

US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest



WAIVER REQUEST & Balloon Competition Operations Manual

August 9-16, 2026
Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska

Balloon Competition Operation Manual

US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest

August 9-16, 2026

This manual has been prepared as part of the application for the issuance of a Certificate of Waiver with attachments and special provisions for a Manned Free Balloon Competition on August 9-16, 2026. All competition is in conjunction with the **US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest**.

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SECTION I

PURPOSE

This manual is submitted as a part of an application for a waiver of Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) part 14 CFR Part 91: §91.119 (b) and (c) and §91.127 (a) and (b) by the **Old West Balloon Fest for the US National Hot Air Balloon Championship**.

No waiver is requested nor is waiver required by 14 CFR for any mass ascensions or pilot choice launches or final landings made in compliance with the BFA Competition Rules, as they are considered necessary for take-off and/or landing.

§91.119 (b) and (c) Minimum Safe Altitudes

The waiver will allow officially registered balloons to operate at an altitude of no less than 500 feet above the highest obstacle within a 500-foot horizontal radius of the balloon in route to the target within a 15-nautical mile radius of the designated launch field or goal.

It will also allow for officially registered balloons to operate at 75-feet AGL above spectators and to set goals and/or targets at a minimum distance of 200 feet from physical barriers provided for spectator control.

The waiver will also allow officially registered balloons to descend to the surface over open water or sparsely populated areas including declared targets, but no closer than 200 feet from any person, vessel, vehicle, or structure.

No waiver is requested nor is waiver required by 14 CFR for any mass ascensions or pilot choice launches or final landings made in compliance with the BFA Competition Rules, as they are considered necessary for take-off and/or landing.

§91.209 aircraft lights

Flight Operations will not be conducted between the hours of Sunset and Sunrise. Balloons will be inflated as a ground-based static display after Sunset and will not require any additional lighting.

SECTION II

RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES

Duties of Personnel

Event Organizer / Director	Colleen Johnson
Balloonmeister, pre-event pilot safety briefer	Sam Parks
Assistant Balloonmeister	Maury Sullivan
Steward	Jim Cusick
Crowd Control	Committee security in coordination with Scotts Bluff sheriff
FAA Liaison	Sam Parks
Weather Officer	Don Day
Weather Assistant	Robert Wise
Safety Officer	Mark MacSkimming
Landowner Relations	Mike Johnson
Scoring Officer	JC Smith
Chief Measurer	Patti Cramer

Registration and Airworthiness Determination

Balloons flown at the event must have current certificates of registration and airworthiness, or in place of the latter, an equivalent document from the Federal Aviation Administration. Specific certificate/airworthiness standards are as follows:

- The aircraft may be certificated in any category, including experimental, provided the requirements of 14 CFR Sections 91.7, 91.203, and 91.715 are met. FAA personnel may perform spot or ramp inspections.
- While operating, the balloon must have within it all documents required by the applicable regulations.

Chapter 3 of the competition rules covers procedures for balloons damaged or otherwise made unairworthy during the event. Throughout the event, the Safety Officer or his designees, and appropriate FAA personnel, will be consulted as necessary.

The organizer will maintain a roster containing the name, address, certificate number and date of last flight review of each registered pilot and the registration number, manufacturer, model and date of aircraft annual inspection of each aircraft participating in the event. A copy of each list is provided with the attachments and updates will be available at on-site registration. Facilities for FAA personnel to monitor operations during registration and all scheduled balloon events will be provided.

All pilots are required to register in advance of any practice flights and full registration along with document examination will be the afternoon of August 9, 2026. At this registration, they will be required to show an Annual or 100-hour inspection endorsement and an Aircraft Registration.

Pilot Qualifications

Pilots must be officially registered with the US National Hot Air Balloon Championship.

Each pilot must hold the appropriate pilot certificate (Private or Commercial) with Lighter-Than-Air Category and Free Class Rating. Each pilot must show evidence of current Flight Review (14 CFR part 61, § 61.56) and must show evidence of currency per §61.57.

Pilot/Crew Briefing Procedures

All pilots are required to sign a statement indicating that they have read and understand the provisions of the waiver and the official Championship Rules prior to any competitive flight.

Event flight crewmembers carried on board a balloon during the event must have been briefed by the pilot of the balloon and must attend the pilot briefing for that flight. Each event flight crewmember must sign the waiver form supplied by the pilot. Each event flight crewmember must attest that they have attended the applicable pilot briefing(s) and have read and understand the conditions of the waiver.

Before each flight all pilots must attend the flight safety briefing. Chapter 8 of the competition rules provides details of

all briefings and major details of the general and flight briefings are provided here.

Briefings

General Briefing: In accordance with the FAA issued Waiver each pilot flying in the event must attend the General Briefing scheduled for 7:30 PM August 9. This briefing will review the Waiver and other pertinent information to help ensure safe conduct during the event.

Flight Briefing: Attendance at the applicable pilot briefings are mandatory and will be conducted as indicated on the attached Pilot Schedule.

Safety

All meteorological reports, forecasts, and other safety or navigational information are provided in good faith for the guidance of participants. The organizer and official staff assume no responsibility for the completeness or accuracy of such information. It is the pilot's decision whether to rely on that information or acquire additional information pursuant to 14 CFR Section 91.103.

Responsibility

Each Pilot has full and complete authority over the balloon and is responsible for all decisions to be made associated with the balloon on the ground and in the air. Each Pilot must ensure that his crew, his equipment, and his own level of skill and experience are suitable for the conditions in his own judgment. The Pilot is responsible for all the actions of his crew during the event.

Conduct

Pilots and their crews are required to behave in a sportsmanlike manner and to comply with the directions of the Event Officials. Profanity or unsportsmanlike conduct directed at any Official or volunteer will be grounds for expulsion of the pilot from this and/or future AIBF events.

Letter of Agreement / Statement of Responsibility

PIC Responsibilities

Each pilot has signed a letter of agreement and statement of responsibility acknowledging their responsibilities under the FAR's as related to the Old West Balloon Fest. See Emergency Response Plan for details of lines of and assumption of responsibility.

Acknowledgement

Pilots must know, understand and abide by all of 14 CFR, AIBF rules and regulations, including any rules that are added or modified during the event and announced during any official pilot briefing. All pilots, aircraft owners and operators agree to have liability insurance as required by the organizer in effect throughout the event.

Release of Liability

The Participant, by entering the event, agrees that the organizers and sponsors of this event, competition officials, officers, trustees, agents and/or members of these entities are providing the Participant with the facilities and means for participation in this event and in no way do they supersede the responsibility of the pilot in command as stated in 14 CFR, or otherwise

Liability to Third Parties

By entering the event, a Participant assumes all liability for injury, loss or damage to third parties or their property caused by himself or his crew.

