

OUTLAND AIRPORT

Airport prepares to compete for project

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MT. VERNON — Outland Airport will soon know the full weight-bearing capacity of its runway as it prepares to potentially improve it in order to compete for an unidentified project to be awarded by the end of the year.

Airport Manager Chris Collins said the facility must complete a nondestructive runway evaluation as soon as possible to determine if it will need to make upgrades to house a new client that uses aircraft beyond the estimated limits of the pavement.

Collins said he preferred not to identify the potential user so other local airports won't be able to compete for the lucrative contract.

"We don't want to totally let the cat out of the bag so we won't get as much competition from other airports," Collins said. "We've got a fantastic op-

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portunity in front of us we don't want to divulge because we don't want our competition seeing our path to make this happen and tak-

ing those steps too."

The Airfield Facilities Directory, which uses theoretical methods to determine the capabilities of runways, estimates that Mt. Vernon isn't capable on a consistent basis of handling aircraft that weigh more than 110,000 pounds. Collins said he expects the actual capability of the runway to far exceed that.

"There's no hard data about what it can actually withstand," he said.

Collins said he expects the evaluation to be completed by low bidder Applied Research Associates, of Champaign, in the next week. A

full report is expected to be received by the airport six weeks after the two-day on-site procedure is finished, around the beginning of November.

While the evaluation's \$13,630 price tag will be locally funded, Collins said it will more than pay for itself should the user choose Mt. Vernon.

"This is a very ambitious project. With great risk comes great reward," he said. "It's a fantastic opportunity if we can get it done."

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