



DOWNWIND CHASE

Official Newsletter of the Pacific Coast Aeronauts

♦ JULY 2025 ♦

NEW!

Winds aloft weather site
isitflyingweather.com

View from the Board

April Turner, President & Co-Secretary

When Tech Meets Tranquility:

Amazon Delivery Drones vs. Balloons in Shared Skies

The rural sky is no longer the exclusive playground of birds and balloons—it's getting crowded. With Amazon pushing the frontiers of autonomous aerial delivery through its Prime Air drone program, a fascinating conversation is quietly taking shape: *how do these robotic couriers coexist with the slow-floating majesty of our hot air balloons?*

The Rise of Delivery Drones

Amazon's drones are designed to deliver packages under 5 pounds in less than 30 minutes. Flying autonomously and relying on a mix of GPS, sensors, and onboard AI, they typically operate below 400 feet—right where hot air balloons often dwell.

To keep the skies safe, Amazon must follow FAA regulations, which include:

- Operating within visual line-of-sight unless granted beyond-visual-line-of-sight waivers.
- Avoiding manned aircraft by yielding right-of-way.
- Using certified operators and technology in controlled airspace.

The Gentle Giants of the Sky

No matter how big or small, hot air balloons are like floating poetry—silent, slow, and stunningly graceful. We have always operated based on wind and weather patterns. But while majestic, we're also subject to very limited steering, drifting wherever the wind wills.

Typically ascending between 500 and 2,500 feet, balloons also occupy the lower segments of airspace during launch and landing—bringing us into potential crossover with drone flight paths, especially in suburban and rural areas.

Navigating Shared Airspace

The FAA airspace zone Class G is the uncontrolled airspace under 1,200 feet, where many Amazon drones are expected to fly and where we take off and land. To prevent close calls, a few strategies are key:

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IMPORTANT INFO!

CLUB MEETINGS

HELD ON THE FIRST WEDNESDAY OF ODD-NUMBERED MONTHS PLUS DECEMBER.

NEXT CLUB MEETING:

**3RD MEETING
OF 2025**

Wed. July 2nd

@ 7PM PDT

BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BOD) MEETINGS

**HELD QUARTERLY, 3RD THURSDAY
@ 7:00PM (AND AS NEEDED)**

NEXT ONE IS JULY 24, 2025

ALL MEMBERS ARE INVITED

CONTACT US

TO ATTEND ALL VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Current club members receive an email with a link to attend meetings for free. Dates are subject to change; in such rare cases, members are notified via email.

Please see last page for officers, committee chairs, contacts and additional club information.

Email newsletter contributions to:

PCA: pca@pcaballoons.org

PCA Mailing Address:

**NEWSLETTER DEADLINE:
20th of each month**

Summer is Here!

*Safe Flights and
Softest of Landings!*

- **Geofencing technology** in drones to avoid sensitive or high-traffic launch sites.
- **NOTAMs (Notices to Air Missions)** filed by drone operators, (and possibly balloons in the future) to alert other airspace users of their plans.
- Ongoing collaboration between drone companies and ballooning organizations to create best-practice guidelines.

Future-Proofing the Skies

As aerial delivery scales up and recreational flying hits our optimal weather season, digital air traffic management (sometimes called "U-space" or "UTM") is becoming a hot topic. This will be a GPS-guided highway in the sky—with rules, lanes, and live coordination.

The Rise of Delivery Drones Amazon's drones are designed to deliver packages under 5 pounds in less than 30 minutes. That might not sound like much but consider how many everyday essentials fall in that category: batteries, phone chargers, vitamins, a bag of coffee, or even a last-minute birthday gift.

In suburban and rural areas—where a drive to the store might take 20 minutes or more each way—drones offer a high-speed, low-impact delivery method for everything from over-the-counter medications to pet supplies. In emergencies, they could even transport small medical kits or supplies faster than traditional couriers.

These drones rely on GPS, sensors, and AI to autonomously navigate into a customers' backyard or designated delivery zone, all while minimizing emissions and avoiding traffic snarls.

A Balloon Pilot's Perspective: Safety in the Skies

For us hot air balloon pilots, the sky isn't just airspace—it's our canvas of freedom, tradition, and trust. But with the rise of autonomous delivery drones, many balloonists are sounding the alarm about safety and visibility. According to the Balloon Federation of America (BFA), a recent FAA proposal could grant delivery drones the right-of-way over manned aircraft in certain low-altitude corridors. This is deeply concerning for balloon pilots, who already operate without the ability to steer precisely and often fly in the same airspace—below 400 feet AGL—where drones are expected to dominate.

