

The Manager's Approach



Vol. 7 Issue 12

Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

December, 2008

Pine Mountain Lake Airport Safety Meeting

The FAA held a Safety Meeting at the Groveland Community Hall for the purpose of allowing the local community to comment on safety issues associated with the Pine Mountain Lake Airport. Harlow Voorhees, the FAA Safety Team representative moderated the meeting which was held in a town hall style format.

Several items were discussed, particularly the deer problem at the airport. Although there were some concerns voiced regarding the deer fence itself being a safety hazard, many of the residents indicated that they were certain the deer fence was effective in reducing the number of deer on the runway. Two representatives from the Department of Fish and Game were at the meeting to answer questions. They indicated that relocating the deer was not desirable since the local herd had a virus that they didn't want to spread to other herds. It was noted that birth control was very expensive and therefore not practical. The option of thinning the herd was a "last resort" option and this initiative would need to be endorsed by both the Pine Mountain Lake Association and the Board of Supervisors to in order to become a viable alternative.

There was discussion regarding the construction of an additional deer fence along the southern boundary of the airport from the Corsair Restaurant east over the airport beacon hill. Many feel a fence at this location will be helpful. I will contact the PML Aviation Association to see if we can work together to construct this fence.

One resident questioned whether the orientation of runway signs met the FAA

requirements since the signs are not parallel or perpendicular to the taxiway. FAA Advisory Circular 150/5340-18, Standards for Airport Signs Systems, states that "For special situations where visibility would be improved, single-sided signs may be canted." These signs are angled towards the run-up areas for greater visibility.

Another resident noted the edge of the runway was difficult to distinguish from the charcoal colored rock along the edges. He asked if a white line could be painted along the edges of the asphalt to clearly identify the edge of the runway pavement. According to FAA Advisory Circular AC 150/5340-1H, Standards for Airport Markings, this is called a Runway Side Stripe Marking which should be 18" wide and white in color. Although the concern with identifying the edge of the runway has not been brought to my attention before, we will consider installing these stripes when we have the runway markings repainted. This may not occur for a few years because the current markings are in pretty good shape.

Recently we filled some cracks in the asphalt runway using a specialized crack filling product that is easy to apply and fast drying. The manufacturer indicated that more than one application would be necessary to fill the cracks. It was mentioned at the meeting that the cracks were not fully filled, to which I explained that as the filler material dries it shrinks, thus the reason for the need for multiple applications. This product must be applied in warm weather so the second or third applications may not be completed until next spring.

Columbia Campground Bathrooms and Wash Rack Closed for the Winter

Every winter we shut down the bathrooms at the Columbia Airport campground so the pipes won't freeze. The campground remains open for camping during the winter but the toilets and showers are locked. Pilots wishing to use the campground are still welcome; however the only open bathrooms are on the end of Hangar Row A and in the Bald Eagle terminal.

The aircraft wash rack is also shut down to avoid freezing of the water heater and associated piping. Once in the past we were a little slow in shutting down the wash rack and the equipment froze up resulting in an expensive repair to the equipment.

The water is usually turned back on in April when warmer weather is guaranteed.

Airport Financing & Budget

Several of our local pilots have been asking questions about the Airports Department budget and where our funding comes from. The Airports Department is an "enterprise fund" which basically means we get to keep the revenues we generate within our department. Our revenue comes from airport lease payments, tiedown rentals, hangar rentals, landing fees, transient fees, campground fees, fuel flowage fees, and other miscellaneous charges. We also receive an annual grant for each airport from Caltrans Division of Aeronautics for maintenance and operation of each airport. We do not receive any income from the personal property tax on aircraft, the possessory user tax on hangars, or residential property tax. Although it is very desirable for the two airports to be self-supporting, there is simply not enough revenue to balance the expenses. Consequently, each year the Board of Supervisors approves a contribution from the general fund to balance our budget. This contribution is only enough to balance our already very lean operational costs.

Those people interested in the budget process should attend the County Budget Hearings held for each new budget, for the mid-year budget, for the 3rd Quarter budget, and for the End of the Year budget. It can be a real eye opener for those that want to understand the County's finances.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Why Is It So Quiet In The Traffic Pattern?

Since my last newsletter I have made two errors at operating my radio while commuting to work. One time I was flying into Columbia Airport and saw one of Springfield Flying Service's aircraft flying the pattern, but I couldn't contact him. My reasoning was that he had the volume turned down on his radio. Once on the ground, I went to turn off my radio and realized that I had it tuned to 122.95 and not 122.97! Yikes, my mistake completely. It is amazing how quiet 122.95 is early in the morning.

On a flight home this week I heard some traffic at Pine Mountain Lake Airport over my second radio tuned to 122.9. In order to hear the Pine Mountain Lake Airport transmissions so I could get a feeling of the traffic and runway in use, I turned the volume down on my primary radio so I could clearly hear the Pine Mountain Lake traffic. As I approached the airport I switched the frequencies on my radios so I would broadcast on my primary radio, but I neglected to turn up the volume. The radio was surprisingly quiet again!

Check your radio frequency and volume each time you approach an airport!

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