

UPDRAFT

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USHGA Chapter 119

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The Newsletter
of the
Massachusetts
Hang Gliding
Association

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Meeting Schedule:

Saturday, May 9
7:30 PM Gringo's
RT 8 North Adams

Other dates to be
decided at the
meeting

Where to

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A Stormy Winter ends ... is smoother lift ahead?

Winter usually brings smooth winds, but this winter was very turbulent on the national organizational level. As reported by Hang Gliding magazine, a group of members sued the USHGA after failing to get USHGA to put the divisive waiver issue to a membership vote. The court ruled that, as a social club, the USHGA could require the waiver as a condition of membership.

The USHGA started with good intentions. It was perceived that obtaining and paying for insurance would be a major problem in the coming years, especially if a pilot ever sued a landowner. One way to lessen that chance was a national waiver, to be signed by all members. This was implemented about two years ago, and immediately invoked the concern of members who felt the waiver was overly inclusive of whom it released. Proponents of the waiver said it would place responsibility for flight with the pilot, where it belonged. Waiver opponents claimed that the long list of released people made the pilot responsible for the actions of others. After almost a year of trying to kill the waiver, or put it to a membership vote, some pilots sued. This caused the leadership of the USHGA to develop a bunker mentality, which turned the multi-national internet Hang Gliding e-mail list into a USHGA chatroom, with much heated debate. The largest problem, though, was that less than 10% of the membership had access to both sides of the debate.

The fallout of this isn't over yet. First, a new soaring wing has developed in the ASC (Aero Sports Connection) which is

working on developing a rating system and providing liability insurance for pilots. This is a group of talent and money that is lost to the USHGA. Second, there has been serious questioning of the USHGA's reported \$60K- 70K cost defending against this suit- most of which went to the lawyer who wrote the waiver. Third, USHGA's status as a social club won't fit well with its responsibilities to regulate the sport in the stead of the FAA. Fourth, both the Executive Director and the new President embarked on a campaign to discredit and impugn Vic Powell, a pioneer of the sport and past USHGA president, because of his involvement in the lawsuit. Fifth, Hang Gliding magazine has been used as a propaganda vehicle for the Executive Committee, instead of a voice of the membership. How many members know that the USHGA lost in an arbitration hearing, and pressed the matter into court? Or that the suit was to be dropped if a membership vote was taken? How many changes (for the better) were made to the waiver during the course of the suit, and would that have happened without it? Worse, the same issue that had GW Meadows stating that the waiver issue was behind us had Phil Bachman rehashing USHGA's version of events, and excluded submitted letters which were contrary to that view!

Whether or not the waiver is a good idea or a dangerous document remains to be seen. Whether or not more insurance will help retain flying sites here in New England remains to be seen. But there are some things which need to be changed NOW- Members ought to be able to express an opinion in THEIR magazine. Booting people out of the USHGA was wrong, especially since that cut off access to required skill ratings. Ratings should be retained. Pursuing a vendetta against members that challenged the organization is wrong. Apologies should be issued. Members just need to be more involved. Let Randy Adams (our Region 8 Director) and USHGA know your opinion, but be informed before you form one!

Region 8 Meeting Report

The Region 8 Meeting was held on March 7th in Littleton, hosted by Randy Adams and the New England Skyriders. It was a good gathering, attended by USHGA Executive Director, Phil Bachman and reps and members of all the clubs. Each club gave a report of it's activities, and much conversation ensued about the waiver, new instructor requirements, ratings, and sites. Perhaps the best product will be an updated regional site guide, due out soon.

Contact Info

For other clubs, organizations, and sites:

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Flying begins with a bang

The season started late, but quickly got into full swing on the last week of April. After a long season last year, the warm winter allowed routine flying right into December. The Spring began with some flying in February and March, but not much. By mid-April, the winds started cooperating, allowing flights from Skinner and the Trail. And April 28-30 had three mid-week soarable days. Keep your head out the window instead of buried in weather forecasts, since the old forecast models don't seem to apply in this year of El Nino.

By mid-May, Skinner should be on extended hours (to 8PM), and Greylock should be open and accessible.

Election and Survey Results

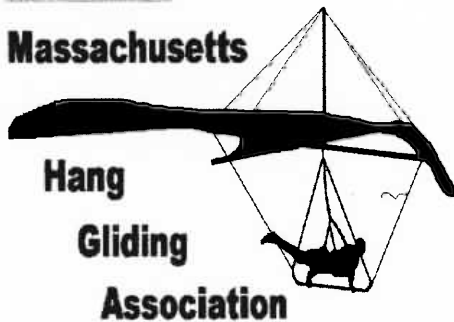
The elections resulted in an encore performances by Brooks, as President; John, as VP; and Mark as Secretary. Gary joins the Executive Committee as Treasurer. The survey yielded no great surprises - the vast majority of the club also belongs to the VT club, most are Advanced HG pilots with no PG ratings; most own a radio, with about half having a HAM license. 60% want to vote on the waiver, 20% don't want a vote.

Massachusetts Hang Gliding Association

**PO Box 1549
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Since 1975...

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**Next Meeting : Saturday, May 9, 1998
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