

How to Keep, or Lose, Our Flying Field

In recent years, we have seen the unfortunate closure or restriction of at least SIX RC fields in King and Snohomish Counties. MAR/C itself faced a serious threat in the 1990s. By sharing these stories, the board hopes everyone will better understand our motivations and concerns when we make rules and other decisions and learn what all of us should do to safeguard our amazing and unique field.

Your board of directors' primary responsibility is to ensure the vitality and continued existence of our beloved field. When local fields are lost or restricted, we must ask ourselves, "Could this happen to us? What can we learn to ensure the continued joy of flying at Marymoor Park for generations to come?"

Lessons from Field Closures:

1. **Flaming Geyser State Park.** This year, the RC field at Flaming Geyser State Park, between Enumclaw and Maple Valley was closed by the State Park System. A dispute between a flyer and a dog walker (who turned out to be a King Co. Sheriff) turned ugly when the pilot allegedly flew his helicopter aggressively toward the walkers to urge them to leave the field. The field was closed temporarily for several months after this incident. During that time, other interests, including the local tribes, influenced the decision. The field was reopened for a while, but later the State closed it for good.
2. **Lake Sawyer Hawks:** Over a twenty-year span, a neighbor about one mile from the runway engaged in a campaign to close the field. The club did noise studies and spoke with their county commissioner. They showed that the club was compliant with the sound requirements the county established for the club, but this was not enough. The neighbor cultivated relationships in county government, and in each election the complaints would cycle through the county from different directions. The club was fortunate to have a county commissioner and a King County Executive Chief of Staff who supported them. The club president wrote white papers about sound measurements and did a major presentation to the local committee about sound and club operations. In the end all of the neighbors but one was supportive of the club. Even so, King County parks got tired of spending resources on the issue and gave the club a choice. It was never put in writing but clearly stated, "The club needs to make a decision. Go all electric or risk loss of the field". It was not popular with some club members, but in the end the club chose the electric route to preserve the field.
3. Several years ago, the **Cascade RC Club** near Snohomish was shut down. In this case the owner of the land, who's family had been a long-time supporter of RC and other aviation activities, sold the land to the owner of adjacent property. This worked for a few years but ultimately too many people were flying past the field boundaries,

especially on the weekend. The new owner shut the club down because of the noise and the nuisance of dealing with complaints. Now the area is only used for RC car activities.

4. In the 1990's **Marymoor Park** asked a consulting agency to develop and recommend a master plan for the park. The agency did not think model airplanes belonged in a park and did not include our field in the plan. Herb Bone, past MAR/C president, and others banded together with the people wanting off-leash dog space and contested the recommendations of the consultants. They were ultimately successful.

Right now, a new Master Plan for Marymoor Park is being developed. So far, even though our field is on land that ordinarily would not be used, we have been given an exception because of our long-standing presence at Marymoor and our good reputation with Park management. It is a good sign that the park has invested in our new buildings.

5. Many years ago, the **Seattle Area Soaring Society** had exclusive use of the 60 Acres zone south of 116th street. They shared with others, such as dog walkers, and rocket launchers. For many years the Washington State Soccer League lobbied King County Park management and the County Council to take over that land and turn it into even more soccer fields. Despite of the multi-year valiant efforts of SASS, who's president was a lawyer, the soccer league finally won. SASS was able to keep the field for their use for one weekday evening, but they moved their primary field to a new location in Carnation.
6. **Boeing Hawks club at Longacres**: This is yet another example of a long time club who lost a field. A member flew a plane into power lines, causing a blackout in one part of town. The field was closed.

As you know, drones continue to pop up in the news, creating the usual paranoia and mystery associated with aviation activities. During the recent national news about drone sightings in New Jersey, none had broken the law, endangered anyone, or spied on anyone. And yet the national furor resulted in Congressional hearings, and ultimately pressure will be placed on the Federal Aviation Administration to "do something about it". While the AMA continues to make progress in making the new UAS rules less onerous, FAA rules are here to stay. They could be used as an argument to shut down a field or take away FRIA privileges.

Causes of RC Field Closures -- What We Need to Do

1. **Be kind and welcoming to everyone.** To anyone visiting our field, be kind and welcoming. Explain what we do and how many people we help. Tell them how special our field is amidst a sea of athletic fields, and what a unique opportunity it is for young and old to engage in a mentally and physically challenging hobby. Tell them how youth

accept new levels of responsibility and learn safe practices, and how this education has launched careers in engineering and aviation, not to mention life-long friendships.

2. **Fly within boundaries and follow local rules for noise.** If you are not sure you are flying within bounds, get a friend to stand at the boundary with a cell phone so they can tell you when you've gone too far. Experience has shown that larger aircraft are often much farther away than the pilot perceives.
3. **Consider the sensitivity of your neighbors.** Even when you are flying safely, consider that your activity might feel threatening or scary to someone who is not comfortable with the hobby.
4. **Follow your club's rules.** They have been written to preserve the field and ensure safety for everyone.

We must continue to serve the community and be good neighbors with other park users. Our outstanding reputation for being kind and helpful, and as a place where friends can enjoy safe, educational, and creative flight gives us a strong and constructive voice for keeping ourselves in the park.

Put simply, uphold our reputation, follow the rules, be kind to everyone and have fun!

Next month, we'll write about safety, how we think about it, and how it guides our decisions for making rules and other aspects of running the club.

Thank You!

Brian D. Kelly and your Board of Directors