

STATE AVIATION JOURNAL

A black helicopter is the central focus, parked on a snowy field. The background features a range of mountains under a blue sky with some clouds. Bare tree branches are visible in the upper right corner. The overall scene is a winter landscape.

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Aviation in Puerto Rico

New at the Helm:

Alaska's
Steven Hatter

Aviation's Role in the
North Dakota Oil Boom

Tucson Hosts 2011 NAC Conference



Steven Hatter is Deputy Commissioner - Aviation for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

Alaska's Steven Hatter

Embracing Challenge and Opportunity

By Kim Stevens

Alaska is an aviation-centric state with significant time and distance, communications, remote access, and weather challenges. Also, much of Alaska flying occurs in uncontrolled airspace in and around distant airports. For these reasons, Steven D. Hatter, Deputy Commissioner - Aviation, for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and his staff are very interested in getting critical decision-making information to pilots in real time, whether it's navigation or traffic data, or weather information. "We believe Alaska is the perfect place to test new cockpit awareness technologies under the NextGen banner," said Hatter, "so we've put in place a Memorandum of Agreement with NASA to partner with them, where possible, on some of their NextGen work."

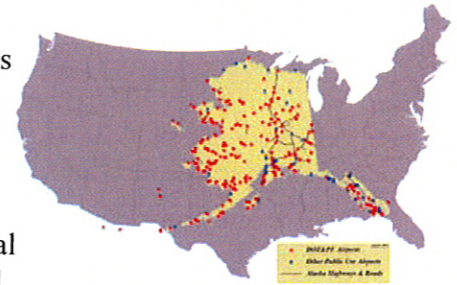
The importance of aviation in Alaska is rooted in the "last frontier" reality of the state. "It's always interesting to see the geographic overlay of our state on top of the lower 48," said Hatter. "We dwarf Texas in size and it's a powerful graphic to see Southeast Alaska on top of Florida, with the Aleutian Islands extending westward

past California." Yet, within this huge geographic state area, Alaska ranks with Vermont and New Hampshire in the number of road miles.

The scope and scale of aviation in Alaska is simply incomparable to any other state and is indeed a lifeline to much of rural Alaska.

Airports provide a vital link for access to food, mail, schools, medical services and travel. "The astonishing fact," said Hatter, "is that 82% of our rural communities have no road access." That speaks to the critical nature of aviation as an enabler of life to the first Alaskans. Beyond necessity, access to outdoor experiences found nowhere else depends on aviation, both commercial and private.

For Hatter, it's a blessing and privilege to be leading at the state government level in a field that he's passionate about—aviation. Aviation's importance and criticality of course spawns opportunity and commerce for avia-



tion related ventures, and according to Hatter, all of this sums to their Alaska aviation system being the largest in the United States with over 700 airports supporting over 10,000 pilots. Of these 700 registered airports, the State of Alaska sponsors 254, ranging from Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport all the way down to the most remote rural airports that consist of the basics—a runway, an apron, snow removal and grading equipment, and an equipment housing building.

“If scope is huge, scale is also fascinating,” said Hatter. At the top end of their system is the fifth largest cargo throughput operation in the world in the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (second in the United States), which requires a global perspective to ensure they keep their current business, while also looking for growth opportunities. At the other end of the size/activity scale, they are responsible for protecting a life sustaining link to Alaskans who choose to pursue a traditional way of life far from any road system. Hatter said that when you look at the economic metrics associated with such a large and diverse system, the following facts emerge:

- 47,000 jobs statewide....which is roughly 10% of total in the state
- \$3.5B contribution....8% of FY 2007 gross state product
- Rural Alaskans fly at about 8 times the enplane-

ment rate as compared to rural residents in the western US

- Rural Alaskans ship almost 40 times more freight per capita than rural residents in the western states do
- Bethel airport is a critical hub in Western Alaska providing direct support for 56 rural communities in Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta1 in 14 jobs attributable to the airport; \$108M in enplanement, mail, and cargo expenditures

“It’s just vitally important we tell the whole story of our system accurately and often,” said Hatter. “We want and need fact based policy-making and an informed public.”

Prior to becoming Deputy Commissioner for aviation in January of 2011, Hatter spent 26 years in the US Air Force flying fighter aircraft, serving in headquarters level staff positions, and eventually leading large operational organizations. “From a training and education perspective,” said Hatter, “I’ve had the benefit of excellent executive level leadership preparation as a graduate of the US Naval War College and then serving in large organization leadership on active duty.”

