

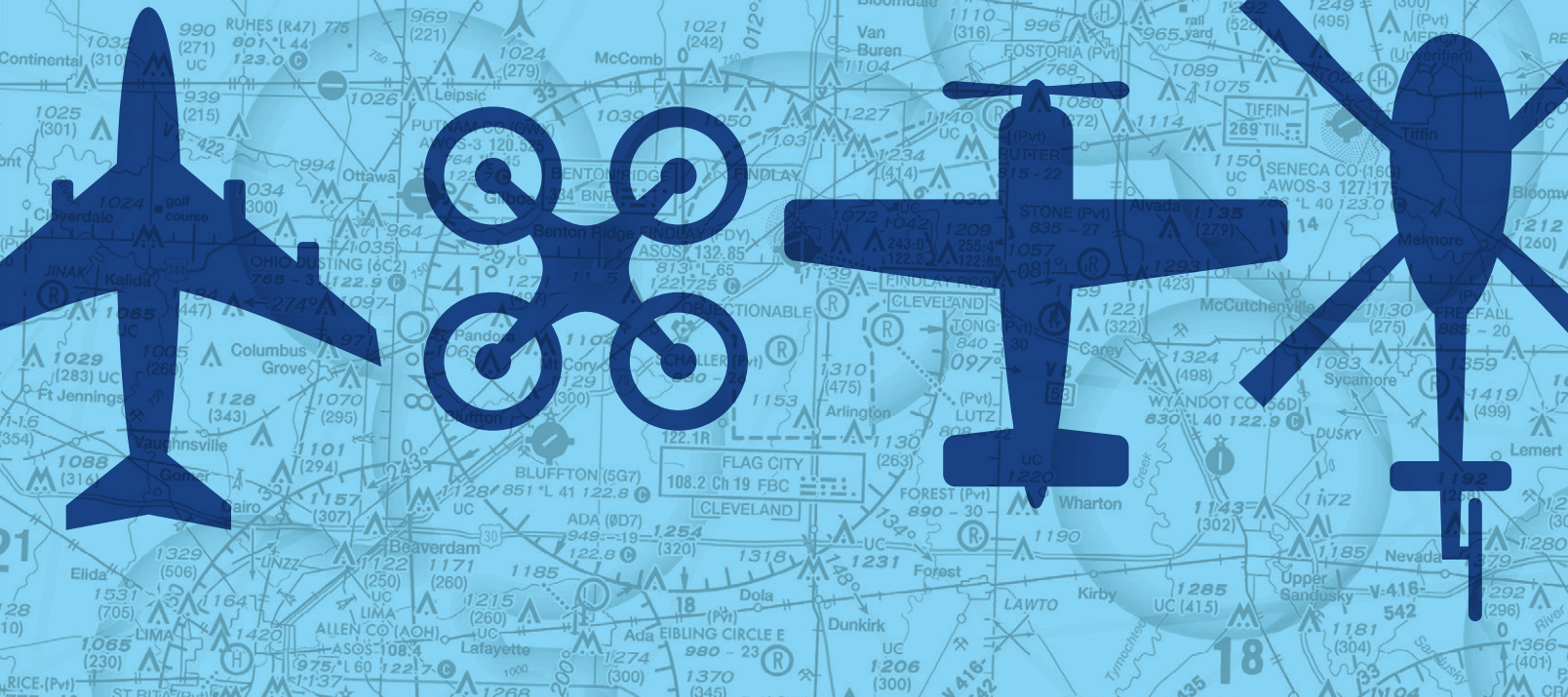


Aeronautical Chart User's Guide

14th Edition



Aeronautical Information Services
Federal Aviation Administration





**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Aeronautical Information Services
Aeronautical Chart
Users' Guide

Effective as of 17 June 2021

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INTRODUCTION

This Chart Users' Guide is an introduction to the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) aeronautical charts and publications. It is useful to new pilots as a learning aid, and to experienced pilots as a quick reference guide.