The BFA warns that drones "cannot see where they are flying and are blind to us because balloons do not have ADS-B transmission capability". In other words, balloons are essentially invisible to drone navigation systems, which rely on electronic signals to detect and avoid other aircraft. If drones are prioritized in right-of-way rules, balloonists fear a significant increase in collision risk.

The ballooning community is urging the FAA to reconsider, emphasizing that their aircraft are slow-moving, highly visible to human pilots, and historically safe. They advocate for maintaining manned aircraft right-of-way and ensuring that drone operations are designed with balloon safety in mind.

The Local Impact: Small and Rural Balloon Festivals

While major ballooning events like Albuquerque's Fiesta have the resources to implement drone detection systems and coordinate with airspace authorities, smaller or rural balloon festivals often operate with limited budgets and volunteer crews. These festivals are community treasures—celebrating local heritage, drawing tourism, and offering a rare chance to witness the magic of flight up close.

But as drone delivery corridors expand into suburban and rural areas, these festivals may face new hurdles. Without robust airspace coordination tools or real-time drone tracking, the risk of unintentional airspace conflicts increases. A single drone incursion during a launch window could ground balloons, delay events, or worse—pose a safety hazard.

Pilots and organizers worry that without clear protections and communication protocols, these beloved gatherings could be forced to scale back or even disappear. That's why advocacy and awareness are more important than ever.

Stay Informed and Get Involved

The ballooning community is actively engaging with the FAA to ensure that manned aircraft, especially those as unique and vulnerable as our hot air balloons remain protected in shared airspace. If you haven't read it yet, they have a [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for Drones](#) pending. For updates on this outreach campaign and ways to support balloonist safety, keep an eye on [PCABalloons.org](#) and [BFA.net](#). (*this is where you come in, dear reader!*)

The BFA is leading the charge but will need our support to ensure that innovation in the skies doesn't come at the cost of tradition, safety, or the joy of watching a balloon rise with the morning sun. If Amazon's drone fleet and balloon pilots can sync through smart systems, the skies could remain a place for both innovation and awe.



LETTER FROM BFA

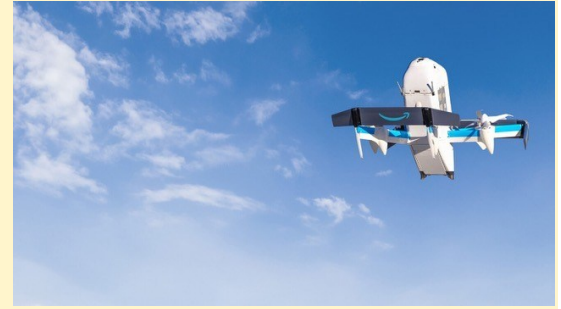
Balloon Federation of America
1601 N. Jefferson Way - Suite B
Indianola, Iowa 50125

June 14, 2025

Dear Jeanne,

The BFA will soon be issuing a call to action asking all balloonists, BFA members or not, to reply urgently to an expected forthcoming NPRM giving some drones aerial right-of-way over other aircraft, including balloons.

On May 8, at approximately 6:16 am Mountain Standard Time a hot air balloon in Glendale, AZ experienced a "near miss" with an Amazon delivery drone. The near miss happened while the balloon was on an approach to landing and the drone missed the balloon at basket height by approximately 15 feet according to the pilot. The drone, a new model weighing over 75 lbs and traveling at 58 knots, never varied its path. Amazon officials later contacted the balloon pilot to say that the drone operator observed the balloon via an on-board camera and maneuvered the drone to miss the balloon. This close call was entirely avoidable and speaks loudly to the disregard for a reasonable margin of safety by the drone operator.



Many of you may be aware that the drone industry has been attempting for well over a year to convince the FAA to change the right of way rules in FAR 91.113 as was proposed by the Beyond Visual Line Of Sight (BVLOS) Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) final report. In April of 2022, the BFA as well as its partners in the National Aeronautics Association Aero Sport Group, made public comments opposing this effort, and were successful in that all request for BVLOS operations waivers were met with approvals only if the drone operator could guarantee that they would be able to detect and avoid all manned aircraft.

It now appears that with a push put on by these large drone companies, their attorneys and lobbyists, that FAR part 108 may contain provisions that will give some right of way to drones over all other types of aircraft that do not have electronic conspicuity (ease of visibility).