Event Flightcrew Member Qualifications, Experience, and Maximum Numbers On-Board Each Balloon for each Type of Event

Event flightcrew must be briefed as to duties by the pilot in command and attend the pre-flight safety briefing. Only the number of event flight crewmember(s) specified by the respective balloon flight manual may be carried in each balloon during the flight. US National Hot Air Balloon Championship event flight crewmembers will be kept to a minimum and are limited to a maximum of two. Old West Balloon Fest event flight crewmembers may be as many as five as dictated by flight conditions and limitations of the respective balloon flight manual.

Event Documentation

All relevant registration files, task data sheets, pilot registration information, etc., will be maintained by the organizer at least 60 days after the event and will be made available to the FAA Monitor upon request. Competition maps and task sheets will be made available to the FAA Monitor at the time of pilot on-site registration or the general pilot briefing. Digital versions (pdf) of the competition map will be sent via email upon request.

SECTION III

GROUND OPERATIONS

Clear Areas

Clear areas are established at each target site. These areas are kept clear of spectators and are frequently fenced. Scoring officials will police target sites to keep unauthorized persons out. In the Minimum Altitude Diagram, this is referred to as the "Target Area."

Certain competitive tasks have predetermined goals associated with the intersection of two minor public roads or a public road and a railroad where strict control by event officials is not maintained since there is no expectation of spectators. **Markers are generally not dropped at these goals**, but results are determined electronically with the use of GPS loggers. Pilots are expected to maintain a 200' vertical clearance over any obstacles on approach or in any area of these pre-determined goals. Chapters 6 and 12 of the rules provide more details about these goals.

Spectator Areas

The primary competitive spectator area for weekend Old West Balloon Fest activities and competitive pilots Fly In tasks is located at Mitchell Airfield. Occasionally, other Common Launch Areas (CLA's) may be used during the competition. CLA's are included in the Attachments section of the document. Physical and natural barriers around the launch site initiate crowd control, and target areas are controlled by Scoring Officials. Official and balloon recovery vehicles are parked in restricted areas. Traffic is controlled by local police as required. The use of existing and temporary barriers is used to secure spectators from the briefing area, headquarters, and from potential low-level flight areas surrounding goals/targets. It should be noted that the flight of the balloon is occurring at sufficiently slow speeds that people have ample opportunity to move away and stand well clear from approaching balloons as directed by event safety officials.

Competitive goals/targets set outside the primary launch area areas attract few, if any, spectators beyond those involved in race operations (officials and crews). Scoring and measuring officials control these areas as determined by conditions and will isolate the area surrounding the goal/target from any unauthorized personnel.

Where goals are located on public roads extra caution will be taken by the officials on site to protect themselves, the motoring public, and all bystanders, particularly where markers are dropped and need to be accurately measured before they are moved.

Diagram or Description of Crowd/Spectator Restraints

The launch field is clearly delineated using brightly-colored fencing. Event officials marshal the perimeter to ensure the public remain outside the area. A public-address announcer reminds spectators to remain off the launch area and cautions spectators of the hazards involved. See attached diagram of launch field outlining fence control areas.

Method of Public Protection During Launch Field Access

There may be occasions where the public would be invited onto the launch field. Pilots and crew are responsible for the safe operation of inflator fans at all times. Launch directors would be used to ensure public safety in conjunction with the public-address announcer advising of handling lines/ropes causing possible tripping hazards. All spectators would be required to exit the field prior to deflating the balloons. The public would also be advised that all types of smoking and vaping is prohibited.

Crowd Management Requirements

Local law enforcement as well as committee security personnel under the direction of the Safety Officer will provide crowd control. Crowd control at the primary launch field (CLA 1) is established by a fence line monitored by event officials.

Each Pilot-In-Command (PIC) is responsible for crowd control in the immediate vicinity of his/her balloon during the inflation and launch. The PIC and crew are responsible for the protection of their property. The PIC shall also take measures to protect the public from any dangers associated with balloon operations. Launch Directors and other Officials will aid in crowd control if an emergency should occur.

An organized system for emergency life, safety and crowd control is coordinated through the central command center through the use of an Incident Command System compliant with the National Incident Management System. This system

will marshal police, fire, medical, security, field officials and others as appropriate for the condition that exists. The central command center receives information on UHF radio and telephone and can transmit on UHF radio, telephone and the public address system.

Fire protection, emergency medical and law enforcement services on Common Launch areas at Mitchell Airfield will be provided. Fire and rescue units with Emergency Medical Technicians are available at Mitchell Airfield during launches. An additional fire truck will be stationed at the propane area during refueling operations.

Landowner Relations/Notification

Positive landowner relations are vital to the continuance of competitive balloon events. There is an ongoing effort by all involved persons prior to, during and after a competitive event to maintain good landowner relations for the event. Additionally, as per Rule 9.2, pilots must obtain permission to launch from private property; and per Rules 10.5,6, and 7 minimize disturbing landowners. Landowners may request that their property be indicated on the competition map as a Prohibited Zone (PZ) and per rule 7.3.

SECTION IV

FLIGHT OPERATIONS

Areas of Operation

Flight operations will occur within a 15-nautical mile radius of the map center near the intersection of Mitchell South Rd and Hawk Road (N 41°55'17.0" W103°48'42.0") located in Scotts Bluff County as indicated on the official competition map. Final landings may occur beyond these boundaries, but no pilot choice take-offs or mass ascensions will exceed these boundaries. Headquarters for the event operations will be located at the Gering Civic Center, 1050 M Street, Gering, NE. The Maximum Altitude for flight operations will be **10,000 ft. MSL**

The primary launch field for weekend activity is located at Mitchell Airfield, 60653 Mitchell South Rd, Mitchell, NE. It's located **15 nautical miles from the Scottsbluff Vortac on the 263° radial.**

The competition map geographic center is 7 nautical miles from the Scottsbluff Vortac on the 250° radial.