The FAA is the source for all data and information utilized in the publishing of aeronautical charts through authorized publishers for each stage of Visual Flight Rules (VFR) and Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) air navigation including training, planning, and departures, enroute (for low and high altitudes), approaches, and taxiing charts. Digital charts are available online at:

- [VFR Charts](#)
- [IFR Charts](#)
- [Terminal Procedures Publication](#)
- [Chart Supplements](#)

Paper copies of the charts are available through an FAA Approved Print Provider. A complete list of current providers is available at http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/flight_info/aeronav/print_providers/.

The FAA Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) Pilot/Controller Glossary defines in detail, all terms and abbreviations used throughout this publication. Unless otherwise indicated, miles are nautical miles (NM), altitudes indicate feet above Mean Sea Level (MSL), and times used are Coordinated Universal Time (UTC).

The Notices to Airmen Publication (NOTAM) includes current Flight Data Center (FDC) NOTAMs. NOTAMs alert pilots of new regulatory requirements and reflect changes to Standard Instrument Approach Procedures (SIAPs), flight restrictions, and aeronautical chart revisions. This publication is prepared every 28 days by the FAA, and is available by subscription from the Government Printing Office. For more information on subscribing or to access online PDF copy, go to https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/notices/.

In addition to NOTAMs, the Safety Alerts/Charting Notices page of the Aeronautical Information Services website is also useful to pilots.

KEEP YOUR CHARTS CURRENT

Aeronautical information changes rapidly, so it is important that pilots check the effective dates on each aeronautical chart and publication. To avoid danger, it is important to always use current editions and discard obsolete charts and publications.

To confirm that a chart or publication is current, refer to the next scheduled edition date printed on the cover. Pilots should also check NOTAMs for important updates between chart and publication cycles that are essential for safe flight.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF CHART USERS' GUIDE AND UPDATES

All information in this guide is effective as of **17 June 2021**. All graphics used in this guide are for educational purposes. Chart symbology may not be to scale. Please do not use them for flight navigation.

The Chart Users' Guide is updated as necessary when there is new chart symbology or changes in the depiction of information and/or symbols on the charts. When there are changes, it will be in accordance with the 56-day aeronautical chart product schedule.

COLOR VARIATION

Although the digital files are compiled in accordance with charting specifications, the final product may vary slightly in appearance due to differences in printing techniques/processes and/or digital display techniques.

REPORTING CHART DISCREPANCIES

Your experience as a pilot is valuable and your feedback is important. We make every effort to display accurate information on all FAA charts and publications, so we appreciate your input. Please notify us concerning any requests for changes, or potential discrepancies you see while using our charts and related products.

*FAA, Aeronautical Information Services
1305 East-West Highway
SSMC4, Room 3424
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3281*

*Telephone Toll-Free 1-800-638-8972
Aeronautical Inquires: https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/flight_info/aeronav/aero_data/Aeronautical_Inquiries/*

WHAT'S NEW?

Update as of 17 June 2021

The following charting items have been added to the Chart Users' Guide since the Guide was last published on 22 April 2021:

VFR CHARTS

No Significant Changes Applied

IFR ENROUTE CHARTS

No Significant Changes Applied

TERMINAL PROCEDURE PUBLICATION (TPP)

A new subsection was added to describe Area Navigation (RNAV) Waypoints and associated Required Navigation Performance (RNP) requirement/capability notes.

In the near future, Minimum Safe Altitude (MSA) information will be included on Departure Procedures (DPs). In preparation for this change, an update was made to the TPP legend for DPs and Standard Terminal Arrival (STAR) charts. The previously combined legends have been split into separate legend pages, and the new DP legend now includes sample MSA information.

EXPLANATION OF VFR TERMS AND SYMBOLS

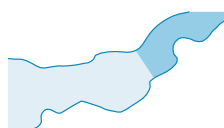
This chapter covers the Sectional Aeronautical Chart (Sectional). These charts include the most current data at a scale of (1:500,000) which is large enough to be read easily by pilots flying by sight under Visual Flight Rules. Sectionals are named after a major city within its area of coverage.

The chart legend includes aeronautical symbols and information about drainage, terrain, the contour of the land, and elevation. You can learn to identify aeronautical, topographical, and obstruction symbols (such as radio and television towers) by using the legend.

