



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

November 4, 2013

Susan T. Mitchell
Assistant Commissioner (Acting),
Office of Field Operations,
United States Customs and Border Protection [CBP],
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 2.4A,
Washington, DC 20229

Re: Customs Access for General Aviation at Fairbanks, Alaska

Dear Ms. Mitchell,

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association represent nearly 400,000 members nationwide. Each year a number of our members fly their aircraft between the contiguous 48 states and Alaska, either on business or for pleasure. The most commonly used route for this travel is through Canada along the Alaska Highway. Depending on the members individual travel plan and the capabilities of the aircraft, this requires stops in Canada, and re-entering the country going into Alaska.

It has recently come to our attention that Customs and Border Protection has reduced their service to smaller general aviation (GA) aircraft arriving in Fairbanks. In the past, pilots merely needed to contact the Fairbanks Port of Entry during business hours, and could arrange for arrival later in the evening. Today, we are informed that pilots must arrive during their duty hours of 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., or wait till the following day. Given the distance from the normal Canadian departure airports in Whitehorse or Dawson and average speed of a general aviation aircraft, this leaves only about a three or four-hour window to fly (after contacting Customs) in order to arrive by 4 p.m. Given that weather sometimes delays departures, this further restricts general aviation travel. It also potentially creates a safety problem if pilots feel they are pressured to "push the weather" to meet the Customs hours of operation, instead of waiting for afternoon convective activity to die down, and make an evening or night time arrival. Especially during the summer months, when northern Alaska experiences 24 hour daylight, the added ability to operate in the evening and during the night time greatly increases safety and access.

The other options for customs processing are to land at Northway, which is also restricted to a shortened time window, or to continue to Anchorage where 24 hour arrivals are currently supported. The additional mileage to Anchorage is such that it places it outside the range of many GA aircraft. It

also involves crossing two mountain ranges, which greatly increases the chances of encountering adverse weather. In the past, pilots could clear in Eagle, on the Yukon River, however this station was shut down a couple years ago.

AOPA respectfully requests that you restore access to Fairbanks International Airport to a 24 hour basis, allowing general aviation aircraft the opportunity to travel safely and efficiently between Canada and the lower 48 states. While we don't have hard numbers on international general aviation traffic, a past survey of Fairbanks airport transient aircraft tie-down logs recorded visitors from 38 states and four Canadian provinces over the course of the year, excluding corporate traffic. In that year, the combination of international and interstate general aviation traffic resulted in adding over 2,000 visitor days to Fairbanks. These visitors contribute to the economic support of the airport, the Fairbanks community and many go on to visit other parts of Alaska. It is our understanding that there are commercial air service drivers for customs processing that may also support restoring service to a 24 hour basis. Please let me know if you need any additional information to support this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom George". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom George

cc: Jesse VanderZanden, Fairbanks International Airport
Lisa Murkowski, U.S. Senate
Mark Begich, U.S. Senate
Don Young, U.S. House of Representatives
Sean Parnell, Governor of the State of Alaska
Kip Knudson, State of Alaska Governor's Office, District of Columbia
Pat Kemp, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities