

The Manager's Approach



Vol. 5 Issue 8

Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

August 2006

Pine Mountain Lake Airport Master Plan Adoption

The Airports Department has been working on the development of the Pine Mountain Lake Airport Master Plan for nearly two years now. The development process has included working with the consultants, the Master Plan Advisory Committee, the FAA and Caltrans; holding public workshops; and finally, review by the Airport Land Use Commission and by the Historical Preservation Review Commission. The Master Plan is now ready to go to the Board of Supervisors for adoption. At this time I expect the Board will address the Master Plan around the end of September. After adoption, the Airports Department will be requesting proposals for the construction of additional commercial and storage hangars and we will be applying for FAA AIP grants to design several priority projects.

Updated Columbia Airport Layout Plan Receives FAA Approval

The Airport Layout Plan for Columbia Airport needed some revisions so it reflects the current airport configuration and clearly indicates future planned improvements. This work was accomplished by our Airport Engineer Stantec Consultants through funding provided by FAA AIP grant. The revised Airport Layout Plan was approved by the FAA earlier this month.

Grass Runway Maintenance

We closed the grass runway for 3 days mid week to fertilize the grass. It is important to

fertilize the grass a couple of times per year to keep the grass in good healthy condition. To prevent burning the grass and to keep the fertilizer from being thrown on to the aircraft by the spinning tires, we watered the runway twice a day for three days to wash the fertilizer in the soil. During this time we close the runway because of the sprinklers being on and to keep aircraft from damaging the water-soaked grass.

When the grass runway is closed a big yellow X and orange delineators are placed on the blast pad. These markings should be easily visible to any aircraft taking off or landing. We understand your disappointment but appreciate your cooperation and understanding when we have the much loved grass runway closed.

Watch for Geese

I had to do a go around this morning while attempting to land on Runway 29, our grass runway. On short final I noticed numerous dark specks on the runway right at the threshold. The specks turned into a flock of geese feeding on the grass. My first notion was to "land long" over the top of the geese but the geese took wing and flew down the runway in the direction of my flight. Many of you know that I fly a version of the Piper Cub which has to work hard to out speed geese in flight. Realizing that it was going to be a tough race, I executed a go around by side stepping the runway and the flying geese. I was awarded with a beautiful overhead view of the birds in flight lighted by the early morning sun. Those that use the grass runway need to be alert for the birds feeding on the runway. No one wants to hit a bird much less one that weighs twenty or so pounds.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

I have stated in the past that I try to keep anonymous the pilots and the aircraft involved with performing stupid pilot tricks. This one is on the edge because, although I don't know the pilot, the aircraft involved is unique because details of the aircraft and the stupid deed go hand in hand.

When I arrived at work one morning, I noted that there were two people setting up a powered parachute adjacent to the grass runway. In the past I have requested that powered parachute pilots set up adjacent to the grass runway because the set-up time prior to take off would block the runway for a period of time preventing other pilots from using it. Not too long after I was settled in my office I hear the aircraft take off and depart to the west. About 20 minutes later the powered parachute returned and the pilot executed a pretty good landing. It was a nice calm morning and perfect conditions for ultralight flying.

A couple hours later I received a call from the Sonora Police Department asking me if I had any knowledge of a flying parachute operating in the area that morning. I provided the officer with my observation of the powered parachute that operated out of Columbia Airport that morning and the officer responded that the pilot had a passenger and that they had flown "through" the Sonora High School football stadium flying a banner that said "Go Cats" or something to that effect. The officer said that it was the first day of school and the stadium was filled with students. The pilot reportedly flew less than 100' above the ground and those that are familiar with the stadium know that the surrounding hills are higher than that!

To the best of my knowledge the powered parachute is considered an ultralight aircraft with an empty weight of less than 254 pounds. FAR Part 103 addresses ultralight vehicles and it clearly states in Part 103.15 Operations over Congested Areas "No person may operate an ultralight vehicle over any congested area of a city, town, or settlement, or over any open air assembly of

persons." I could not find where the regulation allowed flight over congested areas at some minimum altitude. To me the regulations state clearly that there is to be no overflight of congested areas.

Part 103.1 was also violated because ultralights are supposed to be flown by a single occupant and this guy had a passenger. I inspected the airframe later in the day and there were two placards that stated "To Be Used For Instruction Only". This pilot was really providing his passenger some quality instruction on how to violate the FARs and endanger themselves and innocent people on the ground. In my mind what is really stupid about their actions is that they tarnished both Columbia Airport's and our local pilots' reputation. Nearly every pilot I know tries hard to be a good neighbor by flying safely and courteously. It just takes one to goof up and make us all look bad.



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:

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