Seeley Lake Airport History

The original airport for Seeley Lake was located north of the lake at what is now the Westside Trailhead. It is unknown exactly when it was built but Bud Anderson remembers it in 1937 when he was a kid living north of it. Bud remembers a winter when he skied across the five-foot fence that surrounded the airport. It's probably a safe guess that the old airport was built by the Depression-era Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps in the mid-late 1930s.

In 1941 it was the base of operations for training the first operational smokejumpers when Earl Cooley and six others took off in Bob Johnson's Travelair planes to jump out over Blanchard Flats. The first smokejumper training consisted of the instructor hanging a parachute in a tree and telling members of the squad what its various parts were--apex, risers, secondary lines and guide lines. The next day they were to make the first jumps--and for most, the first plane rides--in their lives. Cooley liked to say he took off seven times in an airplane before he ever got to land in one.

The concrete base of the windsock can still be seen at the north end of the landing strip and a foundation marks the location of an old hanger near the south end. The main landing strip can still be driven by Cadillac's and (except for some ruts made by late winter beelers) tie-down area is tree free.

The south end of the old airport is now used as a heliport.

1963 was a big year for Seeley Lake. A new postoffice, drug store, ambulance, approved high school, and an airport under contract made the news.

In May 1963 plans were started for a new airport two miles west of Seeley Lake at what had then called Stump Prairie. But by then subdividers had renamed the area to "Seeley Lake Pines." On July 12th, the State approved the airport with a 3500'x75' runway, fence, and tie down area--all for $27,049. In October Al Martinson announced an airport would be built at the "Old Sperry Place." ACM granted an easement for Airport Road on February 14, 1964. Clearing and construction began for the airport in May 1964.

It was originally constructed by Western Montana Properties, developer of the Sky Park subdivision, under a program with the Montana Aeronautical Commission and then turned over to Missoula County to operate.

Through the years the airport has sort of been an unwanted stepchild bouncing back and forth between Missoula County and Montana Aeronautics Division. While owned by Missoula County they couldn't maintain it and wouldn't allow the local flying club to volunteer any help because of liability fears. Finally in July 1998 the State Aeronautics board resumed ownership. They turned over management to the local flying club under a volunteer program that minimizes liability and provides workman's compensation insurance coverage for volunteers for hours worked.

Today's Seeley Lake Airport is open to the public, has no control tower and can be found on the Great Falls Sectional Chart. It is unattended, but has a white beacon light. The runway has a turf surface, in excellent condition and is 4575 feet long. No services are provided except parking tiedowns for planes.

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5/17/63

Planning airport on Seeley Lake Pines property

10/18/63

Airport to be built at "Old Sperry Place." Al Martinson

11/1/63

Airport approved 7/12. $27,049. 3500'x75' runway, fence, tie down

12/20/63

New postoffice drug store, ambulance, approved high school, airport under contract.

2/14/64

ACM grants easement for Airport Road

5/8/64

Clearing and construction began for airport

http://www.seeleyswanpathfinder.com/pfnews/1999news/dec99/airport.html

http://www.seeleyswanpathfinder.com/pfnews/1999news/dec99/airporthist.html