A brief description next to a small black square indicates the exact location for many of the landmarks easily recognized from the air, such as stadiums, pumping stations, refineries, etc. A small black open circle with descriptive type indicates oil, gas or mineral wells. A small black circle with descriptive type indicates water, oil or gas tanks. The scale for some items may be increased to make them easier to read on the chart.

Aeronautical Information Services' charts are prepared in accordance with specifications of the Interagency Air Committee (IAC) and are approved by representatives of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Department of Defense (DoD).

WATER FEATURES (HYDROGRAPHY)



Water features are depicted using two tones of blue, and are considered either "Open Water" or "Inland Water." "Open Water," a lighter blue tone, shows the shoreline limitations of all coastal water features at the average (mean) high water levels for oceans and seas. Light blue also represents the connecting waters like bays, gulfs, sounds and large estuaries.

Exceptionally large lakes like the Great Lakes, Great Salt Lake, and Lake Okeechobee, etc., are considered Open Water features. The Open Water tone extends inland as far as necessary to adjoin the darker blue "Inland Water" tones. All other bodies of water are marked as "Inland Water" in the darker blue tone.

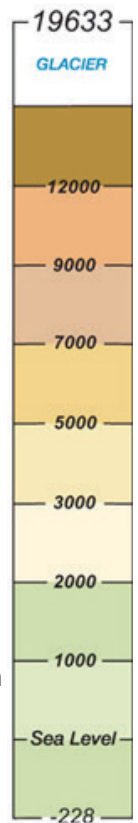
LAND FEATURES (TERRAIN) AND OBSTRUCTIONS

The elevation and configuration of the Earth's surface is important to pilots. Our Aeronautical Information Specialists are devoted to showing the contour of the earth and any obstructions clearly and accurately on our charts. We use five different techniques: contour lines, shaded relief, color tints, obstruction symbols, and Maximum Elevation Figures (MEF).

1. Contour lines join points of equal elevation. On Sectionals, basic contours are spaced at 500' intervals. Intermediate contours are typically at 250' intervals in moderately level or gently rolling areas. Auxiliary contours at 50', 100', 125', or 150' intervals occasionally show smaller relief features in areas of relatively low relief. The pattern of these lines and their spacing gives the pilot a visual concept of the terrain. Widely spaced contours represent gentle slopes, while closely spaced contours represent steep slopes.
2. Shaded relief shows how terrain may appear from the air. Shadows are shown as if light is coming from the northwest, because studies have shown that our visual perception has been conditioned to this view.





3. Different color tints show bands of elevation relative to sea level. These colors range from light green for the lower elevations, to dark brown for the higher elevations.
4. Obstruction symbols show man made vertical features that could affect safe navigation. FAA's Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) maintains a database of over obstacles in the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico and U.S. Pacific Island Territories. Aeronautical Specialists evaluate each obstacle based on charting specifications before adding it to a visual chart. When a Specialist is not able to verify the position or elevation of an obstacle, it is marked UC, meaning it is "under construction" or being reported, but has not been verified.




The FAA uses a Digital Obstacle File (DOF) to collect and disseminate data. Because land and obstructions frequently change, the source data on obstructions and terrain is occasionally incomplete or not accurate enough for use in aeronautical publications. For example, when the FAA receives notification about an obstruction, and there is insufficient detail to determine its position and elevation, the FAA Flight Edit Program conducts an investigation.


The Flight Edit crew visually verifies the cultural, topographic, and obstacle data. Charts are generally flight-checked every four years. This review includes checking for any obstruction that has been recently built, altered, or dismantled without proper notification.

Obstacles less than 1000' AGL.  Sectional Charts, Terminal Area (TACs) and Caribbean Charts (CACs) typically show man-made obstacles extending more than 200' Above Ground Level (AGL), or more than 299' AGL in yellow city tint. Features considered to be hazardous obstacles to low-level flight are; smokestacks, tanks, factories, lookout towers, and antennas, etc.

Obstacles 1000' AGL or greater. 



 **5540**
(650)
GARFIELD STACK

Man-made features used by FAA Air Traffic Control as checkpoints use a graphic symbol shown in black with the required elevation data in blue. The elevation of the top of the obstacle above Mean Sea Level (MSL) and the height of the structure (AGL) is also indicated (when known or can be reliably determined by a Specialist). The AGL height is in parentheses below the MSL elevation. In extremely congested areas, the FAA typically omits the AGL values to avoid confusion.

