

Montana and the Sky

Montana Department of Transportation

Aeronautics Division

Vol. 77, No. 1 January 2026

Montana Aviation Conference

Please welcome 2026 Keynote Speaker:

Nathan K. Hammond

Nathan was born into the airshow world, his first flight was at 2 weeks old on his mother's lap. Raised in up-state New York, the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome Museum was his childhood playground and a major influence from day one. Fascinated by the thrill and excitement at the weekly airshows, Nathan's approach to safely demonstrate aircraft for the crowd's entertainment was developed.

Soloing as a teenager, Nathan now has over 7,000 hours of experience as an airshow, corporate, and factory demonstration pilot and he holds an aircraft mechanics license. Following the family legacy that began at the Aerodrome, Nathan continues to fly the museum's collection of early pioneers and World War I aircraft. He has truly flown everything from Jenny's to jets!

Twenty-five years ago, Nathan established what would become a deep-rooted involvement with a deHavilland Chipmunk, then known as the Pepsi SkyDancer. Enamored with the aircraft's graceful appearance and love of aerobatics, Nathan joined the SkyDancer team. He quickly advanced as crew chief and ferry pilot for airshows across North America.

After years of coaching and mentoring, the closely held and highly guarded art of skywriting was passed onto Nathan. His first message was a true test, written overtop 100,000 NASCAR fans and broadcast on live TV. From that moment, a new legacy was born. Nathan's skywriting has received recognition on National TV, USA Today, and major news outlets for his aerial displays at Airshows, festivals, and sporting events.

In 2016, with a well-established airshow career, Nathan took full control of SkyDancer and re-named the ship GhostWriter, in reference to his skywriting. Today, Nathan flies the GhostWriter in an action-packed routine full of loops, rolls, and verticals, held tightly in front of the crowd. When night falls and the stars come out, he lights up the sky with 200lbs of wing-mounted pyrotechnics and special effect lighting, as he dances across the sky.

Nathan will be the Friday night banquet keynote speaker at the 2026 Montana Aviation Conference in Billings. Be sure to attend so you don't miss out on Nathan's stories of precision aerobatics and skywriting!



2026 Montana Aviation Conference Registration Open

The Aviation Organizations of Montana (AOM) is pleased to announce the 41st Montana Aviation Conference. The conference will be held in Billings February 26-28, 2026, at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center.

The conference offers three days of speakers, seminars, workshops, awards ceremonies, business meetings, comradery, and social events. It is an opportunity for those from the aviation community to connect, learn, and exchange ideas and information.

Around 500 participants are expected this year.

If you are interested in saving money on registration fees, check out the "take off to landing" package on the registration website and register by January 31, 2026!

Lodging is available at a special rate by calling the Billings Hotel and Convention Center in Billings at 406-248-7151. Mention the Montana Aviation Conference for discounted room rates. Hotel room reservations must be made before January 1, 2026, to get the event rate.

For more information, contact the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) Aeronautics Division at 406-444-2506 or email katkins@mt.gov.

Vendor and attendee conference registration may be completed by scanning the QR code:



65th Montana Airport Directory Available

Each year, the MDT Aeronautics Division produces an updated Montana airport directory. One is included with each annual pilot registration and additional copies may be purchased for \$5. Information such as field elevation, navigation and communication frequencies, and airport diagrams are displayed for each airport. Additional information not found in the Chart Supplement, like alternate airport contact names and numbers, as well as courtesy car availability, are included.

To purchase a 2026 directory, please call Montana Aeronautics at 406-444-2506.

Please email Montana Aeronautics Aviation Support Officer, Stephen Torske, with any directory updates at storske@mt.gov.



Invitation to Exhibit Aircraft

Join us Friday evening, February 27th, for the 41st annual Montana Aviation Conference in Billings! The AOM invites aircraft owners and operators to showcase their aircraft at a static display hosted in Edwards Jet Center's heated hangar.

Enjoy a social hour with cocktails while connecting with fellow aviation enthusiasts hosted by the Montana Pilots Association (MPA) and Robert Peccia and Associates.

To participate in the static display, please RSVP to Mike Vivion, AOM President, at Michael.vivion@gmail.com.

Aviation Scholarships Available

More than \$20 million in aviation scholarship funding, training programs, and career pathways are available through AviationStart. This free resource compiles available opportunities in one place.

For more information, visit: aviationstart.org

The Aircraft and Pilots Association (AOPA) Foundation is awarding more than \$1 million in scholarships. These funding opportunities help AOPA members take the next step in their aviation journey, whether that's pursuing primary flight training, earning advanced ratings and certificates, or building a career through pathways like aviation maintenance. The spring application deadline is April 1.



Scan the QR Code for visit the AOPA'S website for more information.



