

The Manager's Approach



Vol. 3 Issue 12

Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

December 2004

Grass Runway & Frost

I have been told by several individuals that we should be restricting operations on the grass runway at Columbia when there is frost on the ground. Apparently, landing on the grass when it is frozen can severely damage the grass. Some golfers told me that it is an absolute no-no to even walk on the greens when they are covered with frost. Obviously, I want to keep the grass in as good a shape as possible, so I am asking our local pilots to please “stay off the grass” in the early mornings when the frost is still on the ground. Late mornings and afternoons are usually frost free making grass runway operations acceptable.

Pilot Alert!

Airport Frequencies Are Changing

We are very close to finally getting our frequencies changed. For those of you who aren't familiar with the issue, many pilots have complained that our Unicom frequency of 123.05 MHz can be very congested at times, especially on weekends. The Airports Committee and the Board of Supervisors recommended changing to a less used frequency for safety. Columbia will be changing to 122.975 MHz and Pine Mountain Lake will be changing to Multicom 122.900 MHz. Our new FCC licenses have been issued and we just received the new crystals for the Pilot Controlled Lighting (PCL) systems at both airports.

The plan is to change Columbia's frequency on Wednesday, February 9th and Pine Mountain Lake's on Thursday, February 10th. A NOTAM will be filed and the FAA

Charting Office will be distributing the updated information to various aeronautical publication organization including Jeppesen & other electronic database producers. A recorded message notifying pilots of the new frequency will also be put on the AWOS system.

For the next several months we can expect that there will be many people arriving at both Columbia and PML Airports that will be using the old 123.05 MHz frequency. To help make our Columbia Airport as safe as possible, Bald Eagle Aviation will be monitoring both frequencies for several months and will be advising arriving pilots broadcasting on 123.05 MHz that they need to switch to 122.975 MHz. At PML Mother Lode Aviation will be doing the same thing but advising arriving pilots to switch to 122.900 MHz.

Keep in mind that every once in a while, we have planes in the pattern that are not talking to anyone. So, always keep your eyes open when around our airports.

Insurance Reminder

The Airports Department would like to remind everyone that is tied down or rents a hangar on airport property that we require a current copy of your liability insurance policy to be on file with the Airports office. Additionally, the insurance policy must show Tuolumne County Airports as an additional insured. We are now in the time of the year when many insurance policies are renewed. Please check your policy and make sure we are named on your policy and then fax, mail or drop off a copy of the insurance document. We appreciate your assistance in taking care of this requirement.

Electric Deer Fence Installed

The Airports Department has been working on the deer problem at the PML Airport for several months now. Recently a 1,000' long electric fence was installed along the north side of the approach end of Runway 9. A parallel fence will be installed along the south side of the runway in the near future. This fence is to create a behavior modification in the deer migration pattern by moving their crossing points to either end of the fence, thus keeping the first 1,000' of Runway 9 clear of deer. I am very much interested in any and all feedback regarding the appearance and effectiveness of the electric fence. I know it is somewhat unsightly and I am evaluating options for making the fence less obvious. Also, because I spend most of my workday at Columbia Airport, I am interested in any observations regarding the reaction of deer to the fence. Lastly, keep in mind that this is just a test of the electric fence option. Depending on the test results, we will either continue to install more fencing along the runway or abandon the electric fence option altogether.

I want to extend a thank you to those residents of PML that helped construct the fence. Your volunteer labor is greatly appreciated. The volunteers included Roger Sloan, Dick Collier, Rich McGlashan, Tom Martin, Dan Eells, and Jerry Lynn. Thanks for your help guys.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Last issue I wrote about staying off the grass runway and adjacent areas during wet conditions. My main concern was that I didn't want to have the runway torn up or the adjacent dirt ramp area rutted. Well guess what? The power of the pen is not as powerful as I had hoped.

A couple of weeks ago, just after our heavy rains, someone taxied their plane across 17-35 at the windsock and onto the infield adjacent to the grass runway. Not only did the aircraft leave some ruts in our infield, but the aircraft bogged down to the point

where only large amounts of throttle would keep the plane moving. Just when we thought this pilot was experiencing severe brain fade, the throttle was pulled to idle and the engine shut down. It was obvious this stupid pilot was actually thinking. Instead of powering his way out of a bad situation and risking damage to his propeller and leading edge of his horizontal stabilizer he had the sense to shut it down and get some help.

Several people came out to help him push the plane back to the asphalt taxiway after which the pilot taxied the plane over to the wash rack to clean the mud out of his brakes and wheel pants (another sign the pilot made a quick recovery from his brief spell of thoughtlessness). The story had a happy ending in that no damage was done except to the pilots ego. But there will be three ruts in the grass runway infield which will serve as a reminder to this pilot and others that wet weather, natural ground and taxiing aircraft just don't go together very well.

Stupid Pilot Tricks is a monthly article that attempts to raise awareness of safety and courtesy issues around our airports.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

The Airports Department would like to thank all our pilots and tenants for helping make 2004 an outstanding year. We hope you all have a wonderful holiday season and great flying experiences in 2005.

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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