Lat. 44.734500 Long. -112.721970
- 11) Lat. 44.734680 Long. -112.720620
- 12) Lat. 44.739940 Long. -112.723440
- 13) Lat. 44.740000 Long. -112.724590
- 14) Lat. 44.741910 Long. -112.724420

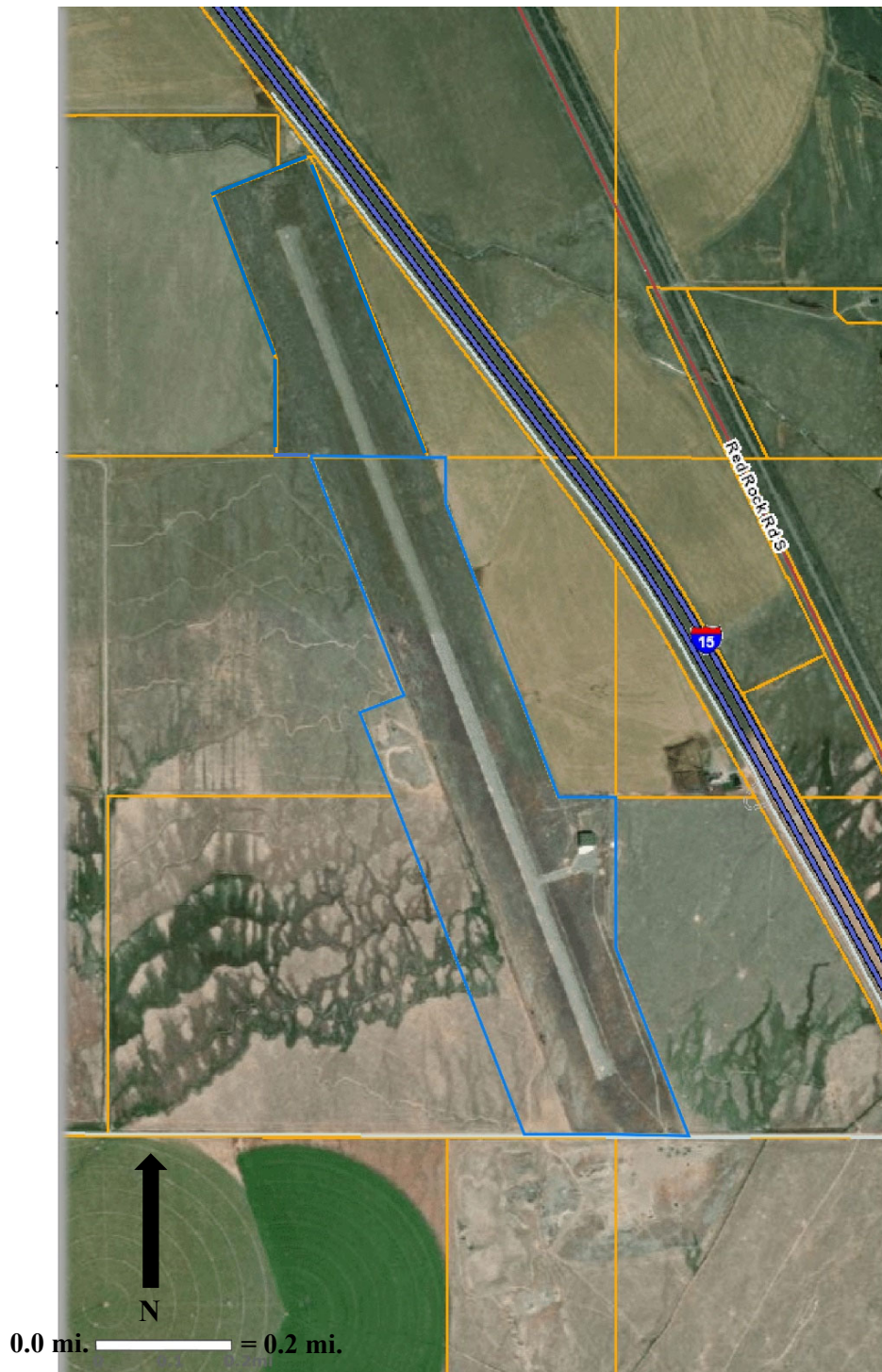
Location and National Register Boundary (blue) of the Dell Flight Strip. Found on the USGS 7.5' Quadrangle map: Dell (2011).

