

BEFORE THE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
DOCKET SECTION

98 APR 21 PM 3:35

Essential air service at

ROCK SPRINGS, WYOMING

under 49 U.S.C. 41731 et seq.

Docket OST-97-2959 - //

COMMUNITY COMMENTS OF
THE AIRPORT MANAGER OF ROCK SPRINGS
ON ESSENTIAL AIR SERVICE CARRIER SELECTION

Communications with respect to this
document should be addressed to:

Mr. Gary D. Valentine
Manager, Rock Springs - Sweetwater County Airport
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ROCK SPRINGS - SWEETWATER COUNTY AIRPORT

PO. Box 1987

Rock Springs, Wyoming 82902-1 987

April 13, 1998

Essential Air Service Division, X-53
Room 6401
Office of Aviation Analysis
Department of Transportation
400 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: Department's Order 97-1 2-8

Mr. DeVany:

The order for the Rock Springs - Sweetwater County Airport provides for a minimum of 57 seats on week days, 19 seats on Saturdays, and 38 seats on Sundays. Based on historical enplanement data this would seem to be adequate. But, we would like to point out that this airport has experienced a dramatic decline in boardings over the last several years. Our analysis of this trend points to several leading causes for people using the airline less frequently including unreasonably higher airfares and questionable reliability. This past summer when prices were becoming more competitive in our region the boardings showed an incredible increase over the previous year.

This demonstrates that the fair price of an airline ticket is the most influential factor when determining the use of an air service. In our area it is even more significant when the close proximity of the Salt Lake City international Airport, hosting discount air service, is taken into consideration. The traveling public understands that airfares will be higher out of a small airport using regional carriers, but when that airfare is hundreds of dollars higher it is no longer feasible to use air service out of the Rock Springs Airport. If the airfares are not reasonable with this market, passengers will drive the 180 miles for a more competitive rate. The demographics of our area and studies that we have conducted dictate that this airport could board many times more passengers than it currently does if the airfares were competitive and the service was reliable.



For an airline to be competitive in this area, it is necessary that the airline have a code share agreement with a major carrier. An airline must also create a reasonable airfare based on the knowledge of the demographics of this area and the close proximity to Salt Lake City and, finally, demonstrate reliability to regain the customers confidence. Even though our boardings have been increasing over the past 10 months, it is evident, based on the proposal to provide essential air service at Rock Springs, that a subsidy is necessary until the utilization increases significantly.

We respectfully request that a subsidy be paid to Great Lakes Aviation, Ltd. for the purpose of serving the Rock Springs - Sweetwater County Airport. We further request that the airfares be controlled in such a manner as to help the airline make a profit by having competitive fares with the surrounding area. The airline should be encouraged **by** incentives directly connected with the EAS subsidy to increase ridership.

It is also vitally important that the hub for Rock Springs remain in Denver. Air Service to Denver has been a valuable asset in promoting the economic development of the surrounding area. Sweetwater County has a proactive and effective economic development agency which actively pursues the recruitment of new businesses and the expansion of existing ones. One of the major selling points in these programs is our frequent and convenient air service to Denver and connecting cities. Loss or reduction of that service would adversely impact our communities' efforts at economic development and severely curtail our ability to promote growth and diversity in our region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary D. Valentine". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Gary D. Valentine
Airport Manager