

Hoodoo Meadows Commonly Asked Questions & Answers

Prepared by IDFG staff with support and references from ITD and author Richard Holm

Q: Why do some claim Hoodoo was closed?

A: An informal letter of notice to close was sent to ITD in 1977.

- Letter did not include reason for closure.
- Letter was signed by District Ranger at the time.
- No NEPA records available that support closure either from public comments or agency.

A: Another informal letter from FS fire personnel to ITD in 1982 state the airstrip was closed because it was too high at an elevation of 9,500 feet. Another letter in 1978 from personnel in Ogden said the runway had washed out.

- The airstrip is actually at 8,200 feet (source - 1962 USGS Cadastral Survey). The runway was never washed out and remains completely intact.

Q: What are reasons provided for lack of maintenance at Hoodoo?

A: Informal Closure action possibly taken to avoid risk of lawsuit relative to airstrip recreation

- Until 1980, the Idaho Recreational Statute did not protect Federal and State Agencies from liability when providing recreation (i.e. airstrips). In 1980 the statute was revised to provide “absolute exemption” from liability to those agencies that allow recreational-access to the public.
- Airstrips within wilderness were prohibited from closure by the Central Idaho Wilderness Act. Hoodoo is not in wilderness and so did not have a Congressional Act protecting its status.
- The 1985 Frank Church Wilderness Plan outlined the greatest difficulty in maintaining runways was cost. Informal closure possibly due to lack of maintenance caused by lack of funds to maintain infrastructure. Many other airstrips in and out of wilderness around the 1980s were left unmaintained for the same possible reason – lack of funding.

Q: How long was Hoodoo in operation?

A: Forty-Nine years. Used by the public from time of construction in 1936 until 1985 when lodgepole pine grew in.

Q: Why are IDFG & ITD interested in re-maintaining Hoodoo?

A: To provide diverse public access to Hoodoo Meadows, Yellow Jacket Lake, and the Bighorn Crags.

Q: Is there already access to Hoodoo?

A: Road access is a 4-hour drive on rough roads, and in heavy snow years this road is only open July-September (when snow melts on the North slopes of roads).

Q: What are the public benefits of maintaining Hoodoo Meadows Airstrip?

A: Easier, more timely, and more diverse access to the backcountry. Hoodoo meadows airstrip is only a 15-minute flight from the runway in Salmon. Improves safety for others flying over this common path. For example, in 2017 USFS had to land a helicopter on that runway after an engine warning chip light came on.

Q: Why focus on airstrip access?

A: Recreation is on the rise in Idaho; however, trails and airstrips and roads to spread people out have decreased by 50-80% since 1980. Increased fire activity, inflation, and lack of funding has led to funneled access on the maintained access still available. Additional access is important as the Frank Church trail network needs repair and maintenance.

Q: Is the cost to re-maintain the airstrip too high?

A: No. On the second field tour of 3 performed by ITD, IDFG, and or USFS, a contractor was invited to the site to provide estimated cost to clear the airstrip surface and grade runway. The estimated cost is \$30,000 to complete the airstrip surface and maintain 3-5 miles of trail in this area. This will bring the runway surface back to standard, which would remain useable for approximately 20 years.

Q: Who will pay for the airstrip and will this be an added burden to the Forest Service?

A: The initial maintenance is fully funded by pledged funding from Idaho Aviation Association and Recreational Aviation Foundation. Continued maintenance will be directed by ITD under the Division of Aeronautics through a Special Use Permit process.

A: Responsibility and liability of the airstrip would be transferred to ITD under a Special Use Permit Process. ITD's Division of Aeronautics would be responsible for management and maintenance. Big Creek Airstrip (located on a Cherry Stem Road) is under this same management strategy. Although the Forest Service will retain permitting responsibilities, there will be no burden to the Forest Service or expenditure of federal funds.

Q: Is there diverse support to have Hoodoo maintained?

A: Letters of support have been received from the following groups: ITD, IDFG, Idaho Recreation Council, Idaho Aviation Association, Recreational Aviation Foundation, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and Idaho Wildlife Federation, and Local and State elected officials.

Q: Is Hoodoo more dangerous than other backcountry airstrips?

A: In the 49 years it was open to the public, there are no documented incidents. The Idaho Transportation Department's Division of Aeronautics has evaluated the airstrip and concluded that the airstrip is safe for landing and takeoff using the appropriate aircraft and pilot skill level.

Q: Is density altitude an issue?

A: All runways in Idaho are affected by density altitude. Mountain flying skills are required with all mountain airstrips.

Q: Is the airstrip too short?

A: No. The airstrip's original length is 2,400 feet long, which is twice the length of IDFG's Lower Loon Creek Airstrip. Hoodoo is unique in that all terrain falls out from the airstrip, unlike other high-elevation airstrips where mountainous terrain must be avoided on takeoff.

Q: Is the airstrip difficult?

A: All backcountry, mountainous runways are difficult. It is the job of the Idaho Division of Aeronautics to write those flying criteria specific to airstrips (i.e. level of difficulty and recommended aircraft and skill levels to operate at a particular airport). ITD evaluated cost, safety, emergency preparedness, public opinion, benefit versus detriment, alternative plan and proximity to other airstrips of managing Hoodoo Meadows Airstrip. The Idaho Transportation Board unanimously approved the Division of Aeronautics to manage and maintain Hoodoo Meadows Airstrip and to perform the necessary maintenance to reestablish an airfield safe for aircraft operations.