

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

January 2005

Frequencies Change February 9 & 10

The CTAF at both Columbia and Pine Mountain Lake Airports is changing in early February. I wrote a detailed article about this change in my last month's bulletin. Just as a reminder, Columbia will change to 122.975 MHz on Wednesday, February 9th and Pine Mountain Lake Airport will change to 122.900 MHz on February 10th. Please pass the word on to all your pilot friends and be on the lookout for arriving and departing aircraft still using the old frequency.

Deer Fence at PML

Those of you that fly in and out of Pine Mountain Lake Airport will notice a new electric deer fence along both sides of the first 1,000 feet of Runway 9. This sloped fence is based on a design provided by the Wildlife Services Division of the US Department of Agriculture and is a test to see if an electric fence is an option for keeping the deer from crossing the runway.

I have been soliciting feedback on the effectiveness of the electric fence and comments so far suggest that some deer go over it, some go under it, some go between the strands and some go completely around the fence. Based on these observations, my plan is to add additional strands to the fence in an attempt to prevent the deer from going under and through it. I also plan to spray liquid fence on the ground between ends of the north and south side fences in an attempt to keep the deer out of the area between the two fences. Obviously, the recent wet weather has kept us from spraying the liquid fence. When drier conditions arrive we will spray between the two fences.

Thanks You For Updating Insurance Policies

Francesca and I would like to thank all our tenants that sent in their updated insurance verification paperwork for 2005. Individual notification of this requirement is both time consuming and expensive. Thus, all of you that responded to my update request in last month's bulletin have certainly helped us out.

Grants Approved for the Design of a Perimeter Access Road and Taxiway C Extension

We are in the final stages of drafting a contract with Stantec Consulting for the design of a perimeter access road around the south end of Runway 17-35 and the design of a paved extension to Taxiway C at Columbia Airport. The Airports Department applied for and received an Airport Improvement Grant from the FAA for 95% of the design work. We also received a 5% matching grant from Caltrans Division of Aeronautics. Together, these two grants will fund 99.5% of the project.

Once the design is completed we will then apply for grants to construct the perimeter access road and taxiway extension. The perimeter access road will significantly reduce the number of vehicles crossing the runway, thus increasing the safety of our airport. The Taxiway C extension will provide access to the southwest side of the grass runway which is one of our areas identified for hangar development.

It is not clear yet whether the construction of these will occur in 2005. The gears of government do indeed turn slowly.

Soggy Conditions

Yea I know, I'm stating the obvious. Unless you have been away on holiday for the last month, you know our airports are soaked to the bone. Please make every effort to keep your aircraft and vehicles on the paved surfaces. Any traffic on our gravel or dirt areas is sure to cause rutting and a maintenance headache for Fred and Dennis.

Used Oil Disposal At PML

I was asked to let pilots at Pine Mountain Lake know that we have a used oil disposal tank available for collecting used aircraft and vehicle engine oil. The used oil storage tanks are located inside the metal building located on the east side of the parking ramp. The combination to the building lock can be obtained by calling my office or by contacting Mother Lode Aviation.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Foggy Brain Cells

Tuolumne County has some of the best flying weather found anywhere in the US. As the saying goes, we are above the smog and fog and below the snow. This statement is true most of the time. Our IMC weather usually appears when the valley fog blows east and engulfs our Airports or when a big storm passes through. The big storms are pretty easy to predict but the coming and going of the fog is a lot less predictable.

When the fog sets in the San Joaquin Valley, often times for days on end, we may experience warm sunny weather in the foothills and great flying conditions. A problem develops when the fog engulfs Columbia and then Pine Mountain Lake Airports. There are no higher elevation airports around the area and options for airport landings drop significantly.

Last month a fellow pilot hastily came to my office and asked if I was flying home to PML that day. Of course I was and I responded "affirmative". He suggested that

I leave immediately because the fog was just about to engulf the south end of Columbia Airport. My quick glance out the office window confirmed my friend's observation. I quickly checked the PML webcam which showed sunny VFR conditions, then jumped in my Cub and took off toward a "wall of fog" sitting just off the end of the runway. The performance of my plane was more than adequate and I quickly climbed over the fog staying in the sunshine and had a pleasant flight home.

So what is so stupid about that, you might ask? I checked the weather at my destination, had plenty of fuel and was familiar with the route. Well my flight to PML was nothing like the flight that ended with an airplane landing on Highway 120 at Buck Meadows three years ago. That pilot got stuck on top and both Columbia and Pine Mountain Lake Airports were fogged in. Not having enough fuel to cross the Sierras to Minden or Carson City, that pilot chose to land on the highway. Poor planning, changing weather, and no options lead to a broken airplane. Fortunately no one was hurt in this incident.

What is more stupid than landing your plane on Highway 120 when fogged out of your destination? How about significantly busting minimums when making an IMC approach into Columbia or PML? I've seen it done several times and it scares the heck out of me to think what could happen!

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:

Tuolumne County Airports Department
Jim Thomas, Airports Director
10723 Airport Road, Columbia, CA 95310
209-533-5685
jthomas@co.tuolumne.ca.us