United States Department of the Interior  
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Dell Flight Strip
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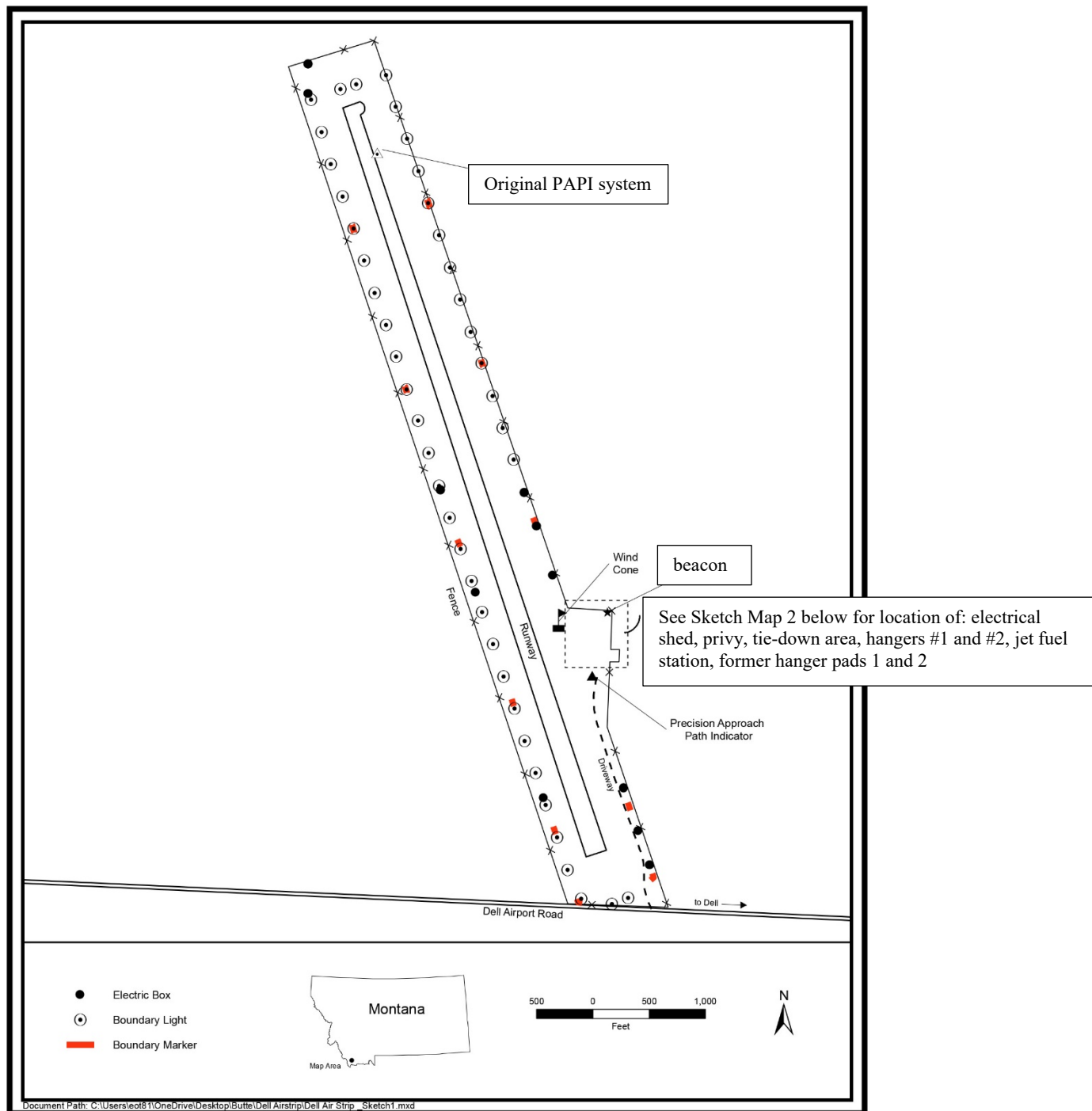
Location and National Register Boundary of the Dell Flight Strip, aerial view.

