

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Flying Around and Landing On New Melones Reservoir

I have been asked by the Resource Manager for the New Melones Lake to pass on to pilots some concerns the Bureau of Reclamation has regarding flying over the lake. There seem to be four items of concern:

- Don't fly closer than 500' over or 500' adjacent to a boat. This is a FAA Regulation.
- Don't fly under the bridges or within the walls of the Stanislaus River Canyon up to Camp Nine.
- Don't loiter over the dam area, or fly through the spillway. This is a TSA restriction.
- Adhere to the Bureau of Reclamation's "Policy for Seaplane use of New Melones Lake" if you intend to land on the lake.

Keep in mind that the Tuolumne County Airports Department has no jurisdiction over aircraft in flight. That belongs solely to the FAA. All I am doing is passing on concerns that have been raised to me by the New Melones Lake Resource Manager. If you choose to ignore the above mentioned concerns there is a chance you might be reported to the FAA.

It was also brought to my attention that the Bureau of Reclamation has developed the "Public Conduct on Bureau of Reclamation Facilities, Lands, and Waterbodies" under 43 CFR Part 423. This federal regulation contains a section on aircraft which includes the requirement that "You must not operate any aircraft while on or above Reclamation facilities, lands and waterbodies, in a careless, negligent, or reckless manner so as

to endanger any person, property, or natural feature."

For more details about flying over or landing on New Melones Lake, Reclamation's new Public Conduct policy or their policy on seaplane use of the lake please contact the New Melones Resources Branch of the Bureau of Reclamation at 209-536-9094, stop by their administrative offices at the visitor's center on the south side of the Stevenot Bridge, or visit their website at:

http://www.usbr.gov/mp/ccaof/field_offices/new_melones/index.html.

Grass Runway Use During Wet Weather

This time every year I need to remind our pilots that use the grass runway that when the weather is wet the grass is soft and susceptible to damage. During the winter months please avoid using the grass runway until the grass has had a chance to dry out. This usually requires two or three days of sunny weather.

Another request that will help preserve the grass is for pilots to not use their brakes while on the grass. Usually the grass has sufficient friction to slow aircraft down rather quickly. Heavy braking often leads to locking up the wheels which tears up the grass.

Finally, the work on Taxiway C should be completed within the next month. However, the edge of the taxiway will be hydroseeded to promote rapid growth of the grass and to reduce erosion. Access to Taxiway C from the grass runway will be blocked until the grass has had sufficient time to develop.

Trimming Trees & Brush

One of the requirements to maintaining our permits to operate our airports is to make sure the airspace on the approaches, departures and adjacent to the runways is kept clear of obstructions. The FAA requirement for airports is that all objects that stick in to the “imaginary surfaces” must be removed or be identified with obstruction lights. The slope of the imaginary surface of the approach and departure is 20:1 and the imaginary surfaces on the sides of the runway are 7:1. This is one safety item that Caltrans Division of Aeronautics checks every time they perform a safety inspection. It has always been an ongoing issue because trees continually grow into the imaginary surfaces. Recently we have had the Baseline Crew trimming trees and brush at Columbia Airport so you will see an improvement along the south side of the grass runway and at the Air Med helipad.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Possible Consequences of the Higher Price of Avgas

How much does it cost you to fill up your aircraft’s fuel tanks? Has this caused you to think twice about going for a local flight in your plane? Are you contemplating using auto fuel in your plane? Have you thought about reducing the quantity of reserve fuel on a flight to avoid landing at an airport with expensive fuel? All these are issues that most pilots will be contemplating in these days of ever increasing fuel cost.

I don’t have a stupid pilot event to discuss here, but I am hoping to prevent an event from occurring. No one will dispute the fact that the cost of flying is steadily increasing. How pilots deal with this problem is the subject of my concern.

First, if the cost of fuel has caused you to reduce the number of hours you fly per year, then both you and your airplane are less prepared for each flight. Pilots get rusty and aircraft systems develop quirks when not

flown on a regular basis. Be more attentive when you perform your preflight and recognize that your flying skills may require some polish.

Are you contemplating using auto fuel in your plane? To legally do this, your airplane will require an STC. Not all aircraft are eligible for the auto fuel STC so be careful. Premium auto fuel has an octane rating of 92 which is too low for high performance engines. Additionally, fuels that contain alcohol can damage your aircraft’s fuel system. Talk to your mechanic before you put anything other than 100LL into your tanks.

The price of avgas varies widely from airport to airport. Fortunately, Columbia and Pine Mountain Lake Airports have fuel prices that are about average. Some airports have prices that are as much as a dollar more than we are accustomed to. When planning a cross country trip, check fuel prices in advance by calling the FBO or by using the AirNav website. Be careful that you don’t cut your reserve fuel amount below the legal requirement or your personal comfort level. I like to see an hour of fuel in my tanks when I land. Keep in mind that fuel in your tanks is the best insurance you will ever purchase because you will always receive a 100% rebate on your premium.

It is my hope that all pilots will take the necessary precautions when considering how they might cut the cost of flying. Don’t be stupid and even more importantly, don’t become as statistic just because you were trying to save a few dollars on avgas

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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