



Economic Impact Study  
**Colstrip Airport**  
2026



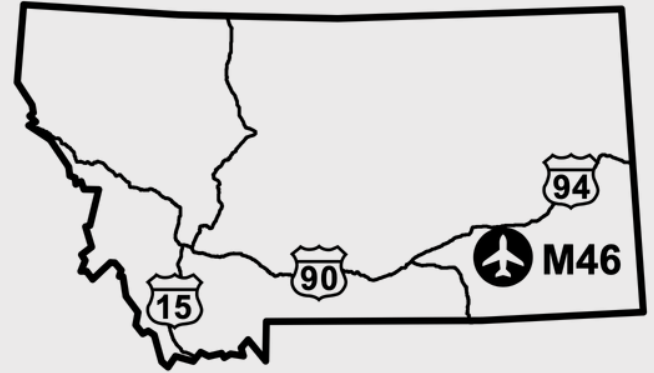
**MONTANA**  
Department of Transportation



**ZENITH**  
ECONOMICS

# Colstrip Airport Impact

Colstrip Airport is a public-use general aviation airport located three miles southwest of Colstrip, in Rosebud County in southeastern Montana. Also known as Ricks Field, the airfield features a primary runway of 5,100 feet with GPS instrument approaches and handles approximately 1,500 annual operations. Airport activities include recreational flying, search and rescue, flight training, emergency medical transport, aerial photography and surveying, law enforcement, and wildland firefighting. The airport serves the Colstrip community and surrounding area, providing general aviation access for a region historically associated with energy production, with the Colstrip Power Plant located less than five miles to the northeast.



## Total Economic Impact on Montana



**Economic Impact**  
\$29 Thousand



**Payroll**  
\$7 Thousand

## Qualitative Impacts

In addition to generating substantial economic impacts, this airport supports a variety of harder to quantify “Qualitative Impacts” that support critical statewide safety and enterprise. The 2026 Montana Statewide Economic Impact of Airports Study documents the following non-inclusive list of qualitative impacts associated with the airport:



**Aerial Firefighting**  
Supports Wildland  
Firefighting Operations



**Search & Rescue**  
Supports Search and Rescue  
Operations



**Emergency Medical  
Aviation**  
Supports Air Ambulance  
Operations



**Police/Law Enforcement**  
Supports Police and Emergency  
Response Ops



**Recreational Flying**  
Supports recreational flying  
and access



**Flight Training & Education**  
Provides Pilot Training and Aviation  
Education

Source: Montana Statewide Economic Impact of Airports.

# Montana Airports Support Our State



**Jobs**  
39,400



**Economic Impact**  
\$6.4 Billion



**Payroll**  
\$2.4 Billion

Montana's airport system functions as a critical component of the state's transportation and economic infrastructure, enabling connectivity across a large and geographically dispersed landscape. Through scheduled commercial service and general aviation activity, airports provide access between Montana communities and regional, national, and international markets, supporting passenger travel, freight movement, and time-sensitive operations that cannot be efficiently served by surface transportation alone.

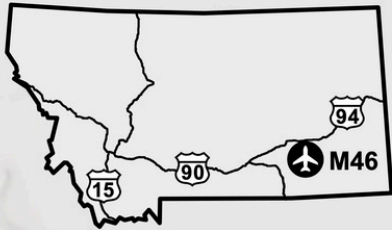
Beyond mobility, Montana's airports support a broad range of economic activity that contributes to employment, income generation, and business operations throughout the state. Aviation-related enterprises, on-airport and nearby businesses, visitor spending associated with air travel, and ongoing investment in airport facilities collectively generate economic activity at the local, regional, and statewide levels. These effects extend across multiple sectors, including tourism, healthcare, construction, professional services, and natural resource industries.

To document both the economic contributions and broader community functions of the state's aviation system, the Montana Department of Transportation undertook a comprehensive, statewide evaluation of Montana's airports. The **2026 Montana Statewide Economic Impact of Aviation** study examines the full scope of airport-related activity, including aviation and non-aviation businesses, visitor spending, capital investment, and secondary economic effects, while also identifying the specific roles individual airports play in supporting residents, businesses, and critical services across Montana.