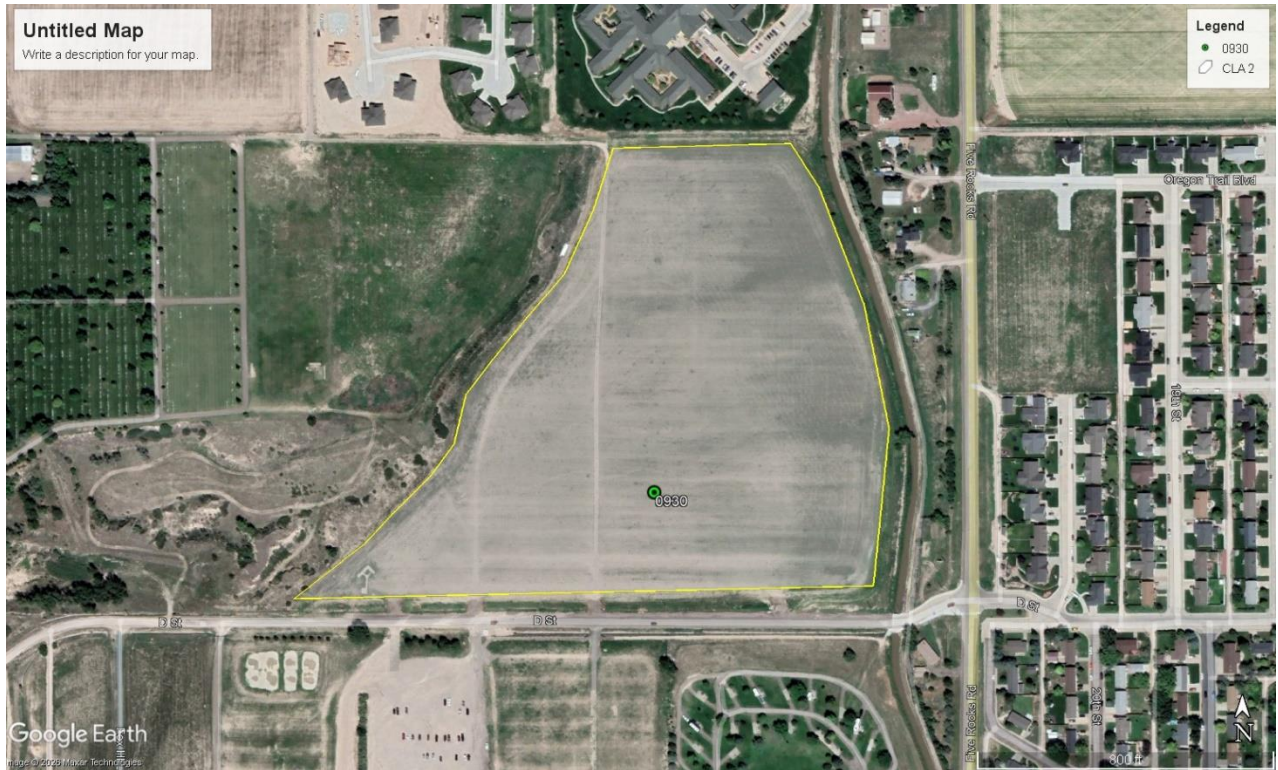
Common Launch Area (CLA's) for mass launches

The launch field and target zone are the area outlined by the crowd control fence depicted in yellow. Mitchell Airfield is the center of flight operations for the Old West Balloon Fest.

