

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Columbia VASI Flight Check

The FAA has not verified our VASI lights at Columbia Airport for several years and our number came up on their schedule. The VASIs are checked using a Beechcraft KingAir that is equipped with some special approach slope instrumentation. The KingAir makes multiple approaches, including flight paths that are off to the side of the runway centerline. With a little adjustment, the Runway 35 VASIs were set to the proper approach angle of four degrees, but at an approach path of ten degrees off of centerline there were some trees obstructing the lights. We have the option to baffle the lights to narrow the width of the approach path, which we did. But, the KingAir did not have enough time left in their schedule that day to re-fly and certify the Runway 35 VASIs. So, we were directed to “take them out of service” until they could return to verify the beam width. Well bad weather set in and the FAA has still not returned, leaving the Runway 35 VASIs still NOTAM'd out of service. The Runway 17 VASIs still need to be verified and are still in service.



Cold Weather Makes for Difficult Engine Starts

Our local FBOs notice the cold weather in more ways than ice on the windshields of their cars. It seems that many pilots have a difficult time starting their planes when the temperatures drop into the 30s and especially the 20s as they have recently. Here are a couple of tips that may help you avoid a call to one of our local mechanics and a delay in your flight.

- Follow your Operating Handbook procedure for cold weather starts.
- Keep your battery charged. Either take it home and put it on a charger or use a solar trickle charger during the winter.
- Replace your old battery with a new one. Old batteries don't have the cranking power of a new one.
- Consider running lighter weight engine oil in the winter which will reduce the cranking friction of your engine.

My engine has a heater pad on the oil sump for preheating the oil and engine. It works great if you have electrical power near by. If you must jump your airplane, please use extreme caution.

PML Deer Fence Survey

We now have received over 82 responses to the Deer Fence Survey out of 118 sent out. This response rate is very encouraging since it indicates that this issue is important to the pilots. The following are the survey results.

Do you think the deer fence is effective at reducing the number of deer on the runway?
Effective or Somewhat Effective – 73%
Not Effective – 13 %
No Opinion – 15%

Do you think that blocking off the runway exit located 1,000 feet from the west end of the runway presents a safety hazard?

Yes – 37%

No – 56%

No Opinion – 7%

Do you think the currently constructed fence presents a safety hazard to aircraft?

Yes – 22%

No – 74%

No Opinion – 4%

Do you think the deer fence is an eyesore?

Yes – 29%

No – 61%

No Opinion – 10%

Would you support thinning the deer herd through legally approved depredation methods?

Yes – 83%

No – 7%

No Opinion – 10%

It is evident that most pilots feel the fence is effective in reducing the number of deer on the runway. However, they also feel the fence and especially the closed runway exit (now reopened) present a potential safety hazard to aircraft. Without a doubt, they also feel there are too many deer at PML Airport and that thinning the herd is an option that should be investigated.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Don't Let the Sun Get in Your Eyes

During the winter months the sun rises over the Sierras directly off the departure end of Pine Mountain Lake Airport's Runway 9. The mornings also generally have an easterly breeze making Runway 9 the in-to-the-wind runway. As a pilot I have to make a decision whether I'm going to take off with a slight headwind on Runway 9 with the sun in my eyes or take off on Runway 27 with a tailwind but the sun at my back. Believing that the most dangerous part of a flight is the takeoff, I usually choose to take

off with the tailwind allowing me to see any aircraft, birds, runway objects, and most important emergency landing spots. My plane doesn't need much runway to get airborne so runway length is not an issue in this situation.

We had a visiting pilot taxi for departure on Runway 35 at Columbia late in the afternoon when the sun was just above the hills west of the airport. Things were going just fine until he turned right from the parallel taxiway towards the runway threshold. As the plane turned west the sun temporarily blinded the pilot and he taxied off the pavement and the prop hit the Runway 35 sign. The sign went flying and the propeller blade bent. Needless to say, the pilot didn't fly this plane back to its home base and now the insurance company is paying for a new engine and prop. Ouch!

Situational awareness is a big part of a pilot's skill set. Anticipate the sun getting into your eyes and take any necessary steps to avoid getting blinded by the sun. Evaluate all the factors that may affect a safe takeoff or landing, and then make your decision on how best to proceed. You aren't required by the FARs to take off or land into the wind. The runway slope, obstructions, rising terrain or even the sun may be a more important consideration when picking which runway you will use.

Have Happy And Safe Flying New Year

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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