



Jet service returns to West for first time since 1978

By Jeremy Weber, originally appeared in the June 5, 2015 issue of West Yellowstone News, reprinted with permission

Commercial jet service made a triumphant return to Yellowstone Airport this week as the first commercial jet since 1978 touched down in West Yellowstone shortly after noon Monday.

The model CRJ200 Delta Airlines connection flight, operated by SkyWest, from Salt Lake City made its landing on the airport's western runway Monday as town officials, business leaders, and others looked on. The flight was welcomed with an archway of water from a pair of the airport's fire engines.

"This is a great day for West Yellowstone and for the state of Montana. For the first time since 1978, we can hear the whine of the engines of a commercial jet here in West Yellowstone," Director of the Montana Department of Transportation, Mike Tooley said. "This new option for travelers will provide a 30 percent increase in the potential number of seats on the flights into this airport."

Tooley went on to state that the return of jet service to West Yellowstone is just one of several new upgrades that the airport can look forward to.

"I would like to thank everyone here for their support. We want everyone to know that we are not going to ignore that support. Over the next few years, we intend to continue improving the facilities here," he said. "Over the next three years we are going to spend about \$7.2 million in state and federal funding to maintain the surfaces of the airport so that the jets can continue to come in."

Each of the new jet flights from Salt Lake City to West Yellowstone will be onboard the 50-seat Canadair Regional Jet (CRJ200). There will be two daily flights Thursday through Monday and one daily flight on Tuesday and Wednesday.

"The jets bring a new product to the West Yellowstone community. A faster, more comfortable ride, and then seamless Delta connection access to the Delta network from Salt Lake City and worldwide," said Mike Ostler of SkyWest Airlines. "We are excited about a faster and more comfortable ride for everyone. We are excited to support you as a community."

The new jet service should also be a boost for the local economy. With the new jet service in place, the West Yellowstone Airport could see as many as 600 jet passengers arriving per week during this summer with an estimated total during the summer of nearly 10,000. The previously used turboprop aircraft could accommodate a maximum of 30 passengers per flight on 12 regularly scheduled flights, or 360 passengers per week and roughly 6,000 passengers per summer on average.

"Every time someone walks off that jet that mean money in the pockets of businesses and Main Street it also means we are marketing a part of our state that will bring guest from all over the world," Director of Montana's Department of Commerce, Meg O'Leary, said.

"Moving from the turbo-prop we will have faster more reliable service to the area and it will bring in more business to the community and more visitors to the park," said Airport Director Jeff Kadlec.



Photo courtesy of Mike Moore/WYNews



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Weber/WYNews