

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Night Time Incident

One of the local Columbia Airport pilots came by my office and reported that while he was night flying and on downwind he was illuminated by a ground based light that was extremely bright, so much so that it momentarily affected his night vision. He was in a high wing aircraft which may have increased the effect of the light.

This occurrence is very troubling and also a federal offense. Although this may be an isolated event, if you ever have this happen to you, please call the Sheriff as soon as possible, and also report it to me at your earliest convenience. We will do everything we can to stop this kind of behavior.

PML Access Gate

The access gate at the Pine Mountain Lake Airport will be upgraded in the near future. The problem is that the cards that are used to open the gate are no longer manufactured. It seems the industry has gone on to better technology and no longer supports the old system. To solve the card issue, we will be installing a new proximity card reader that is the same as those on the PMLA gates. What this means is that in the not too distant future your old cards will not work, but your PMLA card will work, "if it has been programmed into the airport gate card reader". Our new access system is completely separate from the PMLA system.

Prior to switching out the card reader, we will contact everyone that has been issued a PML Airport gate card and obtain from them their PMLA card number found on the back of the card. These numbers will be preprogrammed into the new reader so the new proximity card reader will immediately

recognize your PMLA card. For those that do not have a PMLA access card, the Airports Department will issue you a card that will work in the PML Airport gate only. The Airports Department cards will not work in the PML subdivision gates.

There is no plan to install a receiver for the gate clickers due to the expense of these readers.

Correct Frequencies to be Shown on September 1, 2005 Sectional

I'm sure most of you know that the current San Francisco Sectional does not show our new frequencies for Columbia and Pine Mountain Lake Airports. The reason for this is still unclear because I phoned, faxed and wrote the FAA Charting Office well in advance of the changes. After several follow-up calls and emails I have received a confirmation from the "Lead Cartographer - Western Section, Visual Chart Branch, ACD, National Aeronautical Charting Office, AVN, FAA" (how is that for a title?) that the next issue of the SF Sectional will indicate the correct CTAFs.

Noise Concerns

The Never Ending Battle

Although I receive complaints about aircraft noise or low flying aircraft every month, it seems that recently the number of complaints has increased. I expect this is primarily due to three factors; more people fly during the summer months; the days are longer so pilots are flying earlier in the morning and later in the evening; and people have their houses opened up in the evening to cool off the house. Last night I had my

bedroom windows open and was awoken by the familiar chirp of rubber meeting the runway at 3:30 AM!

Complaints come from residents around both Pine Mountain Lake and Columbia Airports. Most complaints are from non-pilots but a surprisingly significant number of complaints come from pilots also. The difference between the pilot and non-pilot complaints is that non-pilots are really irritated by the aircraft noise or low flying aircraft and the fact that they have no control over the situation. Pilots, on the other hand, are complaining because they know that the situation is avoidable and that the actions of a few pilots have adverse impact on all pilots.

In an effort to help make pilots aware of noise sensitive areas, such as the lake and golf course at PML and Columbia State Park and elementary school, I am working on “recommended arrival and departure routes” at our airports. I want to also show both the traffic patterns for Runway 17-35 and the grass Runway 29. Although infrequent, I do see and hear of potential conflict between aircraft departing Runway 17 and aircraft landing on Runway 29. It is my hope that providing written and graphical information to pilots about the preferred procedures at our airports will improve safety and reduce complaints.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Unfriendly Airport Follow-Up

It seems that my last month’s article about my not-so-friendly experiences at an airport in Alaska got several pilots stirred up to the point where they needed to know what airport I was referring to. I received emails and phone calls from pilots that were going to avoid that airport at all costs. The intent of my article was not to chase people away from that particular airport but to point out that the way visiting pilots are treated can impact the success of any airport. People want to revisit airports that are fun and they tend to avoid those that are not. I also pointed out that the price of fuel is an

important factor, but friendly service and professionalism can more than out weigh high priced fuel.

My concern that other pilots might have the same unpleasant experience at the unidentified airport prompted me to send emails and my Manager’s Approach to two air taxi companies and the airport manager at the airport. I received prompt responses from a pilot of one air taxi company and from the airport manager, both expressing concern about my experiences at their airport. The airport manager did say that a couple of my concerns were justified and that he had been aware of the problems. Both the pilot and airport manager indicated that airport security and safety were significant concerns at their airport. A ramp improvement project is planned that will address the transient tiedown issues and also provide more control over passengers to keep them off the ramp except when loading or unloading. Both individuals expressed their sincere feelings that their airport is indeed friendly to GA pilots.

As you can see, providing honest feedback and having open dialog between pilots, aviation businesses and airport administrators is a smart and beneficial thing to do. Flying away from a bad situation or ignoring an airport’s real problem is the stupid thing to do! Please let me know what your concerns are at the Tuolumne County Airports.

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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