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The United States Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association, Inc.



To: USHPA Membership
From: Mark Gaskill, USHPA VP / Competition Committee Co-Chair
Date: February 3, 2010
Subject: Announcement: Competition Symposium

Competition Symposium

The USHPA Board of Directors has been busy as of late. I'm proud to report that the general membership is now experiencing the benefits of these efforts. There have been too many accomplishments in the previous couple of years to mention all; however, USHPA's better web presence (USHPA.org), sound organizational/financial management, great chapter support, insightful strategic plan, and assertive efforts to develop and maintain important relationships with organizations such as the FAA, CIVL, the Foundation for Free Flight are but a few examples of how USHPA is helping support and protect the sport we all love.

As you may know, paragliding and hang gliding have a well-organized community of competition pilots. These athletes have recently been doing quite well on the international race-to-goal competition scene. The success and competitive spirit of these pilots should be celebrated. Competition is an important part of our sport and an activity that should be supported by the USHPA. Presently the emphasis has been on race-to-goal events. Unfortunately, it seems as if the ranks of people competing in these events are shrinking. Meanwhile we are seeing a great deal of interest in other competition structures (open distance and aerobatic competitions). To date, relatively little attention has been given to supporting these other competition opportunities. This has been unfortunate as these events are very popular and are supported by a significant group of enthusiasts. The Board believes reversing this trend is important to the sport in general, our organization and to providing greater value to our membership.

The actual percentage of USHPA membership who presently compete in organized events are relatively small and getting smaller. The Board does not think this is occurring for a lack of want, but rather for a lack of opportunity, organization, and support. So, to begin reversing this trend the Board, through the Competition Committee (CC), organized a competition symposium in Salt Lake City, UT – January 8 -10. This symposium brought together thirteen experts to represent various aspects of the competition arena. The goal of this symposium was to set the stage for greater

competition opportunities for a broader range of USHPA membership. The symposium consisted of two and half days of intensive work. The resulting recommendations will be presented to the CC and the full Board of Directors at the next meeting in March, also to be held in Salt Lake City.

I would like to present a brief summary of accomplishments in advance of this next Board meeting.

The **Race-to-Goal** competitions currently held are well organized and relatively well attended in the paragliding community (less so in the hang gliding ranks). As previously mentioned only a small percentage of the total pilot population partakes in these events (less than 2 %). Furthermore, the skills required to confidently participate in many of these events seems to be advancing faster than what our membership can sustain. The CC proposed that USHPA expand it's competition program to include three additional categories of events – **Aerobatic** competitions, **Open Distance** (OD) competitions, and **Other Accredited** events (ACE).

Aerobatic competitions have been held in Europe for some time now. These are exciting for both participants and spectators. There are many talented, world class actually, aerobatic pilots here in the USA. Unfortunately, there are few opportunities for these elite athletes to compete in their own country. This is also a missed opportunity to promote our sport before larger groups of spectators. The recommendations from the Symposium will include an organizational structure for aerobatic competitions, including ideas for scoring, suggestions for training scorekeepers, resources and incentives for event organizers, criteria for fairly selecting our World Team, and a move forward plan.

Open Distance competitions have a long and successful history in the hang gliding community. In the last couple of years we have determined that OD events represent a unique category of competition, warranting its own scoring and pilot ranking methodology. The recommendations from the Symposium will include an organizational structure for OD competitions, including ideas for scoring, resources and incentives for event organizers, and a move forward plan.

The **ACE** events shall promote activities and competitions intended to be more attractive to a greater percentage of our membership. Examples of ACE events will be development competitions, fly-in events, league meets, and so on. ACE events will provide the opportunity to develop pilot and competition skills in a less demanding and a more social environment. ACE events will serve to develop future athletes by promoting events where recreational and club pilots can confidently explore each competition discipline (Race-to-Goal, Aerobatic, and Open Distance). The recommendations from the Symposium will include many resources and incentives for ACE event organizers.

The CC and Board hope to see some of these events unrolled in 2010 and 2011. We will strive to keep the USHPA membership informed of our progress and look forward to seeing a thriving and diverse competition community emerge in the near future.

Mark Gaskill, MFT

VP USHPA Board of Directors

Region 4 Director

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