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National Park Service

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Dell Flight Strip
Name of Property
Beaverhead County, Montana
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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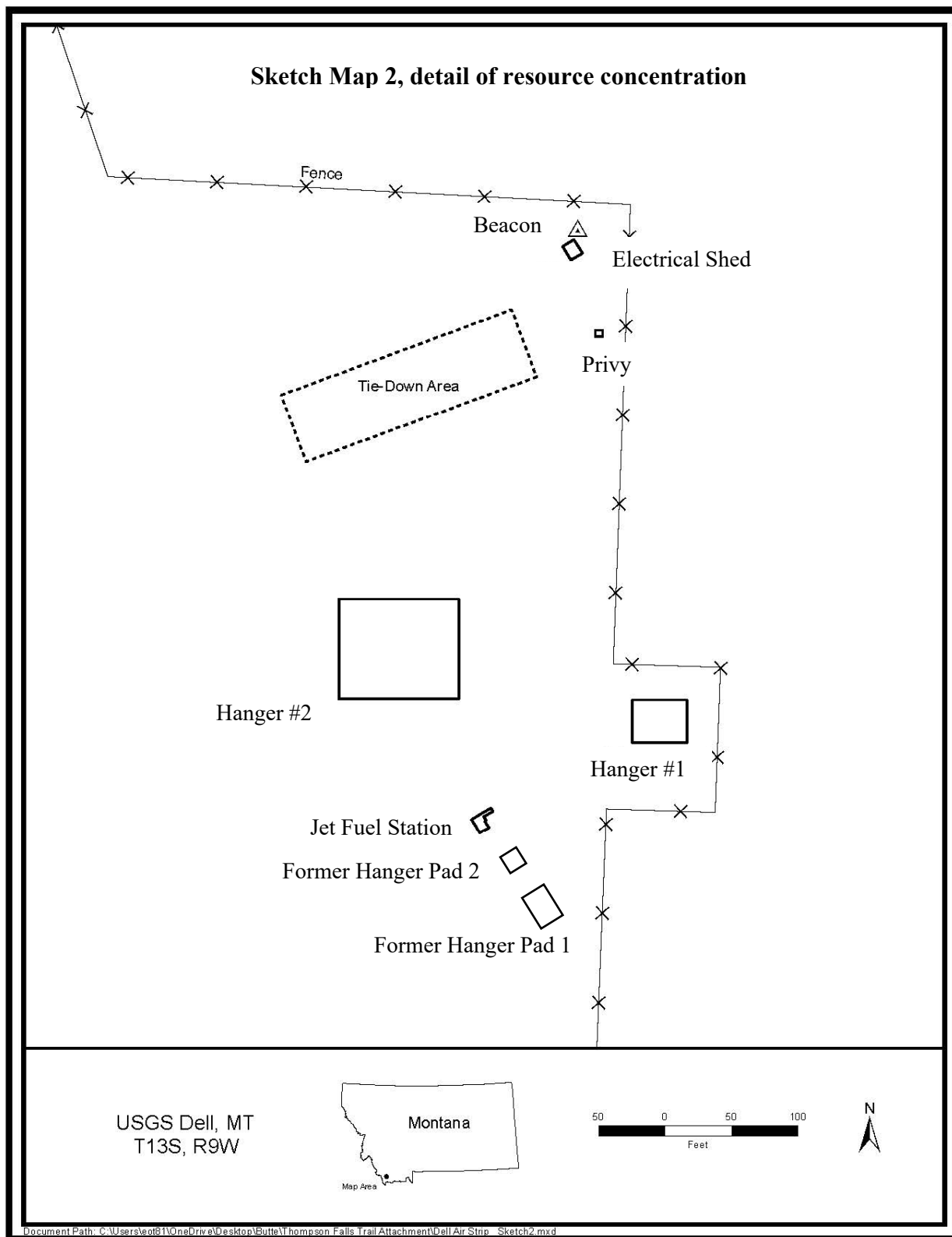
**Sketch Map of Dell Flight Strip, Beaverhead County, Montana**

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National Park Service

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Dell Flight Strip
Name of Property
Beaverhead County, Montana
County and State
N/A
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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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### Photo Log, All Photographs:

Name of Property:	Dell Flight Strip		
City or Vicinity:	Dell		
County:	Beaverhead	State:	MT
Photographer:	Mitzi Rossillon		
Date Photographed:	October 2019 and April 2020		



**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0001. Aerial view, view to north.**

United States Department of the Interior  
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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0002. View of runway, view to south-southeast.**



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Name of Property
Beaverhead County, Montana
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N/A
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**MT\_BeverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0003. View of runway, view to northwest.**



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Name of Property
Beaverhead County, Montana
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N/A
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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0004. View of runway, view to west.**

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0005. Aerial view of runway, view to south-southeast.**



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0006. Detail of runway boundary marker.**



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0007. Runway boundary light and boundary markers, view to northwest.**



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0008. Runway boundary light, view to east.**



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**MT\_Beaverhead\_DellFlightStrip\_0009. Runway boundary light, view to west.**

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0010. Beacon, electrical shed and privy, view to east.**



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MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0011. Beacon and electrical shed, view to northeast.



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0012. Detail of beacon, view to northeast.**

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0013. Electrical shed, view to northeast.**

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_00014. Privy, view to east.**



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0015. Hangar #1, vew to southwest.**

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MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0016. Jet fuel station, view to northeast.

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0017. 2014 Hangar #2: view to northeast.**



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0018. Lighted wind cone, view to northwest.**

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0019. Original Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI), view to south.**



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0020. Overview of southeast corner runway boundary markers array, view to southwest.**

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0021. Overview of southwest corner runway boundary markers array, view to south-southeast.**



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County and State
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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0022. North end of runway boundary lights, view to south-southeast.**

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0023. South former hanger pad 1, view to east.**



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0024. North former hanger pad 2, view to east.**

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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0025. Close up of Modern PAPI.**



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**MT\_BeaverheadCounty\_DellFlightStrip\_0026. Tie Down Area, view to east.**