

# CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



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## Parachutes, Paragliders, and Power



Parachutes and paragliders, powered or not, have enjoyed a recent surge in popularity. This increased popularity, however, has unveiled an old threat wrapped anew. The airborne conflict has, in these operations, manifested itself in unorthodox ways from unusual vantages, while some surrounding issues have also been revealed. A resulting collision is unthinkable, but the threat must be addressed.

Parachutes and paragliders often appear in locations that surprise other pilots. They have been spotted at various positions in airport traffic patterns and in and around skydiver drop zones. They have been seen at altitude over water, on tow behind surface vessels, and at low altitude over private property. Speeds relative to other aircraft precipitate additional complications.

Surrounding issues are ticklish. Reporters' concerns include, but are not limited to, operator certification, operational regulations and discipline, and government involvement. Opinions among reporters are charged and differ.

This month, *CALLBACK* thanks a loyal reader for sharing with us a level of concern for these operations and for inspiring us to share this poignant topic with all our readers. Selected narratives identify important issues and reveal differing opinions, but all point to the danger of an airborne collision, the urgency to make a concerted effort to heighten awareness, and the absolute need to see, be seen, and avoid.

### Airport Traffic Density

A Flight Instructor describes multiple conflicts owing to powered paraglider density in the vicinity of the airport. Evasive action was taken, and common sense is reiterated.

■ *With it being summertime and having a long stretch of good weather, I wanted to bring attention to the likelihood of encountering powered paragliders (PPGs) and other ultralight aircraft (ULACs) that are not equipped with radios or ADS-B. On an instructor time-building flight, we were approaching Benton Harbor (BEH) with intent to land. Near pattern altitude on an approximate 3-mile right base for Runway 10, ... the right seat pilot saw the shadow of a parachute pass beneath the right side of the aircraft over the shoreline. About a second later, the left seat pilot saw a green canopy about 500 feet below the aircraft. A climb was initiated to increase separation, and the approach into BEH*

*was altered. We saw 6 to 8 PPGs at varying altitudes in the vicinity of the airport. In talking with other pilots recently, PPGs and ULACs have also been seen in the vicinity of Westfield Airport (I72) and Indianapolis Executive (TYQ).*

*Ensure that pilots and instructors have knowledge that PPGs and ULACs operate outside of the areas that... have charted symbology. If you consider an area... good... for sightseeing, other people do as well, and awareness should be heightened.*

### On the Waterfront

A seasoned light seaplane pilot describes an NMAC and identifies a nearly invisible, yet deadly threat. A candid discussion and some practical suggestions follow.

■ *While departing from Lake Berryessa (seaplane water takeoff), I spotted a paraglider being towed up to altitude by a boat.... As paragliders commonly operate in this area and do not communicate with pilots on the common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF), searching for them is part of my standard scan.... I kept my eyes fixed on both the boat and the paraglider so that I could mentally draw a line where the tow cable should be. As I climbed up through 3,500 feet (staying clear of the paraglider), I saw something that looked like a small scratch on the transparent canopy of my aircraft. Upon further inspection, I realized it was the towline of a second paraglider and made an immediate evasive action to avoid it. During the maneuver, I spotted the paraglider several hundred feet up above me.... I was so focused on avoiding the first paraglider, I completely missed a second one until I almost made contact with the tow line. As a seaplane pilot... very familiar with the area and... with hundreds of hours flying in and out of Lake Berryessa, this is extremely worrisome to me.... I have never felt concerned about midair collisions.... However,... lack of communication from the paragliders causes an extreme threat, especially to pilots not familiar with the airspace or seasonal operation of paragliders. Over the past two years, this problem has gotten worse.... In my opinion, requiring the paraglide boats to monitor 122.9 or marking the towline with streamers for visibility would go a long way to decrease the likelihood of a midair collision.*

### Disrupted Airport Operations

This small aircraft pilot reported multiple airborne conflicts that disturbed and endangered the existing local traffic.

■ *Two powered paragliders operating from the east side of the airport crossed both runways at low altitude, causing a Cessna 140 to abort its takeoff run. The same powered paragliders crossed the parachute landing area at 200 feet while jumpers were in the air.*

*Skydivers on a tandem jump cannot move away due to the characteristics of their canopies and the obvious lack of thrust to maneuver around obstacles. This was not the first time such incidents happen. The power paraglider group has been causing close calls and constantly keeps crossing both runways at low altitudes, interfering with traffic.*

## A Hazard to Navigation

This small aircraft pilot reported a navigational hazard spawned, in part, by mass paraglider operations. The reporter further laments the notion that regulatory requirements are unclear and suggests that government action is needed.