This notice is to advise you that the BFA has been working behind the scenes, not only our NAA Aero Sport partners, but with the larger nationally recognized general aviation organizations, namely AOPA, NBAA, EAA, VAI and others, joining with them in opposition to any loss of airspace right-of-way. The BFA will be attending meetings with these groups over the next few days in a work session to generate letters of disagreement with any proposed airspace right-of-way changes.

With the current enthusiasm being displayed by the White House in allowing the drone industry to flourish and grow, administrators in the Department of Transportation and the FAA are hurriedly working through the process of issuing an NPRM, reportedly with a 30 day response time for the eventual implementation of FAR 108. As soon as the NPRM is issued, we will distribute the document to the membership along with bullet points that are important to consider in writing a response.

The BFA and its partners are monitoring FAA notifications daily to intercept this NPRM immediately upon issuance so as to provide our membership with sufficient time to write a response. This will be a call to action for all balloonists, whether BFA members or not, to resist any pending regulation attempting to provide the drone industry with right of way over balloons below 500 ft AGL. We will provide you with a list of talking points as a guide in writing your NPRM response. A massive response to this NPRM will be critical. Watch all BFA communications for further details.



Pat Cannon, BFA Government Liaison



Jason Jones, BFA President



Wings of History

Kids Day June 21, 2025

Happy Days at Wing of History - San Martin Airport. Winds were not favorable but Dave Wakefield with the RE/MAX cold air balloon put on great demos and educational presentations for the public and history buffs. It was too windy for flying the remote control balloon but we got a chance to show the size comparison of the lower ends of a full size basket and that of a remote controlled basket. Was a great day despite the winds.

By Pat Moore



WINGS OF HISTORY

**FREE
ADMISSION FOR
KIDS UNDER 18**

Talk to a real glider pilot!

KID'S DAY

ARTS AND CRAFTS!

**Find out how
hot air
balloons fly!
Demonstration
11am -1pm**

**JOIN US FOR A DAY
FILLED WITH FUN FOR
THE WHOLE FAMILY!**

**12777 Murphy Avenue
San Martin, CA 95046
Phone: 408-683-2290
Email: wohoffice@wingsofhistory.org**

**Saturday, June 21st
11am -
2pm**

14th annual Frederick In Flight June 20th, 21st and 22nd, 2025!



*Photos all by Rae Todd except the
crew photo by editor*



Each year Frederick in Flight Colorado opens with sky divers and the National Anthem while the flag descends from the heavens.

This year there were just a few flights with upper level winds in the 20s just a few hundred feet off the ground. I did not fly. Reports from all the pilots said the landings were calm. While on the ground at the field the winds were swirling and shifting to all four points of the compass. I did stay on the ground and on Friday I stood Dragon Moon up for nearly an hour.

Sorry about the shortness of the newsletter this month, everyone is busy. With a little luck we'll have more for the August Newsletter. Your Editor, Jeanne Anson





PACIFIC COAST AERONAUTS CLUB CONTACTS

2025 PCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND CLUB OFFICERS

Names & Email Addresses	Board Term Expires at	2025 Officers
Patrick Moore pcamoore587@gmail.com	2026	Chair of BOD
April Turner pca.april@gmail.com	2026	President & Co-Secretary
Dave Wakefield pca.dwake@gmail.com	Volunteer	Vice President
Linda Walton pca.lindaw@gmail.com	2026	Treasurer
Jeanne Anson ansonlta2@gmail.com	2025	Co-Secretary
Tom Sharpee tomsharpee@gmail.com	2025	



2025 PCA COMMITTEES

Committee	Chairperson	Members
Newsletter	Jeanne Anson	<i>And All Members!</i>
Membership Dev. Outreach	TBD	TBD
Membership Dev. Communications	Dave Wakefield	TBD
Education & Training	Pat Moore April Turner	Jeanne Anson Tom Sharpee
Calendar Based Events	Not Committees	Start Dates
BFA Youth Program	Melanee Scarborough	On Going
Awards	Linda W & April	Later in the year
WHAMOBASS	Board	Planning starts 3/25
Christmas Party	Jana Couch	Oct 2025 planning starts

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Balloon Aircraft and Equipment

Right-click on picture captions for more details

FOR SALE



Raven S-55A



2001 Cameron 'Shoe 90



TBW AX-8B—Racer



TBW FF7 & Trailer