

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 STUDY GOALS

After several years and nearly \$47 million in federal, state, and local funding, an Airport Reference Code (ARC) upgrade at the Rifle Garfield County Airport¹ (RIL or Airport) has resulted in significant infrastructure improvements to the runway, taxiway, and apron system. As a result of these improvements, RIL has become a premier, business jet capable General Aviation (GA) airport in the state of Colorado and the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Northwest Mountain Region. The existing airport master plan for RIL was last updated in 2003. With the completion of these substantial improvements, many of the identified goals in the existing master plan are now complete. This Master Plan will be a critical tool helping to guide RIL and the community toward a new future.

Specific goals and objectives of the project include:

- To the extent possible, utilize all existing and relevant information to ensure the most efficient and cost effective approach to the study process.
- Conduct a public outreach program that is consistent with the needs of the Airport, Garfield County citizens, and the surrounding community.
- Address various FAA required/recommended planning tasks including:
 - Update the forecasts of aviation activity.
 - Incorporate an element of “Planning for Compliance” review, including recommendations for land use measures around RIL.
 - Update the “Exhibit A – Property Map” as part of the Airport Layout Plan (ALP) drawing set.
- Clearly identify/verify the present and future role(s) of RIL via local, state, and FAA transportation and aviation system plans.
- Review/identify the size and layout of airside and landside facilities to accommodate projected aircraft demand and maintain compliance with FAA airport design standards.
- Develop a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and funding plan for RIL that provides the basis for future federal, state, and local government investment.
- Review existing and possible future instrument approach procedure options and determine which will provide the best (lowest) minima that can be flown.
- Develop a Business Plan to identify the vision and long-term strategic goals for RIL for each functional area of the Airport. The Business Plan will also summarize the economic contribution

¹ The former name of the Airport was the Garfield County Regional Airport. As of January 2014, the name has been changed to Rifle Garfield County Airport.

and significance of RIL to the community, as identified in previous and upcoming studies completed by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).

- Prepare an ALP drawing set and associated master plan narrative report which meets current FAA requirements.

1.2 LOCAL INFORMATION

Rifle Garfield County Airport is located in the City of Rifle, Colorado. The Airport is centrally located within Garfield County along the I-70 Corridor. The City of Rifle has become a diverse community with a strong oil and gas presence. As the city has grown, one thing has remained the same; Rifle maintains a friendly small town atmosphere with a scenic downtown district which includes antique shops, restaurants, and museums.

The Airport sits within the Colorado Rocky Mountain Range offering scenic views in all directions. RIL’s location is such that it is only a short drive to Colorado’s ski country, an area visited from worldwide destinations. **Table 1-1** provides a list of surrounding communities close to and within Garfield County in relation to RIL.

TABLE 1-1 – SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Communities Close to Garfield County	Distance/Direction to RIL	Communities in Garfield County
Glenwood Springs	27 miles east	Rifle
Meeker	46 miles north	Parachute
Eagle	56 miles east	Silt
Aspen	61 miles southeast	New Castle
Grand Junction	65 miles west	Carbondale
Vail	88 miles east	De Beque

Source: Google Maps

1.3 AIRPORT MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

The Airport is owned and operated by Garfield County with day-to-day operations managed by an appointed airport director and three staff members. Airport operations and expenditures are paid for through airport user fees and fuel taxes collected through a County Special Revenue Fund.

1.4 AIRPORT HISTORY AND ACTIVITY

Rifle Garfield County Airport began in 1925 with a single landing strip used solely by transient aircraft (no based aircraft). The original location of the Airport was centered on Cemetery Hill, east of the City of Rifle. The first runway was constructed of dirt and gravel and was primarily used for crop dusting operations. The Airport existed in this location through the early 1970s, when the land for the current Airport was donated from the William and Hannah Crann Ranch, for the explicit purpose of use as an airport. In 1981, the original runway was decommissioned after construction was completed on a new runway, Runway 8/26.

The Airport was managed by the City of Rifle through 1960, when Garfield County assumed operation. In 1967, County Commissioners appointed the first airport authority members, who eventually hired the first Airport and Fixed Based Operator (FBO) Manager in 1973. The Airport Authority maintained oversight of the Airport until 1999, when the Garfield County Board of Commissioners dissolved the entity and hired a new airport director. The Airport has grown and expanded to its current operation, including the major airport improvement project in 2010 that served to realign the runway, expand facilities, and add navigational instruments to better serve existing and future aircraft. Aircraft utilizing RIL consist of small general aviation aircraft to large business jets; see **Chapter 2, Inventory**, for further detail.