After retiring from the Air Force in 2006, Hatter earned an additional Masters of Science degree in Project Management at the University of Alaska, Anchorage and since coming on board with the State of Alaska, he’s obtained his Certified Member (CM) status through the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE). “With all

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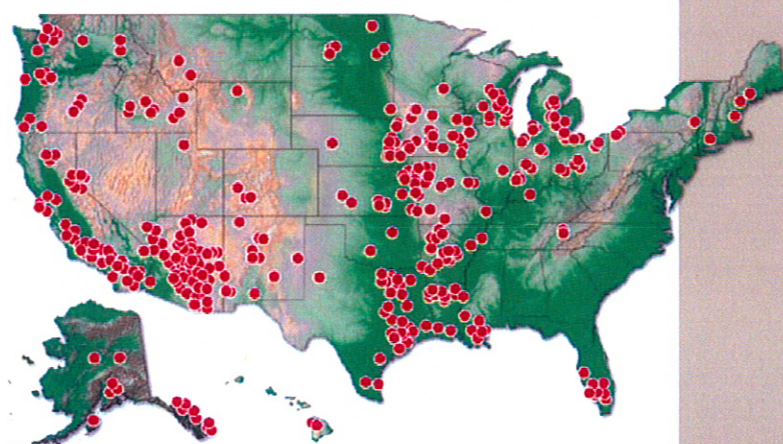
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Alaska

Continued from previous page.

that,” said Hatter, “there is nothing like the day-to-day experience in a job though. I’ve learned a lot in the last year and hope to continue learning as I contribute in whatever time I have ahead.”

Hatter says he has a large span of control in his position and the myriad day to day issues and concerns associated with such a wide area of responsibility tempt him to dive into operational detail that is really the responsibility of the staff. “I need to work at staying strategic and at the executive level of leadership to be most effective in the time I have,” said Hatter. But Hatter admits to being an operations guy. He loves to get right to the operational and/or tactical level decisions and solve problems real time. “I have to work at being disciplined in what I take on and what I trust the staff with,” said Hatter.

Hatter says he is blessed with great staff personnel, both on the statewide aviation side of his duties, and in his role as Executive Director of the International Airport System. “We just have dedicated, smart, and motivated folks making great things happen because they care about what they do.” Hatter said they have a strong team atmosphere and people take a lot of pride in their organization. He did say they could use a few more folks here and there, but acknowledged that most agencies are resource constrained these days.

Regarding the importance of good partnerships within industry, Hatter points out that this is simply a necessary condition for success in aviation. He said they work hard



to engage and collaborate with the various aviation advocacy groups, the carriers, the other federal and state agencies, especially the FAA, general aviation, and the com-

munities and traveling public they serve. As state government level stewards of the public trust responsible for providing safe and efficient airports, Hatter said there is no other way to operate than to be transparent policy drivers, proactive communicators, and collaborative problem solvers.

Along with their NextGen work, Hatter said he is also aggressively pursuing internet-based improvements to their Alaska Aviation System Plan (AASP). “I’d like to



Steven Hatter

make significant progress in achieving web-based “one stop shopping” for all aspects of the airports,” said Hatter. They are also partnering with a number of federal agencies to get the great State of Alaska digitally mapped with an accurate elevation model. Alaska remains the only state in the union that has not been digitally mapped in a uniform and contiguous manner. “The existing map data for Alaska is predominantly over 50 years old, has never met National Map Accuracy Standards, and is frankly, unsuitable to support modern requirements,” said Hatter. Their Statewide Digital Mapping Initiative (SDMI) is the mechanism they’re using to push this goal.

New to the rank of state aviation officials, Hatter attended his first National Association of State Aviation Officials (NASAO) conference in September in Nashville, TN. Hatter thought the event was “fantastic,” and really well planned and orchestrated by General [ret.] Bob Woods and the Tennessee aviation team. Hatter noted that it was especially fun for him personally to come back to Nashville and visit his Alma Mater, Vanderbilt University.

Hatter recognizes the value in networking and believes NASAO is an organization that can be helpful to him. “I’m just getting to know Joe Pestka [NASAO Chairman] and the NASAO leadership team, as well as my state counterparts,” said Hatter, “but there is huge value in networking and working together on national policy issues that impact aviation.” Hatter said it’s particularly compelling to think about helping each other in light of the apparent fiscal and legislative turmoil in Washington DC. He also notes how great it is to see all the airport and aviation related good ideas other states are pursuing. “I learned early in my Air Force career that importing the great ideas of others is not plagiarism when credit is given,” said Hatter. “Taking the great initiatives of others and tailoring them to Alaska is multiplication.” Hatter is also hopeful that they have some good things they can share with others.

What makes the current position so satisfying for Hatter is the challenge and the opportunity to serve. “I can honestly say I have not seen anything close to a routine in this position.” Every day for Hatter seems to present a new and different issue. “One can only hope that the work we do matters,” said Hatter.

He believes keeping balance and perspective is critical to leading well in the long run, so for Hatter, he will try to remember and consolidate the positives and the gains on a regular basis, especially in light of the inevitable conflict moments that come with the job. “I humbly appreciate how important aviation is to virtually every Alaskan and I’m dedicated to give my best to make things better under my watch.”