

Boulder Municipal Airport

Working for this community, far more than most residents ever see

KBDU

 EST. 1928 · BOULDER,
COLORADO


Firefighting helicopters staged at KBDU during the 2020 Calwood Fire response.

2nd largest

civilian air evacuation in U.S. history — after only the Hurricane Katrina response in New Orleans — was flown out of this airport during the 2013 Colorado floods.

EMERGENCY & DISASTER RESPONSE

When roads flood, fires spread, or someone is critically injured in the mountains, KBDU is the base ground transport can't reach.

- **2013 floods** — KBDU became a hub for disaster air operations when flooding cut off neighborhoods; it flew the second-largest U.S. air evacuation on record.
- **Wildfire response** — the airport is quickly mobilized as a base for helicopters and light attack aircraft; nearby Hayden Lake provides a ready reservoir for aerial water drops.
- **Air ambulance** — a Med Evac helicopter is based at KBDU for fueling, maintenance, and foul-weather cover, ready to respond countywide when ground transport is too slow.
- **Search & rescue** — Civil Air Patrol and regular mountain/Flatiron rescue flights originate from the field.

"Closing the airport because there haven't been any recent disasters is akin to closing the local fire station because there hasn't been any recent house fire."

WHY IT HAS TO STAY FUNCTIONAL

- Cuts time-to-launch for air medical, search-and-rescue, and firefighting aircraft.
- Provides an alternate access route when roads are closed or unsafe.
- Serves as a staging and turnaround base during multi-day emergencies.
- Improves survivability by speeding evacuation of critically injured people.

CLEANER, QUIETER SKIES

The airport is actively phasing out the fuel and noise concerns residents raise most.

- **Unleaded fuel** — UL94 became available in 2026 and already replaces roughly half of leaded (100LL) fuel use at the field, with Colorado DOT subsidizing cost parity for pilots who switch.
- **Leaded fuel is being phased out** — full elimination of low-lead fuel is targeted within four years.
- **Electric aircraft are already here** — KBDU hosts an electric aircraft charger, an electric self-launching glider, and experimental electric aircraft.
- **Quieter by design** — smaller training aircraft, electric aircraft, and self-launching gliders (which use a brief motor run instead of a tow plane) are steadily reducing noise.



Electric aircraft charging station now in service at KBDU.

Education, Heritage & What's Next

EDUCATION & RESEARCH

KBDU is a working classroom, not just a runway. Its facilities support hands-on aviation and technical training:

- A maintenance and storage hangar where students learn aircraft mechanics firsthand.
- An active fueling facility that teaches real-world ground operations.
- A runway and surrounding influence zone used to train the next generation of Colorado pilots, mechanics, and first responders.
- **Aviation Career Days** introduce local students to careers in flight, maintenance, and emergency aviation.
- Scientific research flights operate from KBDU for organizations including **NEON, Scientific Aviation, and national research labs** — studying air quality, ecology, and atmospheric science across the region.

COMMUNITY & HERITAGE

Since its founding, the airport has been a public gathering place as much as an aviation facility. **Aviation Career Days** regularly brings students and neighbors onto the field, the airport has hosted a presidential visit, and each summer it's home to the **1940s Ball** — now in its 18th year — drawing thousands of visitors for an evening of WWII-era aircraft and big-band music.

It has been part of Boulder's civic life for nearly a century, and it keeps evolving: unleaded fuel, electric aircraft, and quieter operations are recent, concrete changes — not just promises.

SILENT FLIGHT: WORLD-CLASS GLIDING

Sailplanes based at KBDU fly on nothing but sunshine and wind — no engine, no emissions, once airborne.

- Boulder sits right at the base of the Front Range, where thermals and mountain wave create some of the best soaring conditions on Earth.
- Founded in 1959, the **Soaring Society of Boulder (SSB)** is one of the most competitive glider clubs in the world — in **2025 its team placed 2nd worldwide** (Vice Champion) among more than 750 clubs in the global IGC-OLC League.
- **Mile High Gliding**, the airport's commercial glider operator, trains pilots and flies scenic tours — introducing well over a thousand people to flight.
- No other airport within roughly 50 miles can support glider operations — for Boulder's pilots, KBDU is the only "trailhead to the open space in the sky."



An SSB glider soaring silently over Boulder — powered only by sun and wind.

~50%

of leaded fuel already replaced by unleaded UL94

4 yrs

targeted timeline to eliminate leaded fuel entirely

2nd

place worldwide — SSB's 2025 Vice Champion finish among 750+ glider clubs

A public safety asset that's cleaning up its own footprint

Boulder Municipal Airport has answered the community's two biggest concerns — lead emissions and noise — with real, in-progress fixes, while continuing to do something no other piece of infrastructure in this county can: launch the aircraft that save lives when floods rise, fires spread, and roads close.