

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Grass Runway Winter Use

The grass runway at Columbia has been a big hit since it opened on April 30th. Over the past several months we have been learning how to take care of the grass to keep it lush and green, not to mention mowed. Last month we applied a slow release fertilizer to keep from overfeeding the grass during the winter when the tough Bermuda grass is dormant. The sprinkler system has been shut down to prevent freezing of the lines and eliminate unnecessary watering.

With the Bermuda grass going dormant there is a slight brown tint to the runway. The grass is not dying, just going to sleep for the winter. On the other hand, the fescue grass mixed in with the Bermuda grass is thriving with the cooler days and regular rains adding a bright green carpet-like appearance.

During the winter months, the grass runway will remain open, but it may be closed from time to time if heavy rains make the ground too soft to handle the aircraft wheel loads. We want to keep the runway from getting rutted because rutting will necessitate closing the runway for extended periods of time while the grass and soil dry out and the ruts are raked down.

With this in mind, I am asking our regular grass runway users to avoid operations on the runway for a couple of days after a rain. This will give the runway a chance to dry out lessening the chance of damaging the runway. Also, if you see a soft spot developing in the grass, please avoid that spot by either landing long or to the side of the affected area. A soft spot will be seen as

a brown spot of soil or a shiny spot with standing water.

An additional item of concern is rutting of the areas to the sides of the grass runway. There are soft spots throughout the area adjacent to the grass runway. When taxiing around you may pick up a lot of mud on your tires, fling it onto the under side of your wing, or pack it inside your wheel pants. This mud will also be tracked across the pavement on Runway 17-35 and onto the parking ramp. The bottom line is that the grass runway is really a weather dependant runway. All pilots should be aware of this and conduct their flight operations accordingly. Please don't use the grass runway during wet conditions and for a couple of days after a good rain. This will help keep our unique asset in good condition. Thanks.

New FBO at Columbia

It has been a long time since a new aviation business has sprouted up at Columbia Airport. Aero Resources, LLC, has recently signed a management and operations agreement covering the large Lorick Enterprises hangar located on the southeast corner of the ramp area. Aero Resources, LLC, owned and managed by a couple of long time familiar faces from around the airport, Greg Thompson and Fritz Bayer, will offer aircraft maintenance, Annual Inspections and hangar space to local and out of the area airplane and helicopter customers. Greg, an FAA licensed A&P mechanic with Inspection Authorization and Private Pilot Certificates, and Fritz, also an FAA licensed A&P mechanic with Inspection Authorization and Commercial

Airplane and Helicopter Pilot Certificates, will offer much needed services to the industry. So, heads up for increased activity in the south ramp area in and around the large hangar. For additional information regarding hangar space or maintenance needs, please contact Fritz or Greg at Aero Resources (209) 533-4543, or feel free to drop by their office within the hangar to welcome them to our airport business community.

Pine Mountain Lake Airport Master Plan Public Workshop

The development of the PML Airport Master Plan has come to the point where we will be holding our first Public Workshop on Thursday December 9th from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at the Groveland Community Hall. Those who are interested in learning about the Master Plan process, the forecast data collected, and the airport development alternatives being considered should plan to attend this workshop. This will also be an opportunity for the public to express their desires and concerns regarding the future development of the airport.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

It is no secret that I love to walk the ramps at airports and look at the airplanes. Anyone whose passion is aviation does this often. Years ago I was strolling around a ramp and walked up behind an interesting airplane to check out the instrument panel because I was in the process of designing the panel for my Super Cruiser and was looking for ideas. Just as I got around the tail feathers I heard a “clear” followed immediately by an engine start. This really got my attention as I quickly backed out away from the aircraft.

Who was in the wrong in this situation? I was to a certain degree because I had not noticed that the aircraft was not tied down, nor had I notice that there were people in the plane. But I couldn’t help but think that the pilot was also at fault because, he didn’t make certain the area was clear before

starting his engine. The real error in my opinion was that the pilot started the engine within a second or two of the time he yelled “clear”. This didn’t give me a chance to move away from the airplane after being warned of the impending engine start.

Since that “close call” I have always tried to wait several seconds between the time I yell “clear” and when I actually hit the starter just to allow anyone in the area to prepare for my engine start. I also, take a quick look around my plane to see if there are any people in the immediate area.

Safety is my primary concern at our airports. I often see (or hear) pilots yell “clear” then immediately start their engines and wonder why this is. My presumption is that pilots are quickly working through their start-up checklist without giving much thought to the purpose of this one item. I’d like everyone to realize that “clear” is not a verbal command for your airplane to start its engine, but it is a warning to those who might be in your immediate area that you will soon be making dust, noise, and spinning a deadly propeller. Take five seconds longer during your engine start procedures to assure this first phase of your aircraft operation does not endanger anyone in your tiedown area.

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. If you would like to be on my mailing list or have comments regarding the operation of our airports, please contact me at:

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