

# The Casper-Natrona County Airport Is The Only International Airport In Wyoming

As the only international airport in Wyoming, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer makes himself available 24/7, as there are pilots and high-profile passengers on international charters and private jets who choose to make their entry into the U.S. in Casper.



**Dale Killingbeck**

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As Wyoming's only international airport, Casper's keeps busy with more than 500 international flights a year landing in a Cowboy State metropolis that wouldn't be more than a suburb of other large metropolitan air service markets.

Wait, what? Surely the Casper-Natrona County International Airport just puts "international" in its name to make it sound important or something.

Nope. It's simple — flights come into and fly out of the Casper airport from other countries. That makes it "international."

The tail emblems of large international airlines such as Aeroflot, Air Canada or Saudia may not be sitting on the tarmac and runways of Casper-Natrona County International Airport, but charters from nations represented by those brands — and others — arrive on a regular basis.

Airport Director Glenn Januska said those international flights may be carrying international politicians, celebrities who choose Casper for its ease of entry people who work in the oil field or other extractive industries around the state.

Those flights also may be carrying parts needed for the oil patch or even medical transplant patients in the middle of the night.

"When I talk with people and hear someone say, 'Well, you're really not an international airport,' I know where the conversation is going," Januska said. "No, we don't have commercial service. But when you have an aircraft that departed from South Africa and they land in Casper to clear customs (that's international)."

With its nearly 2-mile runway, services for fuel and catering, and a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer who makes himself available 24/7, there are a lot of pilots and high-profile passengers on international charters and private jets who choose to make their entry into the U.S. in the middle of Wyoming.

“A lot of them will clear because we have a great U.S. custom’s agent,” Januska said. “Officer (John Dale) Leatham is wonderful.”

Requests to interview Leatham for this story were rejected by the media relations officials at the federal agency.

Unlike other U.S. Customs and Border Protection offices, Januska said Leatham makes himself available for flights at all hours of the day. It’s an example of small-town hospitality and personal attention paying off, because most of those international flights have other places they could land, but choose Casper.

“If somebody calls Officer Leatham and says we need to come in on Saturday morning at 2 o’clock, he will meet them out there to clear customs,” he said. “He is very customer-oriented, and we get a lot of aircraft that clear here because they know him. Politicians and celebrities don’t have the paparazzi here. It’s very anonymous coming in.”



Casper-Natrona County International Airport not only provides commercial airline services for U.S. passengers to airport hubs in the country, it serves more than 500 international charter and private flights through its U.S Customs and Border Protection facility. (Photo Courtesy Casper-Natrona County International Airport)

### Bruce Willis' Choice

One celebrity who Januska knows used the airport in past years is retired actor Bruce Willis, who then lived in Sun Valley, Idaho.

“When Bruce Willis used to travel, if he was outside of the country, he would stop in and clear customs because it was easy to get from here to Sun Valley.”

Other celebrities choose the Casper airport because it’s the easiest place for them to clear into the country and get to their destination — which many times is outside of the state. Other times it’s Jackson.

“It’s not because they are coming to perform at the events center, though some of them do,” he said. “For a lot of them, it’s the customer service and the reputation and so forth that Officer Leatham has here.”

There are fighter jets, cargo aircraft and other military flights that regularly land at the facility.

“The fact, we clear over 500 (international) aircraft per year, which for one officer is a high number of aircraft, is because he has that reputation of doing an outstanding job and providing outstanding customer service,” he said.

### **On-Plane Checks, Too**

Aircraft clearing customs at the airport land and taxi to the southwest side of the terminal where the customs facility is located. There is a walkway out to the flight line, and Januska said crew and passengers can come into the customs office waiting room, which offers comfortable seating and restrooms. Or, they can just stay on the plane while Leatham checks passports and inspects the plane.

Airplanes cannot just drop in from outside the borders, though. Each international flight first contacts Leatham to schedule a landing.

Typically, after flying in from someplace outside of the U.S., the planes will be thirsty. Januska said international flights are a boost for the company at the airport that sells fuel. The airport also receive 15 cents on every dollar as a fuel flowage fee.

Because the custom’s facility benefits Wyoming and the region, the state helped pay to upgrade the custom’s area at the airport in 2018.

