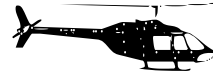


Flight Lines



NINTH EDITION

JUNE 2008

Florida Keys MCD Inaugurates New Marathon Airport Facility

The Florida Mosquito Control Pilot's Association (FMCPA) held our 2008 Spring Safety and Training Seminar at the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District's new hangar facility at the Marathon Airport May 29th, 2008. This was our fifth such meeting since the association was formed at the Aerial Short Course meeting in Lee County in January of 2006. The occasion gave Florida Keys MCD an opportunity to showcase their beautiful new facility in Marathon, and it really is *awesome*.



Also in attendance were John Gardner, Mike Higgins and Art Shiver from Manatee County, and Mike Muench and myself from Hillsborough. In addition to Keys MCD's roster of full- and part-time pilots, a number of other Keys personnel attended in order to earn the Aquatic Weed, Core and Public Health CEUs offered, so we had quite a diverse group of participants.

We started off with a presentation on Aquatic Weed Applications from an aerial perspective; the weeds we treat in Hillsborough County, licensing requirements, equipment require-

ments, pesticides commonly used, and the availability of grants from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to cover the cost of treating invasive, non-native weeds in Florida public waterways. Next was an in-depth look at different types of nozzles used for aerial application of pesticides, particularly those used for low volume spraying of herbicides and liquid larvicides.

Amy Sargent from Florida Keys MCD and Mike Higgins from Manatee MCD each gave overviews of their aerial programs, the equipment they use, the pesticides they apply, and particular problems they address peculiar to their own district topography. Keys MCD Director Ed Fussell gave a warm welcoming address and talked about some of the problems they had overcome in dealing with butterfly enthusiasts. Entomologist Larry Hribar spoke about his various duties there at Keys MCD.

We had a safety presentation about the hazards of hot weather flying from Scott Lunsford of Lunsford Air Consulting, whose pilot training company conducts regular pilot refresher training for a number of mosquito control organizations in the state.

During the facility tour, Keys MCD's Director of Aircraft Maintenance James Zdan showcased all of the different spray systems and equipment used on Keys MCD's fleet of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft.

Some of the issues discussed during the open discussion and throughout the meeting were the continuing effort to obtain Special Risk classification for mosquito control pilots in the Florida Retirement System, and the development of a standardized training syllabus for mosquito control pilots. Mike Higgins from Manatee County spoke about the possibility of getting another special risk bill before congress for the 2008-2009 session. He said that

Representative Mike Davis, who had been a big supporter in past attempts, passed away of cancer last year, but that Page Kreegel, who co-sponsored the bill in the House is willing to sponsor it again. He has been speaking with Representative Sandra Adams, who is running for Senate in the fall, about sponsoring the Senate version. The legislative committee of the Florida Mosquito Control Association has declined to pursue the legislation at this time, as they feel the last effort was so well-coordinated and enthusiastic, and yet failed to make headway.

A quick yet delicious lunch was enjoyed at the Keys Fisheries Market and Marina in Marathon, where we dined al fresco and soaked in the fresh air and sunshine before heading back to tour the Marathon facility.

Quick Keys Facts

Florida Keys MCD employs 70 full-time and 30 part-time personnel, at 3 offices in Key West, Marathon and Key Largo. 32 Inspectors are responsible for 1,788 square miles, 95% of which is owned and protected by federal, state and environmental organizations. The District operates four Bell helicopters: two Jet Rangers and two Long Rangers, which they use for larviciding. Adulticiding is accomplished by two Turbine Islanders, and all of these aircraft are piloted by three full-time and seven part-time pilots. The full-time pilots are dual rated: Amy Sargent, Rex Hopkins, and Keith Mearns.

An interesting aspect of Keys MCD's territory is that it's made up of 38 islands, connected by 43 bridges, and stretches out over a hundred miles of mostly two-lane highway. Some areas are so narrow that they have to fly quite low in order to adulticide without risking drift to surrounding waters. (The Wingman has helped out tremendously.) The Florida Keys are bordered on one side by the third largest barrier reef in the world and the only living coral reef in the United States. That's a huge responsibility!

On Display



Beach Mosquito Control District's helicopter on display at Panama City Beach May 31, 2008. (Photo by pilot Brad Gunn)



*To find out more,
check out
www.keysmosquito.org*



See more pictures from the meeting in Marathon at our website: www.fmcpa.org!

Special Risk: Is it "Do-Able?"

Mosquito control organizations and more specifically, those that head them, have been struggling to obtain "special risk" classification for their pilots for many years. In speaking with Dan Gorman, who headed Hillsborough County Mosquito and Aquatic Weed Control from 1956 through 1994, I learned that he and others had made a number of attempts to pass this legislation over the years, with no success.

In 2006, after forming the Florida Mosquito Control Pilot's Association, we petitioned the FMCA's legislative committee to give it another try, this time with the vigorous participation of the newly-formed FMCPA. (The legislation had been pursued in previous years with no success, and the legislative committee had pretty much given up at this point).

Pilots, directors and commissioners from a number of organizations attended the FMCA's Tallahassee Days, visiting legislators from their districts and pleading our case. Every committee meeting that the special risk bills were brought before was well-attended by these same staunch individuals. And the bills were passed unanimously by every committee up until the last two, where they languished until the congressional session ended, because the chairs of those committees refused to put them on the agenda.

There is absolutely no question that whenever one of our bills is put before a committee, it will be passed. No one in their right mind would deny us this consideration. The problem is purely political.

We are asking very little; our numbers are few and the impact of this legislation would be relatively miniscule. Those that would oppose it, however, see it as setting a dangerous precedent. It is frequently likened to the old saw of "once the camel gets his nose under the tent, you can't keep him out." There are a tremendous number of organizations out there who believe their members also deserve to be classified as "special risk," and many bills are brought before congress every year. A very tiny percentage of them are passed, usually for

those lobbies who have some political capital to spend.

Unfortunately, because our numbers are few, we don't have any political clout.

What is Special Risk?

The Special Risk Class of the Florida Retirement System (FRS) was created to recognize that certain employees, because of the nature of the work they perform, may need to retire at an earlier age with less service than other types of employees. As such, members of the Special Risk Class can retire at age 55 or with 25 years of creditable service.

A website for 911 dispatchers, which asked for contributions to fund this legislation on their behalf, advertised:

Florida 9-1-1 dispatchers/call takers currently have to work 30 years in order to collect 48% of their salary in pension benefits. Firefighters, police officers, corrections officers, jail dieticians, forensic techs, etc. are under Special Risk and can collect 75% of their salary in pension benefits after only 25 years of service. The proposed change will give dispatchers/call takers the same benefits as these other personnel.

They are now in the Special Risk Class.

So that takes us back to the question: "Is it Do-Able?" I think it is, but only if we find a way to bring our case to the public. Lawmakers are elected officials, and have to listen to their constituents. First, we MUST put together a video. People need to see firsthand what we do. We need someone who is at least a semi-professional videographer to volunteer to get and edit some footage of low flying aircraft, towers, helicopters making ag-turns, you name it. We need to launch a public relations campaign in the districts where these key committee chairs are elected. (News stations love video). We CAN push this legislation through if we target our efforts more precisely. Mike Higgins is willing to take the ball and run with it, and so am I - Are YOU?