



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 17, 2021

**CONTACT:** Jina Belcher  
[jbelcher@nrgrda.org](mailto:jbelcher@nrgrda.org)  
304-888-1149 (Cell)

## **New River Gorge Regional Development Authority**

### **Moves Forward with Study on Aerospace Skilled Training Needs**

**Beckley, W.Va. (Feb. 17, 2021)** – Jina Belcher, executive director of the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority (NRGRDA), announced the selection of Pavlik and Associates to undertake a comprehensive review of skilled training needs for aerospace companies locating at the 105-acre site at Raleigh County Memorial Airport.

“The development of aerospace manufacturing and innovation opportunities is one of the most compelling ways to diversify and grow the economy in southern West Virginia,” said Belcher. “Coming off the recent announcement of the \$8.3 million site development at the airport, we want our workforce to be ready for the new companies locating at our Airport Industrial Park.”

Belcher said the aerospace education and workforce study will be completed in 10 months and offer a roadmap for collaborating institutions -- New River Community and Technical College (NRCTC) and West Virginia University Institute of Technology (WVU Tech) -- to address the two- and four-year degree programs needed. She noted the recent focus on development of the airport site and creation of new jobs has caused many local citizens to contact both institutions to inquire about their respective aerospace and aviation training programs.

This work is being funded by a \$50,000 Appalachian Regional Commission POWER grant awarded to NRGRDA in 2020 as well as a matching award of the same amount from American Electric Power (AEP).

In 2020, both New River Gorge Regional Development Authority and Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Partnership, along with their respective airports -- Raleigh County

Memorial Airport and Lewisburg Airport -- received an AERORReady™ designation for a combined 11-county area. Belcher said the AERORReady™ study identified the ease of transferability of skills possessed by displaced coal industry workers into the aerospace industry.

New River Community and Technical College President Bonny Copenhaver has been involved in workforce conversations since the inception of the project. “Recognizing and targeting our already skilled workforce allows the partners involved to have a jump start on training and recruitment to a newly developed aerospace training program,” said Copenhaver. “With campuses strategically located in Princeton, Beaver, and Lewisburg, and serving a combined 9-county area, we are committed to develop a new Aviation Mechanic Training school to help train a workforce that could have guaranteed employment at neighboring aerospace companies.”

Also located within the footprint of the 11-county project area, WVU Tech has agreed to partner its existing two-year Aviation Engineering program with New River Community and Technical College to develop a 2+2 aerospace program of study. WVU Tech Campus President Carolyn Long said students agreeing to and completing all four years of training and coursework will graduate with the skillsets and training need to excel in Aviation Mechanics and Maintenance positions. She added that the average entry level wage after earning this degree is \$60,000 to \$80,000 annually.

Belcher commended WVU Tech and NRCTC for their collaboration on advanced workforce development and training. She said Pavlik and Associates, of Fort Worth, Tex., can fill the gaps and work with the Federal Aviation Administration and other technical and regulatory bodies to conduct the workforce assessment and recommendations.

# # #

**About New River Gorge Regional Development Authority:** The New River Gorge Regional Development Authority’s (NRGRDA) mission is to initiate, facilitate and support the economic and community development efforts within the counties of Fayette, Nicholas, Raleigh, and Summers located in this region of southern West Virginia. NRGRDA stimulates the regional economy through business expansion and retention efforts, including an extensive portfolio of financial services; the management of sites for new companies locating to our region; and serving as a point of access for local service providers which offer a variety of technical assistance for business owners.