

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Grass Runway Use During the Wet Season

My office receives calls from pilots wanting to know if the grass runway is open during the winter months and if so, are there any special concerns associated with winter operations. The following are a few guidelines that should be followed when using the grass runway and which will help reduce damage to the turf.

- Don't use it during wet conditions or shortly after a rain. Give the grass a chance to dry out. This usually takes two or three days.
- Avoid making 180 degree turns on the runway. Rapid turns tend to tear the grass.
- Avoid back-taxiing on the grass. Back-taxiing not only occupies the runway, but increases the wear and tear on the grass. There are several acres of adjacent grass on both sides of the runway that can be used for taxiing.
- Avoid using your brakes on the grass. Locking up your brakes just damages the grass and doesn't help you stop any quicker. Let the resistance of the grass slow you down.
- Avoid making early turns off the runway while still at relatively high speed. Doing this can result in the plane skidding on the grass causing damage to the grass.

The grass runway is a valuable asset at Columbia Airport. We want to keep it in good shape. If the turf surface becomes damaged, it may become necessary to close the runway while the damaged areas are reseeded, which could take several weeks.

Pilots that enjoy our grass runway don't want to see it closed because of poor technique or judgment.

FAA Installs New REILs

The FAA has always owned and operated the Runway End Identification Lights (REILs) at Columbia Airport. For those of you that don't fly at night, the REILs are the bright white strobe lights that identify the threshold of the runway. These lights are connected to the runway lights so they are only on when the runway lights are turned on. The FAA has upgraded the REILs on Runway 35 to a new electronic model. The new lights are more energy efficient and should provide us with many years of reliable service. Hopefully, the FAA will find the funding to upgrade the REILs on Runway 17 in the not-to-distant future.

Gas Siphoned from Cars

We all know the price of gasoline has gone up and one undesirable effect from this is an increase in the siphoning of gas out of the cars parked at both airports. Pine Mountain Lake Airport got hit hard recently when seven cars parked in the long term parking showed evidence of gasoline theft. Unfortunately, some of the cars had their gas caps thrown away and others had the locking doors to the gas filler broken. The Airports Department regrets this has happened, but we want those parking in our long term parking areas to remember that there are no surveillance systems at our airports including the long term parking areas. This makes it very difficult to identify the vandals. To help us deal with

this problem, we request that anyone experiencing vandalism or witnessing suspicious activity report it to the Airport Office as soon as possible.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Now that we are starting a new year I'd like to share with the pilot community the complaints I most often heard last year. These are the things that pilots do which show poor judgment, lack of planning or complete ignorance; to me, more appropriately termed "stupid pilot tricks".

1. Believe it or not we still have pilots coming into both Columbia and Pine Mountain Lake Airports talking on the old frequency. It has been 11 months now since the frequency was changed and yet pilots continue to use old charts, old databases, old approach plates and old airport guides as their "primary" source of data!
2. Low flying and buzzing homes, boats & people. This seems to be one of the most prevalent complaints and ranges from farmers complaining about planes buzzing their cattle to boaters complaining of low flying aircraft.
3. Pilots continuing to operate their aircraft in a manner that creates a noise nuisance to those on the ground. Some airplanes make a lot more than others. All pilots should be aware of the level of noise their aircraft produces. Long props and high rpm make for noise complaints.
4. Aircraft taking off or landing in the opposite direction from the preferred runway. This is a result of pilots not monitoring the radio, being on the wrong frequency or just plain inconsideration. Landing aircraft have the right-of-way, but they should also blend in with the normal flow of traffic at the airport.
5. Pilots not broadcasting their position and intentions so that other pilots in the area can evaluate any potential conflict. This can also be expressed by the words "Where did that guy come from?" Don't rely on every pilot using the radio or

flying the correct pattern. Use your radio to inform other pilots of your intentions and be concise and accurate with your broadcasts.

6. Pilots doing aerobatics in the pattern. Flying doesn't have to be all straight and level. Aerobatics are fun and challenging but also have their time and place. Aerobatics below 1,500' agl in Class E airspace is against FAA regulations. So performing these feats in the traffic pattern not only exhibits poor judgment, but is also against the law.
7. Pilots not checking NOTAMs. In this day of pop-up TFRs and increased airspace restrictions, it is important for every pilot to check for NOTAMs prior to cross country flights. Out of service approach aids and frequency changes are things that pilots should be aware of prior to making a flight.
8. Pilots not monitoring the AWOS prior to arrival or departure at Columbia Airport. In addition to weather conditions, the AWOS may contain a recorded message that informs pilots of a special condition such as a runway closure or an approach path obstacle.
9. Pilots making early turnouts on departure. Turning crosswind before the end of the runway increases the danger to yourself and to people on the ground in the event that you have a problem.

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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