

Florida is home not only to illustrious beaches, theme parks, and national parks, but also diverse rural communities that contain some of the state’s most niche cultural experiences and hidden natural wonders. Residents and visitors rely on Florida’s rural general aviation (GA) airports to quickly access these areas. The following profiles feature a few airports that provide quick rural connectivity and generate millions of dollars of economic impact for the state.

Okeechobee Airport

Rural airports like Okeechobee County Airport (OBE) provide critical access for recreational visitors flying in via general aviation to experience Florida’s diverse natural wonders. OBE is located less than five miles north of Lake Okeechobee, “Florida’s Inland Sea” and the largest freshwater lake in the state. Lake Okeechobee is a popular fishing destination for Large Mouth Bass and Speckled Perch; in fact, the nearby city of Okeechobee has earned the title of “Speckled Perch Capital of the World.” Each year, the city holds the Speckled Perch Festival, which attracts thousands of local and out-of-state visitors to the area. OBE also attracts visitors and flying clubs for the Landing Strip Café, the airport’s on-site restaurant that has become a favorite in Florida’s general aviation community. These attractions, combined with the airport’s fuel services (Jet A and 100LL) and general aviation terminal facility provide local and out-of-state general aviation users with a convenient gateway to one of Florida’s rural treasures in the heart of central Florida.



Source: www.britannica.com/place/Lake-Okeechobee

Defuniak Springs

Defuniak Springs Municipal Airport (54J), nestled in the Florida Panhandle, provides a key general aviation gateway for leisure traffic visiting historic Defuniak Springs. The airport provides quick accessibility to popular beach destinations like Destin and Panama City Beach while providing relatively affordable facilities and allowing visitors to avoid airspace congestion. The airport also accommodates business activity with several on-site tenants, diverse aircraft storage options, and 20-minute access to Freeport, the fastest growing city in Florida. The airport itself has recorded significantly increased activity in the past year and has generated over an estimated \$37 million in annual economic impact to Florida. In response to the rising popularity, the airport is constructing a new 78,000 square foot fixed-base operator (FBO) facility. This \$8.4 million FBO will provide a new modern face to the airport and 24/7 amenities including a pilot’s lounge and restrooms. The airport hopes that these ongoing improvements and the space for further development around the airfield will serve as the catalyst for Defuniak Springs to be “the premier general aviation airport on the Emerald Coast and the gateway airport to the beaches of South Walton.”

Source: Felix Mizioznikov



Lake City Gateway Airport – A Strategic Gateway to Florida

Lake City Gateway Airport (LCQ) offers a convenient gateway for a wide range of general aviation (GA) users to access North Central Florida. Located only minutes from Lake City, visitors can fly through LCQ to visit the area's pristine freshwater springs and fun-filled music festivals such as Florida Folk Festival and Suwannee River Jam. With an extensive suite of facilities and services such as an 8,003-foot paved runway, a modern terminal building, Jet A and 100LL fuel, LCQ is well equipped to accommodate a wide range of GA activity that would otherwise need to travel through comparable airports nearly 50 miles away. Additionally, the airport is close to two major interstates (I-10 and I-75) and along a major rail line – providing a strategic importance to the airport for GA business and emergency activities. Several tenants take advantage of these favorable connections, including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service. The USDA Forest Service maintains an air tanker base at LCQ to provide aerial firefighting for the surrounding area. The optimal location and comprehensive offerings of LCQ have enabled the airport to boost Florida's tourism and generate over \$900 million in economic impact for the state.



TraumaOne Lake City is based at LCQ, providing lifesaving aeromedical flights for North Florida. As the only base in north Florida, the coverage area of TraumaOne Lake City spans over 150 miles in diameter to cover much of the Panhandle region!

Source: www.traumaone.uflhealthjax.org/flight-services/traumaone-lake-city/

Overview

Florida's rural community relies on the state's broad airport system to provide connectivity to the larger transportation system and encourage tourism. These profiles have illustrated the impact that Florida's rural GA airports have on their surrounding communities.