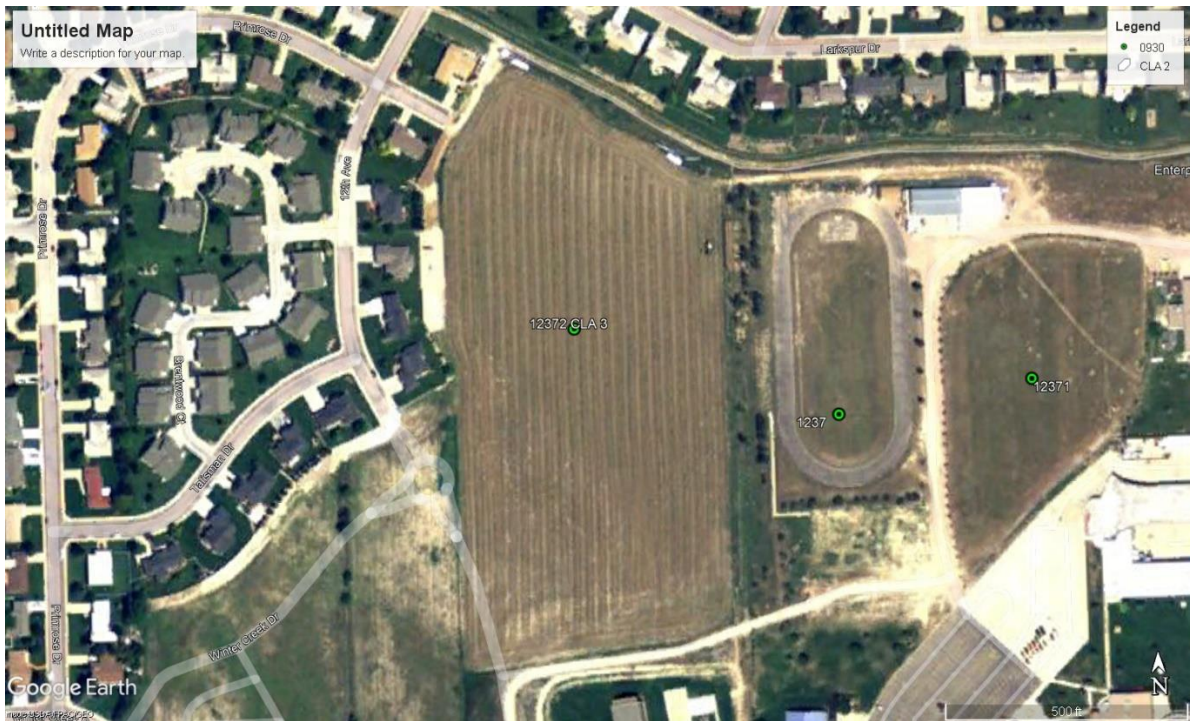


Common Launch Area #1 with Crowd Control Line

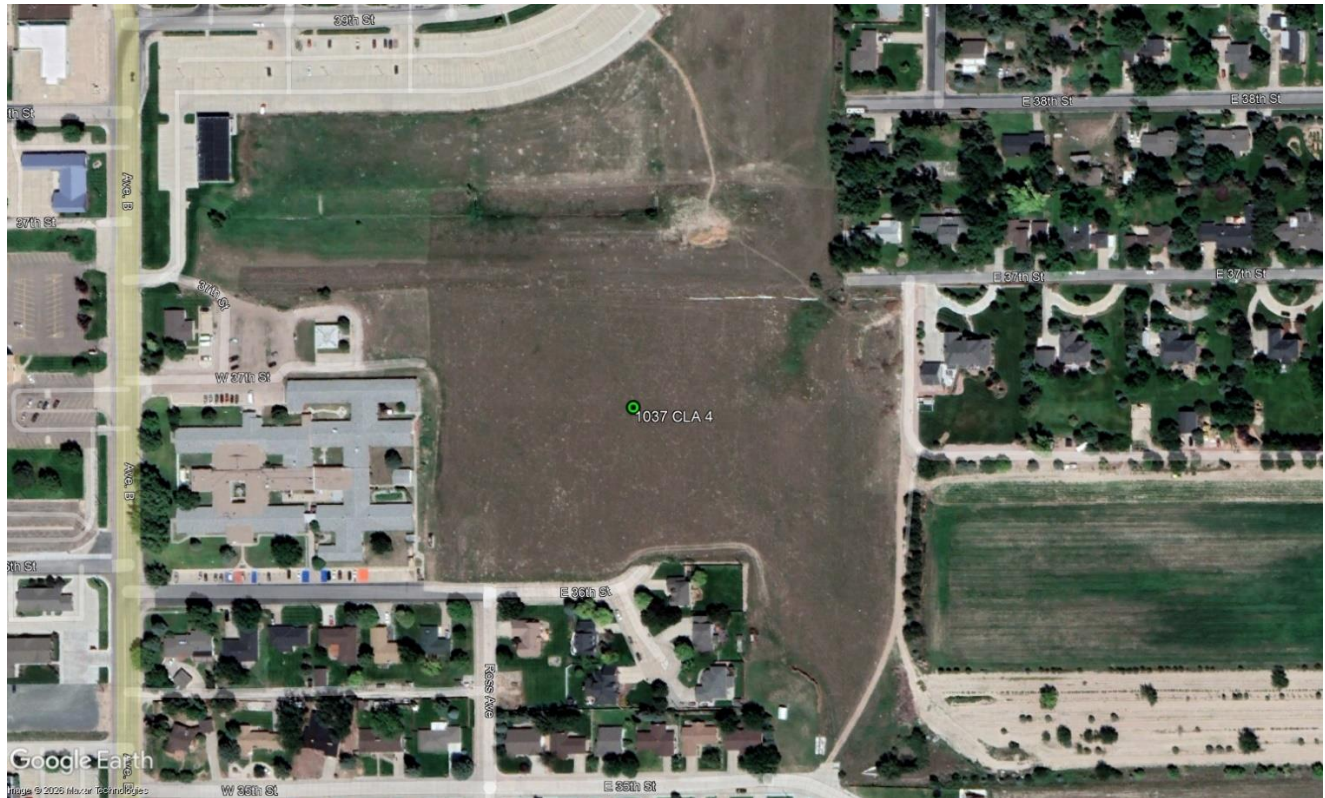
60653 Mitchell South Rd, Mitchell, NE (9860 / 4178)



Common Launch Area #2
2200 West D Street, Gering, NE (0986 / 3093)



Common Launch Area #3
1601 E. 27th Street, Scottsbluff, NE (1230 / 3712)



**Common Launch Area #4
2 W 36th Street (corner of 36th and Ross) (1098 /3767)**

Types of Operations

The event will consist of single and multiple tasks called by the Balloonmeister after consultation with other approved competition officials and the FAA monitor (if available), as appropriate, considering the conditions at hand and forecast to develop during the anticipated flight times. The tasks may include any listed in Chapter 15 of the competition rulebook.

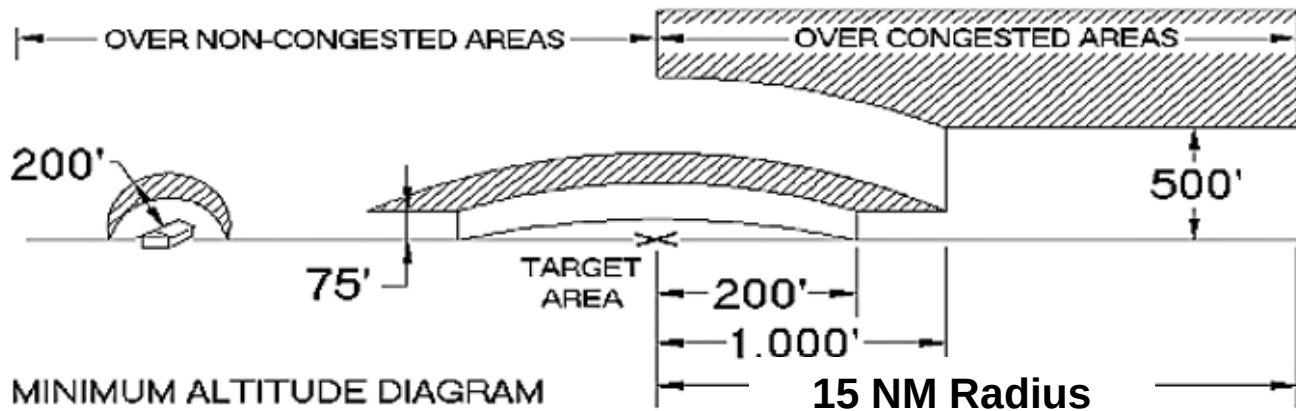
Altitudes

The waiver provides that registered balloons will be allowed to make approaches to targets and/or goals within the designated areas. Balloons making these approaches will be permitted to fly at altitudes as follows:

- a) Over congested areas, and other than during take-off and landing operations, at altitudes of not less than 500 feet above the highest obstacle within a 500-foot horizontal radius of the balloon
- b) Within 800 feet of a target or goal site, allow flight above, but not less than 75 feet above, any open-air assembly of persons (designated spectator area) under the direct control of the event organizer. The balloons must have attained a state of altitude equilibrium at this 75-foot minimum altitude and shall not descend below this 75-foot level while over spectators.
- c) To allow flight over open water or sparsely populated areas (non-congested areas), no closer than 200 feet horizontally to any person, vessel, vehicle, or structure. Balloons may descend to the surface over non-congested areas but must remain at least 200 feet from occupied buildings and spectators not in the immediate vicinity of the event locations.
- d) No balloon shall descend faster than 300 feet per minute while below 200 feet above ground level
- e) At any altitude within a controlled target area or corridor cleared of spectators

In order to provide the highest possible level of safety for spectators, the scoring officials will cause scoring/measuring officials to be positioned among the spectators to allow crowds to be shifted as necessary and to provide warning regarding any markers that may be dropped in the spectator areas. Announcements over the public-address systems will also advise the spectators of the possibilities of both low flying balloons over the area and of markers being dropped in spectator areas.

Minimum Altitude Diagram



Weather Requirements

Flight operations will be conducted during the period from published Sunrise to Sunset, with Visual Flight Rules (VFR) and weather conditions as specified in §91.155. Maximum demonstrated surface winds must be 10 knots or less.

Flight activity will not be conducted unless the ceiling is at least 1,500 feet and the visibility is at least 3 statute miles. The FAA monitor may adjust the minimum ceiling and visibility requirements as his or her discretion, but no less than 1,000 feet and 3 statute miles.

The decision for flight is the sole responsibility of the Pilot and the decision of whether to hold a task is the sole responsibility of the Balloonmeister after consultation with appropriate safety officials and the FAA monitor (if available).

Communication Requirements / Recall

Primarily by the required pilot briefing, however, supplementary information is also given using a mobile texting service, WhatsApp, aircraft radio frequency 122.900 and on the public-address system.