2026 Aviation Awareness Art Contest



The MDT Aeronautics Division's Aviation Awareness Art Contest allows students to broaden their knowledge and promote interest in careers within the aviation. The contest is open to all students in K - 12 in public, private, and home schools. Students should research aviation in Montana and then illustrate a subject of their choosing.

For more details and download the flyer, visit: mdt.mt.gov/aviation/events.aspx

Submissions will be accepted until April 10th.

Artwork must have a Montana aviation theme.

For more details and to download the full flyer, go to <https://mdt.mt.gov/aviation/events.aspx>

For further information, please contact Barbara Barnum
406-444-2506 or bbarnum@mt.gov



AOPA Rusty Pilots Seminar at the Montana Aviation Conference.

AOM is hosting an AOPA Foundation Rusty pilot's seminar at the Montana Aviation Conference in Billings. The Rusty Pilots Seminar, presented by Meg Godlewski, will be held on Saturday, February 28, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Montana Aviation Conference in Billings.

Attendance is free for AOPA members. You can join the AOPA for \$89 and attend for free or pay \$89 without joining.

Life may have got in the way, but the dream of flight can be yours again. Returning to the skies is not as difficult as most rusty pilots think. We are inviting you back in the cockpit and will help you get there.

Participation in the Rusty Pilots program with fellow lapsed pilots to help understand what's changed in aviation since you last took the controls and brush up on your aviation knowledge. It's easier than people think, no FAA check ride or test, you might not even need a medical. *Plus, you will get two to three hours of ground instruction toward your flight review!*

To register for the Rusty Pilot Seminar, visit aopa.org/destinations/event/1614

Or scan the QR Code



2026 Flight Instructor Refresher Clinic

You don't have to be a flight instructor to attend

The Montana Aeronautics Flight Instructor Refresher Clinic (FIRC) is an annual FAA-approved course designed to help certified flight instructors (CFIs) renew their instructor certificates and stay current with the latest in aviation training and safety practices.

The 2026 clinic will be in Helena at the Doubletree Hotel February 6 - 7, 2026, from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. both days.

Registration and Tuition

- Tuition is \$75, with a \$25 discount for pilots registered in Montana.
- Montana pilot registration is available for \$10 per year, providing tuition savings and supporting state aviation programs.
- Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis, and non-instructors and students are encouraged.

For more information, contact Matt Lindberg at 406-444-2506 or mdtad@mt.gov.

To register, scan the QR Code:

Lodging is available at the Doubletree by Hilton located at 22 N Last Chance Gulch.

Call (406) 443-2200 and mention FIRC for the state rate.



Montana Aircraft Mechanic Refresher & IA Renewal Seminar

The MDT Aeronautics Division is offering its Mechanic Refresher and Inspection Authorization (IA) Renewal Seminar concurrently with the 2026 Montana Aviation Conference in Billings (Friday and Saturday). 18 approved hours of training will be offered this year over the two days. Any combination of topics offered will meet the required 8-hour minimum for IA renewal.

Conference registration is required to attend the IA renewal seminar. See page 1 for registration details.

Note: You do not need to be an A&P or an IA to attend and learn!

For more information regarding Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Inspection Authorization renewal requirements and forms, visit: faa.gov/about/office_org/field_offices/fsdo/hln/

Note: The FAA's preferred method for submitting IA renewals is via the IACRA website.

To register for an account go to: iacra.faa.gov

Reminder: 2026 Aircraft and Pilot Registrations Due by March 1st

If your annual aircraft or pilot registration is still due, 2nd notices will be mailed out the last week of January.

Calendar of Events

January 8 - 10 - Winter Survival Clinic. Sugarloaf Lodge, Anaconda. For more information, contact Barbara Barnum at 406-444-2506 or mdtad@mt.gov. (Course is currently full).

January 28 - 29 - Aeronautics Loan and Grant Board Meeting. Helena. MDT Headquarters in the East and West Auditorium. For more information, contact Stephen Torske at 406-444-2506 or storske@mt.gov.

February 6 - 7 - FIRC. Helena. Double Tree by Hilton. For more information contact Matt Lindberg at 406-444-2506 or mdtad@mt.gov

February 26 - 28 - Montana Aviation Conference. Billings. Billings Hotel and Convention Center. For more information, to volunteer or be a vender at the conference, please contact Kelly Atkins at 406-444-9580 or email katkins@mt.gov.

March 1st- Annual Aircraft and pilot registration renewals for 2026 are due.

June 13 - Townsend Fly-In. Sponsored by the Broadwater County Airport Board. Breakfast served for a fee and proceeds go to the local 4H club. For more information, contact Jess Lancello at 406-860-5355 or jessarnold@hotmail.com.

August 9 - Hysham Fly-In. Breakfast available for a small donation 7a.m. to 10 a.m. For more information, contact Ruth Baue at 406-342-5328.

