Alberta Health Services

Date: November 28, 2022

To: Steve Jack; Town of Spirit River CAO

From: Alberta Health Services Air Ambulance Program

RE: Air Ambulance Access to Spirit River during winter months

Dear Steve,

Thank you for speaking with me and Jamie Pollock; North Zone EMS manager, on November 23, 2022.

As discussed, our objective of the meeting was to inform the Town of Spirit River; who operates the Spirit River airport, about recent changes to winter time access for the fixed wing air ambulance program. Spirit River airport was included in a recent risk assessment completed by the Air Ambulance aviation companies. Spirit River was identified as an airport with increased risk of use during winter months and it was recommended by the aviation providers to discontinue flying directly into Spirit River during the winter time only. This information allows for preplanning and other transport arrangements to move patients who would normally be flown by airplane. Arrangements can include rendezvous at another airport or the use of a ground Ambulance. This does not impact access by STARS directly into Spirit River.

One of the goals of updating risk assessments is to ensure the continued safe access of medevac aircraft into rural Alberta communities. While Spirit River has always had a shorter runway, increasing use of smaller runways and changes to overall pilot experience with small rural airports contributed to Spirit River being assessed as a high risk. Specific airport considerations include:

- The runway length is the shortest the fixed wing aircraft can safely land under ideal conditions. Ideal conditions include the runway being “bare and dry” with good visibility and weather/wind.
- The runway width and ramp size makes taxiing and maneuvering the King Air aircraft challenging when snow and ice are present
- Airport maintenance is not available at all times and is prioritized with other emergency access routes (roadways, communities).
- In some cases the King Air wings and propellers over hang the paved areas and are at risk for FOD damage.
- Runway condition reporting is not available at all times and often cannot provide the information needed for pilots to make landing decisions.
- Snow clearing options puts snow berms in close proximity to the aircraft maneuvering areas

As discussed, absence of accurate runway condition reporting, delayed or no winter maintenance, or insufficient snow/ice removal from the runway and runway edges all create hazardous conditions for the medevac staff and patients. Without accurate reporting, an aircraft

could land on a dangerous surface; such as ice, increasing the risk of a runway overrun. Icy conditions could also impede a plane from taking off.

From April 1, 2021 to March 31st 2022. Air Ambulance Fixed wing responded to/from Spirit River 40 times. From November 1, 2021 to April 30, 2022; covering 6 months in which winter weather is normally present, Air Ambulance Fixed wing aircraft responded to/from Spirit River 15 times. Fixed wing aircraft transport scheduled low acuity patients as well as

If you have any further questions, please contact me at jessical.stevenson@ahs.ca.

Regards,

Jessica Stevenson,
Manager, Provincial Air Ambulance Operations and IFT Strategy