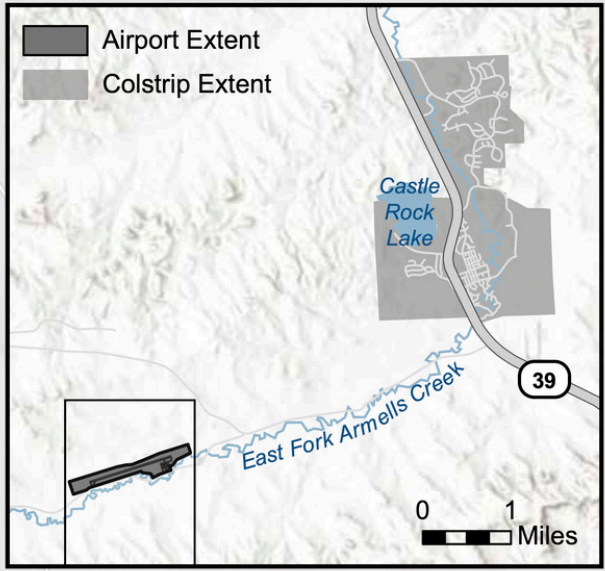
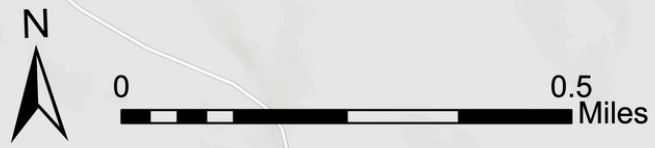
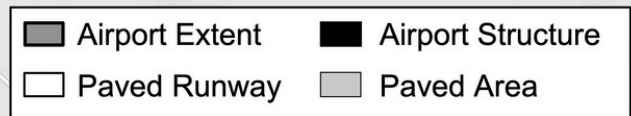
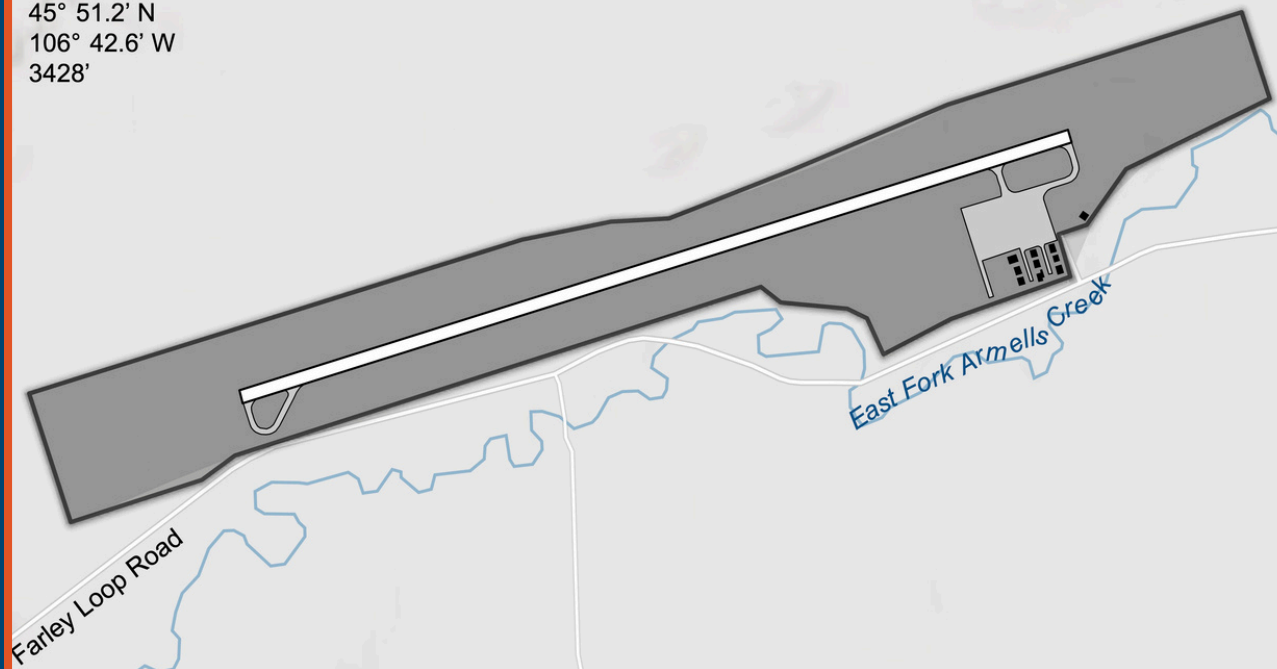


# Colstrip Airport (M46)

Colstrip, MT



45° 51.2' N  
106° 42.6' W  
3428'



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