Pilots will be asked to register their phone number and that of their crew chief with the Remind texting system. While the primary use of the number is for Emergency Recall, we may also use the number to make contact to resolve flight and scoring issues, follow up on missing markers or loggers, and propane refueling status.

Air Traffic Coordination

A NOTAM will be requested from Lockheed-Martin Information Technology at 877-487-6867 advising of numerous balloons in the Stark County area at varying altitudes from **August 9-16, 2026** during the three hours immediately after sunrise and two hours prior to sunset.

A pre-event meeting will be held with Western Nebraska Regional Airport (BFF) administration to review daily flight schedules, anticipated flight paths and any required communications.

UAS Operations

Day VFR UAS operations will be under the control of a Part 107 licensed UAS operator for the purposes of providing media coverage of Old West Balloon Fest operations at Mitchell Airfield and the ground-based static display at Five Rocks Amphitheatre on the evenings of August 15. The operator will be assisted by the event Safety Officer.

Operations will remain below 400' AGL. Other scheduled UAS operations may be involved in the immediate vicinity of targets during the period of 0600 - 0900 and 1700 – 2000 EDT.

No educational demonstration of aerobatic display of any UAS is intended.

SECTION V

LIST AND DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS, TASKS, AND RACES

Pilot Schedule 2026 - US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest

USN - Saturday, August 8, 2026:

4:00 – 6:00 PM **Preliminary Pilot Registration**, Gering Civic Center. Pilots flying the Official practice flight must register, get competition maps, review, and sign the FAA Waiver acknowledgement form. Pilots will still be required to attend the full Pilot Briefing on Sunday evening.

USN - Sunday, August 9, 2026 (SR 05:56; SS 8:02):

All of the event-provided rooms will be available for check- in Sunday after 3:00 PM

5:00 AM Coffee and refreshments available, Gering Civic Center
5:30 AM Pilot Flight Briefing for optional practice flight (FAA Waivered), Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 9:00 AM **Optional practice flight**
8:30 – 9:30 AM Propane refueling (\$40/fill, cash only), Legacy Coop, South Beltline Rd

2:30 – 4:30 PM **Pilot Registration (for those pilots who did not register on Saturday)**, Gering Civic Center.
5:00 – 7:00 PM Pilot Welcome Party at Five Rocks Amphitheatre, **Mandatory - map and details in the registration materials**
7:30 – 9:00 PM **Mandatory**, General Briefing, Gering Civic Center

USN - Monday, August 10, 2026 (SR 05:57; SS 8:01):

4:45 AM Coffee and refreshments available, Gering Civic Center
5:00 AM Briefing doors open
5:15 AM **Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing**: Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 9:00 AM **Competition Flight 1**
8:30 – 10:00 AM Return of unused markers, to Gering Civic Center
8:30 – 10:00 AM Propane refueling, Legacy Coop, South Beltline Road

USN - Monday PM Competitive Flight:

5:00 PM Briefing doors open, light snacks available
5:15 PM **Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing**: Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 7:45 PM **Competition Flight 2**
7:30 – 9:00 PM Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
7:30 – 9:00 PM Propane refueling, Legacy Coop, South Beltline Road

USN - Tuesday, August 11, 2026 (SR 05:58; SS 8:00):

4:45 AM Coffee and refreshments available, Gering Civic Center
5:00 AM Briefing doors open
5:15 AM **Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing**: Gering Civic Center

6:00 – 9:00 AM	Competition Flight 3
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Propane refueling, Legacy Coop, South Beltline Road

USN - Tuesday PM Competitive Flight:

5:00 PM	Briefing doors open, Light Snacks Available
5:15 PM	Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing: Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 7:45 PM	Competition Flight 4
7:30 – 9:00 PM	Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
7:30 – 9:00 PM	Propane refueling, Legacy Coop, South Beltline Road

USN - Wednesday, August 12, 2026 (SR 05:59; SS 7:58):

4:45 AM	Coffee and refreshments available, Gering Civic Center
5:00 AM	Briefing doors open
5:15 AM	Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing: Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 9:00 AM	Competition Flight 5
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Propane refueling, Legacy Coop, South Beltline Road

USN - Wednesday PM Competition Flight:

5:00 PM	Briefing doors open
5:15 PM	Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing: Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 7:45 PM	Competition Flight 6
7:30 – 9:00 PM	Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
7:30 – 9:00 PM	Propane refueling, Legacy Coop, South Beltline Road

USN - Thursday, August 13, 2026 (SR 06:00; SS 7:57):

4:45 AM	Coffee and refreshments available, Gering Civic Center
5:00 AM	Briefing doors open,
5:15 AM	Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing: Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 9:00 AM	Competition Flight 7
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Propane refueling, Legacy Coop, South Beltline Road

OWBF - Thursday, August 13, 2026, Optional Flight – Paid Flights Commercial Pilots:

5:20 AM	Pilot Flight Briefing: Mitchell Airfield
6:00 – 10:00 AM	Media/Sponsor Flight from Mitchell Airfield or Grasslands at Five Rocks
9:30 – 11:00 AM	Propane refueling, Legacy Coop location on Beltline HWY

USN - Thursday PM Competitive Flight:

5:00 PM	Briefing doors open
5:15 PM	Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing: Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 7:45 PM	Competition Flight 6
7:30 – 9:00 PM	Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
7:30 – 9:00 PM	Propane refueling, Western Nebraska Community College

OWBF - Thursday Evening Glow at WNCC:

3:00 PM	Vendors set up at WNCC
3:00 – 5:00 PM	Old West Balloon Fest Pilot Check-in Fairfield Inn and Suites
5:30 PM	Gates open

6:00 – 6:30 PM	Pilots arrive at Western Nebraska Community College – Pilot Check-in
6:30 – 7:30 PM	Pilot and Crew light Dinner
7:30 PM	Glow Briefing
8:00 – 9:00 PM	Balloon Glow , Western Nebraska Community College
9:00 – 10:00 PM	Propane refueling, Western Nebraska Community College

USN - Friday, August 14, 2026 (SR 06:01; SS 7:55):

4:45 AM	Coffee and refreshments available, Gering Civic Center
5:00 AM	Briefing doors open
5:15 AM	Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing : Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 9:00 AM	Competition Flight 8
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Propane refueling, Mitchell Airfield

OWBF - Friday, August 14, 2026:

5:20 AM	Pilot Flight Briefing : Mitchell Airfield
6:00 – 9:00 AM	OWBF Competition Flight 1 and Mass Ascension
9:00 – 11:00 AM	Propane refueling, Mitchell Airfield

USN & OWBF - Friday Afternoon/Evening Non-Competitive Activities:

1:00 – 4:00 PM	River Float, Johnson Casa pilots and crews , 170188 Bay State Road, Mitchell, see the map for the exact location and directions.
4:30 – 8:30 PM	Pilot BBQ, Johnson Casa

Saturday, August 15, 2026 (SR 06:03; SS 7:54):

4:45 AM	Coffee and refreshments available, Gering Civic Center
5:00 AM	Briefing doors open
5:15 AM	Competitive Pilot Flight Briefing : Gering Civic Center
6:00 – 9:00 AM	Last Competition Flight 9
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Return of unused markers to Gering Civic Center
8:30 – 10:00 AM	Propane refueling, Mitchell Airfield

OWBF - Saturday, August 15, 2025:

5:20 AM	Pilot Flight Briefing : Mitchell Airfield
6:00 – 9:00 AM	OWBF Competition Flight 2 and Mass Ascension
9:00 – 11:00 AM	Propane refueling, Mitchell Airfield
11:30 AM	Weiner Dog races and costume contest
5:30 AM – 1:00 PM	Craft Fair– Mitchell Airfield
5:30 PM – 9:00 PM	Craft Fair – Mitchell Airfield

USN & OWBF - Saturday Evening Non-Competitive Activities – Mandatory Attendance:

6:30 – 7:30 PM	Pilots arrive at Mitchell Airfield, use your balloon bucks at the food and beverage trucks for dinner (you can use them in town as well)
8:00 PM	Glow Briefing : All pilots, Glow field
8:30 – 9:30 PM	Balloon Glow, Mitchell Airfield
9:30 – 10:30 PM	Propane refueling, Mitchell Airfield
10:30 – 12:00 PM	Awards Ceremony and after party, Mitchell Airfield

OWBF - Sunday, August 16, 2026, Non-Competitive Optional Flight:

5:30 AM	Pilots arrive at Mitchell Airfield for a Non-Competitive flight from Mitchell Airfield or Grasslands at Five Rocks. This is our day to fly over the Scotts Bluff National Monument. Paid rides available for commercial pilots.
6:00 – 9:00 AM	OWBF Flight

Tasks and Races

Tasks and races are completely described in the BFA Rules and Regulations that will be provided electronically or to the IIC during on-site registration.

ATTACHMENTS

BFF Airspace, Competition Map and Operations Area



Mitchell Airfield

Primary Launch Field for Old West Balloon Fest
15 nautical miles from the Scottsbluff Vortac on
the 263° radial

US NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP PARTICIPANTS

Updated information will be provided at on-site registration

Jeremy Rubin
Leroy Clair
Joseph Strutz
Andy Baird
Nick Donner
Kimberly Whiteman
Gary Heavin,
Allen Anderson
Kasey Schwemmer
Peg Bilson
Jennifer Brimley
Sanne Haarhuis
Cory Bloom
Bruce Wood
Joe Heartsill
Rhett Heartsill
John Petrehn
Jobe Skinner
Ken Draughn
Chase Donner
Edward Gordon
Landon Kohtz
Patrick Cloyd
Joe Zvada
Chris Garcia
Petra Wilson
Jonathan Wright
Michael Stone
Al Nels
Patrick Sullivan
Phil Clinger
Aaron Foelske
Brad Craig
Grant Pfeifer

OLD WEST BALLOON FEST PARTICIPANTS

Updated information will be provided at on-site registration

Mark Whiting
Clayton Crouch
Todd Ness
Richard Lawhorn
Tim Market
Blair Kaufman
David Bowling
John Wilson
Sean Eakin
Rodney Watts
Corey Gwin
Don Edwards
Mark Williams
Dan Strutz
Mike Johnson
Stephen Blucher
Danita Capps
Jesse Harden
Tristan Toncray
Gerry Palmer
Jeff Bennett

Designated Flight Crew Form

(Please Print) Pilot Name: _____
First Middle Last

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY AND BRIEFING

FAA ORDER 8900.1 states that: only flight crewmembers may be carried on board any balloon operating under the FAA Waiver issued to the Old West Balloon Fest for the period **August 9-15, 2026**. I hereby acknowledge that:

- a) I have received appropriate training concerning my duties relative to the event;
- b) I have attended the pilot and crewmember briefing before each event;
- c) I have read the FAA Waiver and I have been briefed on its limitations; and,
- d) I have been designated Event Flight Crewmember for the purpose of this event.

RELEASE OF ALL CLAIMS

In consideration of the agreement to permit me to be a designated flight crewmember, on behalf of myself, my heirs, successors, executors, administrators, and legal representatives (collectively "I") do hereby release and forever discharge the Old West Balloon Fest, financial sponsors of the balloons, race officials and the Balloon Federation of America (BFA), Cities of Scottsbluff, Gering and Mitchell, Oregon Trail Community Foundation, Scotts Bluff County, and their respective officers, directors, trustees, agents, members, employees, successors and assigns, and each of them, from any and all claims, demands, damages, actions and causes of action of every name and nature, anticipated or unanticipated, which I may have against any of the aforementioned organizations and persons, which may arise out of or result from or in any manner be connected with the balloon flight or activity in which I participate as a designated flight crewmember. Balloon flight or activity includes but is not limited to the preparation, take-off, flight, landing, boarding, pack-up or travel to or from the take-off or landing areas, including ground transportation thereto.

I certify that I am at least 18 years of age, and that I have no medical or mental condition that prevents me from participating in the Ballooning Activities or from executing this Agreement. Further, I understand and acknowledge that Ballooning Activities are hazardous activities and that there is a possibility that those participating could be injured and/or killed while participating. Finally, I understand that I am being permitted to be a designated crewmember only on the condition that I grant a full and complete release of any and all claims that may arise against the organizations and persons designated herein as a result of any injuries (including death) or damages that I may suffer as a result of or arising out of the balloon flight or activities.

This Agreement was entered into in Nebraska and shall be enforced and interpreted under Nebraska law. Should any clauses in this Agreement be in conflict with state law, then only that clause shall be null and void while the remaining clauses shall remain in full force and effect.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand at Scottsbluff, Nebraska, this _____ day of August 2019

PRINTED NAME	SIGNATURE	Date
PRINTED NAME	SIGNATURE	Date
PRINTED NAME	SIGNATURE	Date
PRINTED NAME	SIGNATURE	Date

PILOT ENTRY AGREEMENT

Including Acknowledgement of Responsibility and Release of Liability

I hereby declare that I am participating in the US National Hot Air Balloon Championship (**Championship**) on August 9 - 15, **2026** of my own free volition. I agree that the organizers and sponsors of this event (including the Cities of Scottsbluff, Gering and Mitchell, Oregon Trail Community Foundation and Scotts Bluff County' Balloon Federation of America, event race officials, my sponsor or any subsidiaries, employees, officers, trustees, agents and/or members of the above mentioned entities) are providing me with the facilities and means for my participation in this event and in no way do they supersede the responsibility of the pilot in command, as shown in CFR § 91.3(a) and elsewhere in the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR's).

