

The Manager's Approach



Vol. 6 Issue 1

Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

January, 2007

FAA Visits PML Airport

The manager of the FAA's San Francisco Airports District Office, Andy Richards visited Pine Mountain Lake Airport to look at the deer fence and to see first hand the residential nature of the airport. I think the meeting went very well. The issue that sparked Andy Richards' visit was the installation of the deer fence in the runway Object Free Area (OFA) which by definition should only contain runway lighting and signage. By visiting the airport, Andy was able to see first hand why the fence was placed in the OFA and he agreed that there was no other practical location for the deer fence. Andy did feel the fence was properly constructed using frangible posts (one inch diameter PVC) and low strength wire, and that it did not present a significant hazard to an aircraft that deviated from the runway. The Airports Department is waiting for a formal letter from the FAA regarding the location of the fence in the OFA.

Reducing Runway Incursions

Have you ever had an aircraft, vehicle or pedestrian cross the runway when you were taking off or landing? If so, you were put in a potentially dangerous situation by someone else that should not have been crossing the runway either in that spot or at that time. The FAA Administrator has made reducing runway incursions a top priority because incursions can be avoided, thus increasing the safety of aviation.

The Airports Department takes runway incursions seriously and has a policy that all vehicles must cross our runways at the least dangerous spot. At Pine Mountain Lake Airport this is the far west end of the runway

where the taxiway crosses the threshold of Runway 9. At Columbia it is at the south end of Runway 17-35 at the "numbers" and on the "blast pad" for Runway 29. No one should cross the grass runway in a vehicle except at the blast pad. Driving across the grass runway is like driving across your lawn and can cause damage to the turf.

No one except airport maintenance personnel should be driving on any runway. Airport safety is everyone's responsibility. The last thing we want is a collision between an aircraft and a vehicle. Such an accident would immediately result in stopping all vehicle traffic crossing our runways.

Columbia Webcams

The webcams that were installed by the Northern Yosemite Chapter of the EAA at Columbia Airport have been up and operating for a couple of months now. The TCAA assisted in the financial cost of the project and Aero Resources is donating the internet connection. The camera views are provided at the EAA Chapter 1337 website at www.eaa1337.org/columbia_airport_cam.htm which can also be accessed through the Aero Resources and Tuolumne County websites.

Two Owl Boxes Occupied

Recent inspection of the four owl boxes at Columbia Airport revealed evidence of occupation in two of the boxes. For those of you that have not followed the owl box story, the boxes were installed as an Eagle Scout project two years ago. They are located in the trees north of the grass runway. We hope to attract owls to help control our gopher problem in the grass runway. Owls hunt at night and the grass

runway is not lighted; thus, it is felt that attracting owls for vermin control does not present a problem with night operations.

2006 Accomplishments

Now that 2006 is history, I thought I would summarize the significant Airports Department accomplishments from last year.

- Completed the PML Airport Master Plan
- Completed update of the Columbia Airport Layout Plan
- Completed the biological resources study for the sale of the Springfield Estates Lots
- Completed the first year of a multi year effort to control noxious weeds at PML
- Developed the Airports Department Webpage (click the Airports link at www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov)
- Assisted the FAA with the installation of new REILs on Columbia's Runway 35
- Assisted with the installation of the Columbia Airport webcams
- Acquired Tanker 76 for static display
- Continued to use the CDF Baseline Crew to control weeds and brush
- Continued to test variations of the deer fence & alternative deer control methods
- Completed flight check of the PML VASI and PAPI lights

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Stupid Pedestrian Tricks

I was flying back to Columbia Airport on a very windy day. The AWOS was calling the wind 100 degrees at 18 knots gusting to 29 knots. Not a great day to be bouncing around the sky in my Piper Super Cruiser. Fortunately, the wind was right down the grass runway which pretty much assured me that the landing would be uneventful. Well my landing was uneventful but after having to make a go around because there was a person playing tug-a-war with his dog right in the middle of the runway! With the wind in his ears and his eyes focused on his pet, the guy never saw or heard me approach. It

was only when I applied full throttle for the go around that the guy looked up, completely startled and maybe even a little scared. By the time I bounced around the pattern for a second time the guy and his dog were in his car and headed out the campground gate.

No matter how hard we try to tell pedestrians that they are more than welcome to use the airport property for exercise, but that they must stay off the runway, there are still a few that just don't get it. One day we had a walker ask one of the airport maintenance guys when he was going to mow the grass runway because the grass was so thick it was getting difficult to walk on! Another time, I stopped a jogger that was coming down the grass runway and politely asked him to not jog on the runway. He told me that he had been watching and listening for airplanes, but he was jogging west with his back towards any aircraft landing on Runway 29 listening to his MP3 player!

If you aren't convinced that there are stupid pedestrians by now, I'll tell you about the time when I had to ask two women pushing baby carriages to please not stroll down the center of the runway. They too told me they were looking out for airplanes!

Hanging out at the airport we will see pedestrians do some stupid things from time to time. For everyone's safety, please make an effort to inform pedestrians that runways are for aircraft only and that there are plenty of places to exercise besides the middle of the only place an airplane has to land.

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
www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov