



## Wyoming Legislative Service Office

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Wyoming Aeronautics Commission

Program Evaluation Division

May 2002

### Purpose

The Management Audit Committee requested an evaluation of the Wyoming Aeronautics Commission's mission and purpose, including a review of similar entities in surrounding states.

### Background

The Wyoming Legislature created the Aeronautics Commission in 1937. Seven Commissioners are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

With staff assistance from the Aeronautics Division of the Wyoming Department of Transportation, the Commission disburses state funding from the Transportation Fund to the state's 40 airports. The federal government underwrites most of the cost of Wyoming's airport infrastructure; Commission-approved state funding serves as part of the federally-required "local match."

### Results in brief

In addition to its grant-making function, some state government officials want the Commission to become active in improving air service in the state. However, the Commission's statutory charge, as reflected in W.S. 10-3-101 et seq., does not address air service issues, nor do statutes assign this responsibility to another agency. Further, Commission statutes have not been updated to reflect changes in the nation's aeronautics environment following deregulation in 1978.

Whether the Commission should continue to exist has been debated for almost two

decades. Currently, the argument focuses on the Commission's capacity to address far-reaching air transportation issues. However, the Commission's statutes do not mandate that duty and it has no staff or budget with which to act on those issues.

A review of other states' organizational structures suggests there is no generally accepted norm for aeronautics commission goals or purposes. Nevertheless, some neighboring states' commissions are proactively addressing rural air service preservation and development.

### **Recommendation: The Legislature should consider statutory changes to (1) segregate grant duties and (2) create a state-level focal point for air service advocacy.**

We believe the Wyoming Business Council is the state-level entity best positioned to promote commercial and general aviation air service in the communities. We recommend the Legislature consider amending statutes to give:

- the Business Council responsibility for air service promotion grants.
- the Transportation Commission authority to approve airport infrastructure grants.
- the Aeronautics Commission new duties, or disband it.

Regardless of how duties are realigned, the Legislature needs to ensure broad-based representation in the body that advocates for improved air service.

## **Conclusion**

State officials and residents see Wyoming's air service as being of critical importance to economic well-being. Designated leadership is needed to prepare for federal aeronautics policy shifts in the future, and to position Wyoming as a proactive force with regard to improving the state's air service. Without statutory clarification and specific direction, we see little prospect for coordinated and targeted state-level action on behalf of aviation.

## **Agency Comments**

The Aeronautics Commission agrees with the report's recommendation that Wyoming needs a new approach to aeronautics and that an important first step is updating Wyoming statutes relating to aviation. However, the Commission believes aviation should retain a strong and autonomous voice. It supports designation of a single coordinated agency responsible for aviation in Wyoming with sufficient resources to accomplish specified objectives.