I hereby certify that I am aware of and agree with the responsibility legally transferred to me under the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR's) as regards my personal decision to fly my balloon, and any bodily injury or property damage resulting from there is solely my liability, and that my decision as pilot in command may affect my placement in this event if I choose not to fly. I understand that the pilot of each balloon has full and complete authority over the balloon and is responsible for all decisions to be made associated with the balloon on the ground and in the air.

I certify that I am of sound mind and body and I have no medical, mental, or physical limitations that would limit my ability to safely fly my aircraft. I am not taking prescription or over the counter drugs that may impair my ability to safely fly my aircraft.

Officials of the US National Hot Air Balloon Championship may supply information, guidance, or data and will use reasonable care to ensure the information is accurate and complete. However, the BFA/HACD and Championship assumes no responsibility for the completeness or accuracy of such information. It is my decision whether to rely on that information or acquire additional information. I agree that none of the flights are mandatory and that I will make all flights at my option.

I hereby agree to have in full force during the Championship a balloon insurance policy with minimum liability limits of \$1,000,000 each occurrence combined bodily injury and property damage, including passengers, but not less than \$100,000 each passenger.

I hereby give permission, without any restriction, to the Championship or its assigns, to use still and motion pictures and sound recordings of me, my balloon, equipment, chase crewmembers, employees and agents for news, advertising, promotional media and commercial uses.

It is my understanding that the organizers may inspect all balloons entered in the event; but that such inspection is only for the purpose of determining whether the aircraft complies with all rules of eligibility of said event. The approval of the balloon by said officials does not constitute a representation or warranty of any kind or character whatsoever concerning the mechanical condition of the aircraft, or whether or not it is airworthy.

I acknowledge that the Championship utilizes GPS loggers for purposes of scoring and monitoring participant's flights for adherence to event regulations regarding landowner relations and Prohibited Zone infractions. I agree to carry this GPS logger on all flights and conform to all rules related to its use. I also acknowledge financial responsibility for the device while under my control.

I agree that this Agreement is a Nebraska contract and it is to be governed by the laws of the State of Nebraska, and that I hereby submit myself to the jurisdiction of the Nebraska courts concerning any claims arising out of the Championship or this Agreement. This Agreement, including the Conditions of Entry, General Information, Insurance and Hotel Reservation form, contains all the terms and conditions agreed to by the parties hereto, and no other agreements or discussions, oral or written, regarding the subject matter of the Agreement shall be deemed to exist or bind any of the parties hereto.

I, the pilot in command, hereby declare that I will fly in accordance with the event rules and regulations, abide by the FAR's, and fly entirely at my own risk and waive any right of action against the Championship, the owner of the launch site, event race officials, my sponsor or any employees, officers, trustees, agents, and their respective members for any loss or damage sustained by me in consequence of any action or omission on their part, my part or the part of other participants.

Thus, I release the organizers and sponsors of this event (including the Cities of Scottsbluff, Gering and Mitchell, Oregon Trail Community Foundation and Scotts Bluff County, Balloon Federation of America, event race officials, my sponsor or any subsidiaries, employees, officers, trustees, agents and/or members of the above mentioned entities) from liability for their actions or inactions relating to the Championship which may arise out of or result from or in any manner be connected with the balloon flight or activity in which I participate as a pilot in command.

BY MY SIGNATURE BELOW, I CERTIFY THAT ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE REGISTRATION IS ACCURATE AND I ACCEPT THE TERMS OF THIS ENTRY AGREEMENT.

Pilot Name (Please Print)	Signature	Date
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Landowner Relations

Additional information regarding potential launch and landing locations will be provided prior to the General Briefing.

FAA Approved Waiver and Special Provisions



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Aviation Safety

Flight Standards District Office
3431 Aviation Road
Suite 120
Lincoln, Nebraska 68524
402 475-1738
Fax: 402 458-7841

July 29, 2026

Mr. Sam Parks
Balloonmeister
2995 Findley Road
Statesville, NC 28625

Dear Mr. Parks:

The Lincoln Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) has approved your application for a Certificate of Waiver (CoW) for the US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest on August 9-16, 2026, at the Mitchell Airfield in Mitchell, NE.

Mr. Parks, you are specifically listed as the Responsible Person for this waiver as indicated on FAA Form 7711-2, Application for Certificate of Waiver, FAA Form 7711-1, Certificate of Waiver or Authorization, and as stated in the Special Provisions. Please read the entirety of the Waiver Package, including its attachments, to ensure compliance with the CoW.

Prior to the event, all participants must provide their pilot and aircraft documents for validation. If this documentation is not made available in digital format in advance, the participant will be required to present the documentation in person prior to participation in the event. All participants must acknowledge they have read and understand the CoW, Special Provisions, and US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest, Balloon Competition Operations Manual. Additionally, each required flight crewmember (other than the pilot in command) must attest that they have been briefed by the pilot in command, and that they have read and understand the conditions of the CoW. Upon completion of each daily participant briefing, the list of attendees must be provided to the event IIC.

Any changes to the list of participants, schedule of events, or anything else affecting the waiver, must be coordinated through the IIC.

Sincerely,

 Digitally signed by
BRANDON LEE BENNETT
Date: 2026.07.29
13:46:24 -05'00'

Brandon L. Bennett
Aviation Safety Inspector, Operations

Attachments (1): 2026 US Nationals OWBF Waiver Package

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

CERTIFICATE OF WAIVER OR AUTHORIZATION

ISSUED TO

Sam Parks, US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest

ADDRESS

2895 Findley Road, Statesville, NC 28625

This certificate is issued for the operations specifically described hereinafter. No person shall conduct an operation pursuant to the authority of this certificate except in accordance with the standard and special provisions contained in this certificate, and such other requirements of the Federal Aviation Regulations not specifically waived by this certificate.

OPERATIONS AUTHORIZED

40-70 Hot Air Balloons will conduct flight operations and competitive flight activities within a 15 nautical mile (NM) radius, centered at Mitchell Airfield (BFF 263° Radial at 15 NM/41°55'17.0"N 103°48'42.0"W) from the surface to 10,000' MSL (6,058' AGL).

Flight operations will be conducted daily from 0530 MDT (1130 UTC) to 1030 MDT (1630 UTC) and 1700 MDT (2300 UTC) to 2000 MDT (0200 UTC).

Waiver holder will ensure NOTAM D is issued for applicable times.

