

The Manager's Approach



Vol. 3 Issue 8

Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

August 2004

Promote the Airport

Most pilots know the benefits our airports provide to our communities, but I think it is safe to say most county residents don't. I find myself more often in the position of either defending the airport or acting as a salesman of airport services. I like flying, I like the pilot community and I like my job, so I promote the airports any chance I get. I will be speaking to the Kiwanis soon, letting them know what is "happening" at the airports and what the future looks like for our aviation community.

There are several pilots' organizations that take action to defend our airports and the most active of these in our area are AOPA and the California Pilots Association. Both organizations do an outstanding job, but there is always a need for more involvement at the lowest level. The healthy survival of our airports is determined by the health of the relationship between the local community leaders and the airport. This is where all local pilots need to contribute.

If you are a member of a service organization, on a steering committee, a leader in your church, a coach of a sports team, or if you have regular contact with a civic leader you should voice your support of the airport whenever the chance arises.

The responsibility for preserving our airports is the responsibility of all pilots. Please speak out and do your part.

Good Neighbors

One way we can protect the future of our airports is to fly responsibly. I believe the number one thing we need to do in this area is to minimize the amount of airplane noise

the people on the ground hear. Noise complaints are by far the most numerous complaints I get. We all know big horsepower long propeller aircraft cause the biggest problem. Reducing your rpm as soon as it is safe is a good way to keep the airport neighbors happy. If you are doing bounce-and-goes, vary your traffic pattern a little each time so you are not flying over the same houses every circuit.

When I receive a noise complaint I sometimes get enough information to identify the aircraft. In these cases I will talk to the pilots directly and ask them to try my two suggestions. Yes we have a right to fly our standard patterns, but just because people live under the flight path, doesn't mean they don't get irritated from time to time by excess noise coming from the aircraft overhead.

Maintenance Activities

We fertilized the grass runway on July 9th and then watered it like crazy to wash the fertilizer into the soil. To do this we closed the runway for 3 days to keep the aircraft from tearing up the turf when it is saturated. Everyone should keep an eye out for an "X" on the 29 blast pad indicating the runway is closed. Just so you know, we did file a closure NOTAM but who calls FSS for a briefing before you go bounce around the pattern?

Several people have asked that we provide an airhose for airing aircraft tires. Often times pilots would have to beg, borrow, or steal air from a FBO (how do you borrow air from a FBO?). We now have a new airhose installed just outside the Administration office. It is hooked to the County's air

compressor, which is turned on during normal working hours. It has an air chuck but does not have an air pressure gauge. All airport tenants are welcome to use the air so bring by your airplane, car, motorcycle, bicycle or air tank and fill up.

At Pine Mountain Lake we painted double line stripes around the edge of the run-up area and on the taxiway leading to the departure end of 27. This should help pilots find the edge of the taxiway at night. The flags were replaced and the flag night light fixture was repaired.

The CDF Baseline crews have been making great progress at both airports and you will notice large piles of slash at various locations. These piles will be burned this fall once the burning season opens up again.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Two weeks ago both Pine Mountain Lake and Columbia Airports had an invasion of firefighting helicopters as several fires flamed up around the area. These were not your normal everyday helicopters, they were what are termed "Type-1" helicopters, or to us fixed-wingers big load lifting helicopters.

Now I want to say right up front that none of these helicopter pilots nor any of their ground support crew did anything stupid, other than land on the hot asphalt and leave some big skid impressions that will have to be repaired. The stupid things I want to talk about are those that fixed-wing pilots do around helicopters, or things they do that may create a problem because of the Type-1 helicopter operations.

Whenever you are taxiing or flying your plane around operating Type-1 helicopters you should give them a wide berth. The rotor wash can put you into an "unusual attitude" in an instant!

One stupid thing a fixed wing pilot could do is leave your aircraft in a tiedown that has perfectly good chains and not use them. Twice now I have rushed out to chain down a plane as a Blackhawk or Sikorsky hover taxied past. So far we have been lucky and

no planes have been damaged. You never know when a Type-1 will arrive, even enroute to another airport and want a gulp of gas. Use your tiedowns here and at other airports you visit.

During the firefighting operations 2 weeks ago, the helicopter operators moved a couple of tied down planes out of their way. This action not only helped the helicopter operations but reduced the chance of damage to the airplanes. This brought up the issue of parking your plane in your tiedown with your parking brake set. The planes in question did not have their parking brake set but if they did, moving the planes would have much more difficult, leading to possible damage to the plane. The parking brake is for use when you do not have wheel chocks or tiedowns. Some mechanics have told me that the parking brake should not be left on for long periods of time.

From time to time we have to move planes on the ramp. We did it several times during the ramp renovation project and also before and after the Father's Day Fly-In. The bottom line is that you should not set your parking brake when tied down. Doing so may create an inconvenience for the airport staff or your mechanic. It also could lead to aircraft damage, which would keep your bird on the ground when you want to be out enjoying the skies.

Stupid Pilot Tricks is a monthly article that attempts to raise awareness of safety and courtesy issues around our airports.

The Manager's Approach is a monthly publication from the Tuolumne County Airports Director for the purpose of keeping our community informed of local aviation and airport issues. You can contact me at:

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