Interior Alaska Flight Instructors Association

Guide for Aviation Visitors to Alaska

The following are topics for pilots not familiar with Alaska aviation.

Concept of Alaskan Airports/Airstrips:
In contrast to airports found in many parts of the U S, Alaskan airports are often unique in the relative lack of services and support. In many cases airports in rural Alaska are little more than a runway, which may have no supporting infrastructure such as fuel, tie-downs, maintenance or even surface transportation. Fuel, if available at all, may be seasonal in nature. The airstrip may be miles from the nearest community with no surface transportation other than your own two feet to carry you. A better term to describe these facilities might be to call them "airstrips" as opposed to "airports" which imply buildings, services and infrastructure. A classic case is the pipeline strip at Galbraith Lake, on the north side of the Brooks Range. It is listed in the Alaska Supplement as being 2 miles north of the referenced "city" that is nothing more than the gravel pad from the long abandoned construction camp.

Fuel:
Always check on the availability of fuel by calling ahead on the telephone. To rely upon published information may find you caught out! In general fuel is far less plentiful than airstrips, so careful pre-flight planning to locate fuel locations is essential. You often have to carry enough fuel to get to a rural location, and back again (while maintaining a safe reserve).

Eastern Alaska Military Operations Area (MOA) Complex:
The US Air Force has a massive complex of MOAs and Restricted Areas from east of Fairbanks almost to the Canadian Border. The complex, known as the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex (JPARC) is used for military training. Normally closed down on the weekends and holidays, the airspace is used Monday-Friday about 12 hours a day for low levels of training activity. On approximately 40 days/year there are massive exercises involving upwards of 100 aircraft. During these major flying exercises, pilots should plan carefully and try to avoid the active periods, normally two, 2.5 hour blocks per day. A **Special User Airspace Information Service** is available to allow civil pilots to talk directly to Eielson Range Control for traffic information. Pick up a copy of the SUAIS brochure and become familiar with this service, which greatly improves aviation safety when operating in these airspaces.

Visiting Villages in Rural Alaska:
Native villages are located through out rural Alaska. Not all villages are receptive to unannounced drop-in visitors. It is best to contact someone with the village council or other local government to obtain information before visiting. Also be aware that a number of villages are dry, and taking alcohol even for our own use constitutes an illegal act. Again, check for details before take-off to avoid an unpleasant experience, or worse!

FSS in Alaska:
Different from the rest of the US, the FAA still operates Flight Service Stations in Alaska. There are three hub FSS's (Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau) and fourteen part time or seasonal FSS stations in other parts of the state. We encourage you to take advantage of the services they provide, including walk in briefings.

Fairbanks FSS:
Fairbanks is the home of a 24 hr/day Flight Service Station. The FSS is set up and encourages walk-in traffic. It is located across University Avenue from the control tower. We encourage you to visit! Ask to see their Alaska Weather Graphics.

Alaska Aviation Weather Unit:
The National Weather Service operates a dedicated facility, located in Anchorage, which generates area forecasts and other products for the state of Alaska. They have a website which provides access to graphic forecasts, PIREPs, satellite imagery and other products. http://aawu.arh.noaa.gov/

FAA Weather Camera Program:
The FAA operates over 200 weather cameras, which are updated every ten minutes. These views from airports, mountain passes and other key locations provide a visual depiction of weather in multiple directions, provide a valuable source of weather information, especially for the VFR pilot.
http://avcams.faa.gov/

PIREPs:
Alaska, for its size, has an extremely sparse network of aviation weather reporting stations (AWOs and ASOS). To equal the density of stations the "lower 48" currently enjoys, the FAA would have to add 2.4 times as many stations as we have today. Consequently, PIREPs are important source of information, both for pilots and for weather forecasters. Please file PIREPs as you fly!

Survival Gear:
Alaska state law requires that survival equipment be on board your airplane when flying in Alaska. Elements of survival gear include protective clothing, shelter, food, fire starting materials and signaling devices. Often the camping gear you carry in your airplane will serve as survival gear, so don't leave it at the airport when you venture across the state.