

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Season Over for Air Tankers

The air tankers and air attack aircraft are gone for the season. Last week the aircraft flew out of Columbia Airport, leaving only the Helitack aircraft and crew behind. The heavy rains we received in the middle of October pretty much brought an end to the fire season in our area.

Pilots should keep in mind that even though the chance of a wildfire is greatly reduced around our area, other parts of the state, especially the southern portion of the state, are still very susceptible to burning. If you see smoke along your route of flight, contact ATC to check for flight restrictions, or better yet, simply adjust your flight path to avoid the area.

Grass Runway Fertilized

Twice a year, we fertilize the grass runway to keep it healthy. When we fertilize the runway we close it while the fertilizer is being spread and keep it closed for extended watering. In addition to applying a chemical fertilizer, for two years now we have applied a special compost mixture that will help develop a healthy soil over the long term.

The irrigation system has been shut off for the year and we will let the morning dew and rain water the grass for the next few months. Those that use the grass runway on a frequent basis will see a slow change from a green runway surrounded by a brown infield to a brown runway surrounded by a green infield. This is because as the Bermuda grass goes dormant and browns for the winter the infield grasses sprout and grow. The wonderful thing is that the runway is always clearly visible both in the summer and the winter.

As a reminder to our pilots, please avoid using the grass runway for a couple of days after it rains. We want to let the soil dry out a little to avoid tearing up the grass. Also, there is really no need to use your brakes when landing on the grass runway because the friction of the grass will slow you down just fine and skidding your tires won't slow you down any faster but it does leave big ruts in the grass.

Pine Mountain Lake Airport Day and Young Eagles Rally

On October 3rd the local EAA Chapter 1337 held a Young Eagles Rally at the Pine Mountain Lake Airport in conjunction with the Pine Mountain Lake Aviation Association's Airport Fun Day. Both events were a great success.

Twelve local pilots flew 38 kids who received Young Eagles certificates and their names entered into the EAA's "Worlds Largest Logbook". There were two Lake amphibians participating in the event which treated the kids to a unique "water landing". A visiting pilot from Mariposa Airport flew his 98th, 99th, and 100th Young Eagle, too.

After the Young Eagles Rally, the Pine Mountain Lake Aviation Association held their Airport Fun Day which featured, radio controlled aircraft demonstrations, a flour bombing contest, a spot landing contest, and some pre-arranged fly-bys. The flour bombing contest was won by a pilot that actually dropped his bomb inside the red garbage can! I'll bet he could never do that again.

I would like to thank all the organizers and participants in the Young Eagles Rally and Airport Fun day for promoting aviation and our local airport.

Construction Permit Issued

Construction and grading permits have been issued to Gold Country Hangars for the construction of the new hangars at Pine Mountain Lake Airport. Construction is expected to begin in early November. The hangar project will consist of a row of 10 T-hangars with a single box hangar located on the west end of the building. All tenants that currently lease a tiedown in the construction area have been asked to relocate their aircraft to assure there is no conflict between the construction activity and their aircraft. The cooperation by these tenants has been extremely good.

Final drawings for the Columbia Airport hangar buildings have not yet been submitted to the building department, but should be submitted soon. The developer's plan is to construct the hangars at Pine Mountain Lake Airport prior to starting on the Columbia Airport hangars.

Noise Sensitive Areas

As a reminder to our local pilots, we have several noise sensitive areas near our airports. Maps showing these areas are posted at both airports. Please be neighborly and avoid these areas.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Don't Talk to Me, I'm Busy

Why is it that pilots like to chat to other pilots when one of them is just taking off or landing which is the most critical portion of flight and when the pilot should not be distracted? During the take off roll a pilot should be listening to the sound of the engine for any signs of trouble, should be manipulating the controls to compensate for any cross wind, and monitoring the engine and flight instruments. In my opinion this is not a time to be responding to another pilot's chatty comment. The same goes for the landing phase when a pilot is adjusting engine power, setting the flaps, compensating for a cross wind, and watching his airspeed.

As example of this, I often am just starting my take-off roll and I hear someone in my headset ask "Jim, how's everything at the airport today"? Should I respond "fine", not respond at all, or say "Don't talk to me right now, I'm busy"? I want to say the latter, but usually provide a very brief remark and stay focused on the task of flying the airplane.

What is very interesting is that every person that is hailing another pilot during either of these critical phases of flight are pilots themselves who should know that any distractions during the take-off and landing phases of flight are not desirable!

I don't think there is anything wrong with sharing pleasantries over the radio with another pilot. I do, however believe there is a time for this kind of conversation and a time to avoid it. Pilots can get very busy with the activities required for a safe flight. If you get a radio call from someone that could distract you from your flying duties, either don't respond to them or kindly let them know you will call them back in about a minute. Just like at home, you don't HAVE to answer the phone, you can certainly call them back later.

In my mind the appropriate time to converse non-critical information is after a pilot has reported turning cross wind, or after the pilot reports clearing the runway. I think non-critical conversation should be avoided when a pilot announces "N1234 Taking Off on Runway XX" or announces "N1234 On Short Final for Runway XX". My guess is that any non-critical information doesn't have to be immediately communicated and that waiting for the appropriate time enhances safety.

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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