

Red Deer-Fort McMurray flights announced

By [Harley Richards - Red Deer Advocate](#)

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The drive from Central Alberta to Fort McMurray could soon end in the parking lot of the Red Deer Airport.

Northwestern Air Lease Ltd. plans to launch twice-weekly direct passenger service from the Springbrook-based airport to the Northern Alberta city on Oct. 1. The return flight would include a stop at the Edmonton International Airport.

“There are quite a few people in Red Deer that work in Fort McMurray,” said Northwestern president Terry Harrold.

He noted that his company previously offered passenger service between Red Deer and Fort McMurray, but discontinued it in July 2010 as a result of the economic downturn.

“I think now things have ramped up pretty good.”

Although the schedule has yet to be finalized, Harrold expects one of Northwestern’s Jetstream 32 aircraft to leave Fort McMurray at 10:10 a.m. on Mondays and Fridays, and arrive in Red Deer at 12:30 p.m. after a stop in Edmonton.

The plane will then take off from the Red Deer Airport at 1 p.m. and touch down in Fort McMurray at 2:20 p.m.

The service will have an introductory one-way fare of about \$200, he said.

A release issued by Northwestern and the Red Deer Airport said the frequency of flights could increase if passenger counts justify it.

Meanwhile, Northwestern suspended its scheduled air service between Red Deer and Dawson Creek, B.C. – via Edmonton – effective Monday.

Launched in May, the flights failed to attract the interest Northwestern had hoped they would.

Frequency was reduced from three days a week to two, and now the airline is reassessing the route and looking for ways to boost interest.

“We’ll probably do an add-on – either Fort St. John or Grande Prairie, or something like that,” said Harrold.

An announcement is expected in October.

Northwestern also flies between Red Deer and Kelowna on Fridays and Sundays.

Demand for this route was strong during the summer, said Harrold, but appears to have slowed with the arrival of fall.

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