In addition to airplanes and passengers, Januska said Leatham also clears oil rigs, vehicles, products and parts. One day he walked outside to see a double-decker bus being cleared into the country.

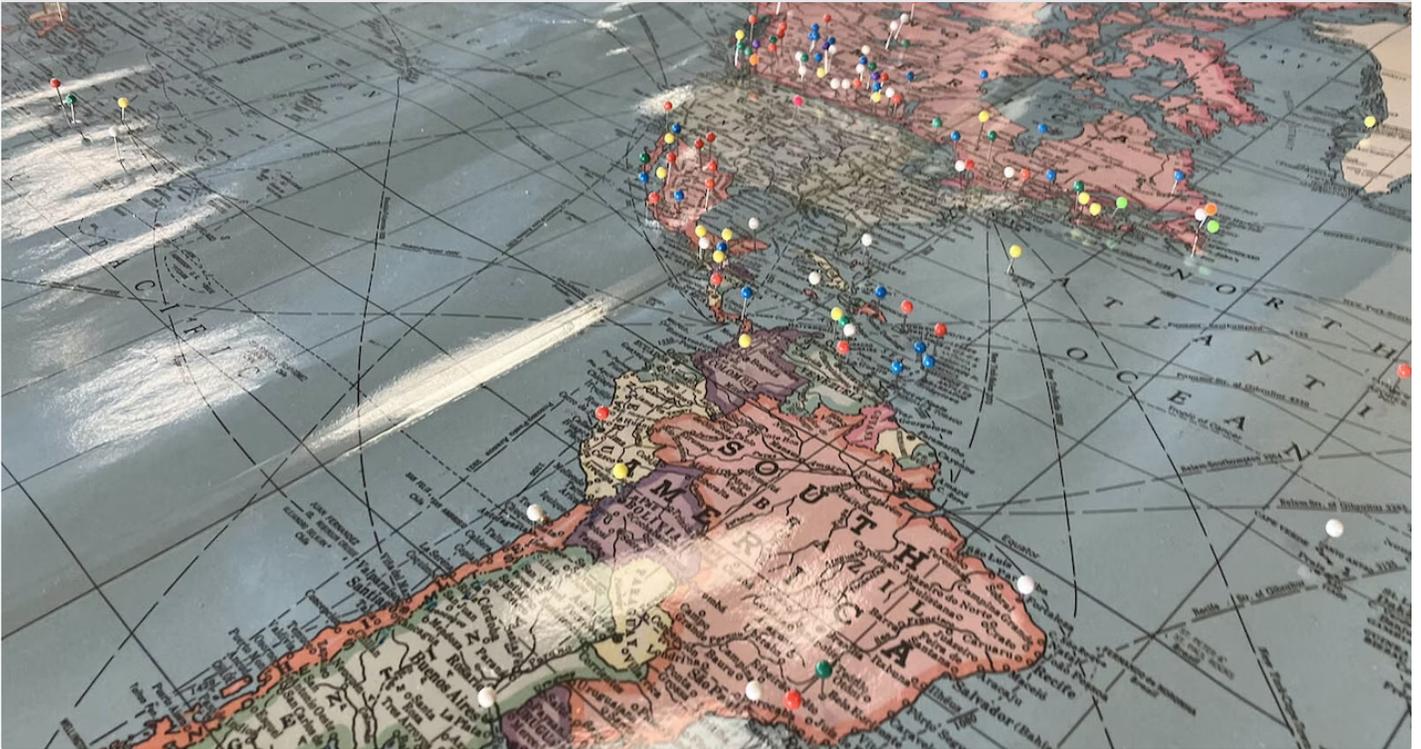
### **Foreign Trade Zone**

Because the airport has a customs office, a foreign trade zone that allows companies to import and export with certain financial benefits was established years ago.

Januska said the trade zone has been mainly dormant, but the airport is working with economic development group Advance Casper to make it more known and potentially bring new opportunities to the region.

While there is no duty-free store at the airport that can be found at larger international airports, Januska said the international side of the facility has proven its worth to the state and region many times over.

“It benefits not only the people in Natrona County, but it also benefits the state,” he said. “The easier and quicker they can clear customs here, you can get products where they need to go. And the better that is for us.”



A map in the customs office has pins showing where flights have originated from over the years. (Dale Killingbeck, Cowboy State Daily)

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