■ *The paragliding club puts up literally dozens of paragliders simultaneously that completely block air navigation through ZZZ south of ZZZ1. This is especially hazardous when the ceiling is below the ridge line, as it was on this day. The NOTAM for glider activity does not let pilots transiting the area understand the nature of the hazard presented by dozens of paragliders operating at once from the cloud base to the ground in a narrow gap in the hills. Anyone that is not familiar with the hazard is likely to have an accident or near-miss. It's like a drone show at Oshkosh.*

*...I don't remember paraglider operators having to obtain a private pilot certificate with a glider rating, and paragliders and conventional gliders have dissimilar operating characteristics. Permitting club operations under Part 91 seems a stretch and definitely unsafe. The paragliding operation at ZZZ2 more closely resembles a mass jump operation conducted...over an airfield or other drop zone, except there are no radio calls to warn nearby fixed wing aircraft. The density of paragliders in the gap over ZZZ makes it difficult to avoid them once you're stuck in the valley under the cloud deck.*

*A government agency needs to specify which set of rules paragliders have to play by. The laissez-faire...approach to regulating paragliders is the classic hole in Reason's Swiss cheese safety model..*

## Justifiably Perplexed

This non-powered paraglider pilot reported multiple airborne conflicts. Local paraglider operations are outlined, and commentary is provided from the paraglider point of view.

■ *At approximately 4,500 feet MSL, an all-white [small aircraft] circled me while [I was] flying a paraglider, and then it flew approximately 200 feet directly below me. I was unable to get the tail number. I am relatively certain this was the same aircraft from the next event.*

*[Several days earlier], at 1,100 feet AGL, an all-white [small aircraft] circled me while I flew my paraglider, then passed directly west of me, level with my altitude, upwind, approximately 200 feet horizontally. I was unable to get the tail number. He flew very slow in a high angle of attack, perfect conditions for strong wingtip vortices, directly upwind. To avoid vortices, I spiraled down and was forced to land in less-than-ideal conditions. Wingtip vortices on even a small aircraft will collapse a paraglider and cause an emergency reserve parachute deployment. Paragliders use non-steerable round reserves.*

*Every Saturday and Sunday, a small group of paraglider pilots conduct towing operations. Paragliders are towed to no more than 1,200 feet AGL behind a pickup truck using a payout winch in accordance with United States Hang gliding and Paragliding Association (USHPA)...recommendations. Towing in [this area] has been going on for approximately 10 years with permission from local land owners. I am working with the tow operator to contact FSS to begin filing NOTAMs during towing operations. The towing occurs in Class G airspace, but the paragliders often enter the nearby Class E airspace, avoiding Class B airspace to the north.*

*The aircraft in the incidents above is not the only aircraft that has made close passes, intentionally, on paragliders over the years. In each case, it is clearly showboating.*

*I am licensed under USHPA as a...pilot with a surface tow endorsement and...a former pilot with 2,500 hours, single and multi-engine commercial instrument ratings with two type ratings. I no longer hold an FAA medical and do not currently fly with my FAA license.*

## A Final Surprise

This pilot's approach was interrupted when the unusual became the unexpected and turned unpredictably worse.

■ *While landing on Runway 17 at Chetek Municipal Southworth Airport (Y23) at dusk, an unlighted, powered parachute with no lights made a radical and unpredicted turn into the final segment of Runway 17. Evasive action was taken to avoid colliding with the powered parachute. A hard left bank and climb was initiated to avoid the unlighted powered parachute at dusk. Powered parachutes tend to fly out of Y23 in the evening time but are always lighted and typically communicate over the multicom.*

ASRS Alerts Issued in August 2022	
Subject of Alert	No. of Alerts
Aircraft or Aircraft Equipment	3
Airport Facility or Procedure	7
ATC Equipment or Procedure	8
Maintenance Procedure	1
Other	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

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August 2022 Report Intake	
Air Carrier/Air Taxi Pilots	5,264
General Aviation Pilots	1,577
Flight Attendants	1,150
Controllers	481
Mechanics	241
Military/Other	202
Dispatchers	163
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,078</b>