LIST OF WAIVED REGULATIONS BY SECTION AND TITLE

§91.119(b) - Minimum Safe Altitudes - Over Congested Areas

§91.119(c) - Minimum Safe Altitudes - Over Other Than Congested Areas

STANDARD PROVISIONS

1. A copy of the application made for this certificate shall be attached to and become a part hereof.
2. This certificate shall be presented for inspection upon the request of any authorized representative of the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, or of any State or municipal official charged with the duty of enforcing local laws or regulations.
3. The holder of this certificate shall be responsible for the strict observance of the terms and provisions contained herein.
4. This certificate is nontransferable.

NOTE - This certificate constitutes a waiver of those Federal rules or regulations specifically referred to above. It does not constitute a waiver of any State law or local ordinance.

SPECIAL PROVISIONS

Special Provisions Nos. 1 to 18, inclusive, are set forth on the reverse side hereof.

This certificate is effective from 08/09/2025 @ 05:30 MDT to 08/16/2025 @ 10:30 MDT, inclusive, and is subject to cancellation at any time upon notice by the Administrator or his authorized representative.

BY DIRECTION OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

MICHAEL AARON
OBRYANT

Digitally signed by MICHAEL
AARON OBRYANT
Date: 2026.07.29 13:21:45 -0500

Michael A. O'Bryant
(Signature)

Central
(Region)

07/29/2026
(Date)

Office Manager / AFG-600 / CE-09
(Title)

Special Provisions
US Nationals Hot Air Balloon Championship & Old West Balloon Fest
August 9-16, 2026

Common Special Provisions

Failure to comply with any standard or special provision is a violation of the terms of this Certificate of Waiver (CoW) or Certificate of Authorization (CoA) and justification for cancellation of this Certificate and constitutes a violation of Title 49 of the United States Code Section(s) 44711(A)(2)(B) and/or 44711(A)(5).

1. The FAA has the authority to cancel or delay any or all acts or events if the safety of persons or property on the ground or in the air, are in jeopardy or there is a violation of the terms of the CoW.
2. Sam Parks will ensure that notification is made to the Leidos Flight Service Station (AFSS) 1-877-487-6867 of the date, time, place, demonstration areas, altitudes, nature of the activity, and duration of the operation and request that a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM D or TFR) be issued.
 - a. Such notice shall be accomplished by providing the controlling flight service station (FSS) with a copy of the CoW, at least 48 hours before the event and no more than 72 hours before the event.
 - b. A Class D NOTAM is issued for the entire aviation event. Class D NOTAM verification is required.
3. Sam Parks, named in Item 2 on FAA Form 7711-2 must ensure that participants are thoroughly briefed on special field rules, the established demonstration area, flying display area, and aerobatic box (other defined areas within the waived/authorized airspace), manner and order of events, and special provisions of the CoW or CoA, before beginning the activities each day.
 - a. No person may participate in any event listed on the CoW unless that person has signed a statement acknowledging receipt of a briefing on the provisions of the CoW.
4. All civil aircraft and pilots participating in the aviation event shall provide the requested data to establish qualifications and airworthiness to the event organizer and if required be available for FAA inspection at the time and place agreed upon by Sam Parks and the FAA IIC.
 - a. NOTE: FAA Checklists, Status Forms, and Job Aids can be used to gather data in advance to establish performer qualifications and aircraft airworthiness.
 - b. NOTE: CoW special provisions never supersede aircraft airworthiness operating limitations. Pilots should review their aircraft operating limitations prior to participating in an aviation event to ensure they are familiar and can comply with the requirements as specified.
5. For civil aircraft, only required flight crewmembers by type design, safety pilots as listed in FAA Order 8900.1, Volume 3, Chapter 6, or those persons required to participate in the Hot Air Balloon operations (wing walkers, stunt persons, participants integral to the performance, and those conducting safety related functions) will be carried on any aircraft engaged in Hot Air Balloon operations authorized by this CoW. Additional crewmembers or essential personnel may not participate without specific approval by Sam Parks and the IIC.

6. No Hot Air Balloon operations shall be authorized or scheduled when a suspension of airport traffic or diversion of other aircraft traffic would cause a hardship to scheduled air carrier operations.
7. A control point shall be established where the certificate holder or responsible person shall direct the Hot Air Balloon operations. Sam Parks shall be continuously available to the FAA IIC or designated representative and is the person designated as responsible for the overall safety of the event.
8. Adequate communication capability (electronic and visual) must be provided to maintain a safe operation, to control spectators, and to advise participants that the Hot Air Balloon operations have been halted or canceled.
9. A crowd line consisting of a physical barrier and/or adequate policing shall be provided to confine the spectators to designated areas. The spectator areas shall have well-defined lateral boundaries.
10. The Hot Air Balloon operations shall be halted for any reason that is in the interest of safety. They shall also be halted when unauthorized aircraft enter the Hot Air Balloon operations area, or when unauthorized persons or vehicles enter the launch, target, or recovery areas.
 - a. The holder of the CoW, Sam Parks, assumes responsibility for the security of areas where unauthorized personnel and aircraft are not authorized access and for compliance with the aviation event security plan outlined in Attachment A – US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest Competition Operations Manual, August 9-16, 2026.
 - b. The FAA IIC has the responsibility to make the holder of the CoW, Sam Parks, aware of any identified safety concerns and if necessary, has the authority for canceling or delaying any or all Hot Air Balloon operations if it is deemed necessary in the interest of safety.
11. The following facilities shall be provided and readily available in accordance with the submitted emergency response plan at the demonstration site. Fire truck, Ambulance, Crash Rescue Vehicle/Paramedic, Marine Unit and police vehicles will be provided as included in the emergency response plan in attachment D – US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest Incident Action Plan.
12. Persons or aircraft not appearing on the CoW application and subsequently added to the CoW or CoA may not participate without specific approval by the responsible person, Sam Parks, and the IIC. Proof of appropriate qualifications for crewmember(s), and an airworthy aircraft is required before participation in the event is allowed.
13. Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) Demonstrations are not authorized under this CoW.
14. Rocket Demonstrations are not authorized under this CoW.
15. Parachute Demonstrations are not authorized under this CoW.

Balloon Event Special Provisions

16. Section 91.119(b) and (c) are waived to the extent necessary to allow participating balloons to compete in the Old Balloon Fest 2025 under the terms and conditions set forth in the FAA approved procedures section of Attachment A – US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest Competition Operations Manual, August 9-16, 2026.
17. The US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest Competition Operations Manual, August 9-16, 2026 (Attachment A), is incorporated into this CoW and becomes a special provision thereof. Any action contrary to the terms, controls, procedures, and conditions pertaining to safety set forth in the FAA approved procedures is grounds for cancellation of this CoW.
18. Sam Parks shall ensure that each participating event crewmember has read and understands the FAA approved procedures section of the US National Hot Air Balloon Championship and Old West Balloon Fest Competition Operations Manual, August 9-16, 2026 (Attachment A), and the special provisions of this CoW.