 **4977**
(1432)

Group Obstacle Symbol Whenever possible, the FAA depicts specific obstacles on charts. However, in high-density areas like city complexes, only the highest obstacle is represented on the chart using the group obstacle symbol to maximize legibility.

Obstacles under construction are indicated by placing the letters UC adjacent to the obstacle type.

Guy wires may extend outward from obstacles. Obstacles with high-intensity strobe lighting systems may operate part-time or by proximity activation and are shown as follows:

5000
(1500) UC
If space is available, the AGL height of the obstruction is shown

5. The Maximum Elevation Figure (MEF) represents the highest elevation within a quadrant, including terrain and other vertical obstacles (towers, trees, etc.). A quadrant on Sectionals is the area bounded by ticked lines dividing each 30 minutes of latitude and each 30 minutes of longitude. MEF figures are rounded up to the nearest 100' value and the last two digits of the number are not shown.

12⁵
In this example the MEF represents 12,500'.

MEFs over land and open water areas are used in areas containing man-made obstacles such as oil rigs.

In the determination of MEFs, the FAA uses extreme care to calculate the values based on the existing elevation data shown on source material. Aeronautical Information Specialists use the following procedure to calculate MEFs:

MEF - Man-made Obstacle

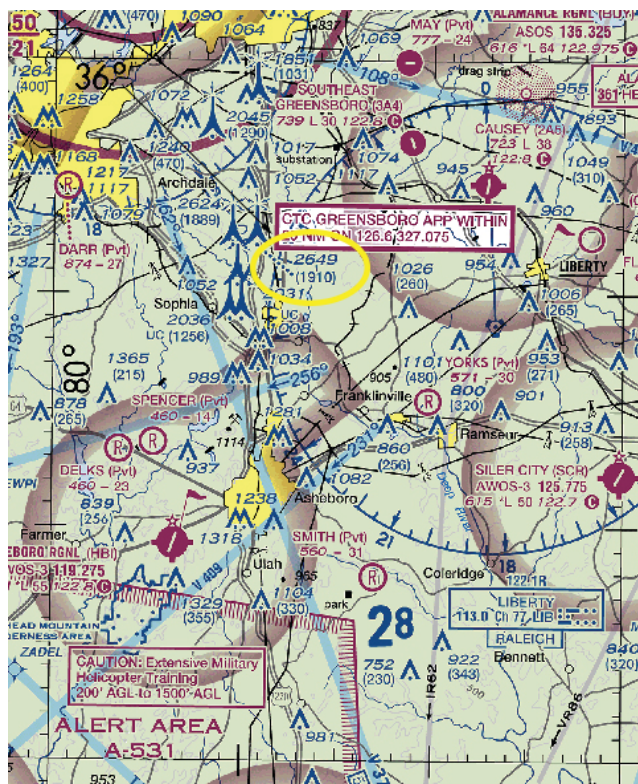
When a man-made obstacle is more than 200' above the highest terrain within the quadrant:

1. Determine the elevation of the top of the obstacle above MSL.
2. Add the possible vertical error of the source material to the above figure (100' or 1/2 contour interval when interval on source exceeds 200'. U.S. Geological Survey Quadrangle Maps with contour intervals as small as 10' are normally used).
3. Round the resultant figure up to the next higher hundred-foot level.

Example:

Elevation of obstacle top (MSL)	2649
Possible obstacle error equals	+100
Raise to the following 100' level	2749
Maximum Elevation Figure (MEF)	2800

28



MEF - Natural Terrain Feature or Natural Vertical Obstacle

When a natural terrain feature or natural vertical obstacle (e.g. a tree) is the highest feature within the quadrangle:

1. Determine the elevation of the feature.
2. Add the possible vertical error of the source to the above figure (100' or 1/2 the contour interval when interval on source exceeds 200').
3. Add a 200' allowance for uncharted natural or manmade obstacles. Chart specifications don't require the portrayal of obstacles below minimum height.
4. Round the figure up to the next higher hundred-foot level.

Example:

Elevation of obstacle top (MSL) 13161

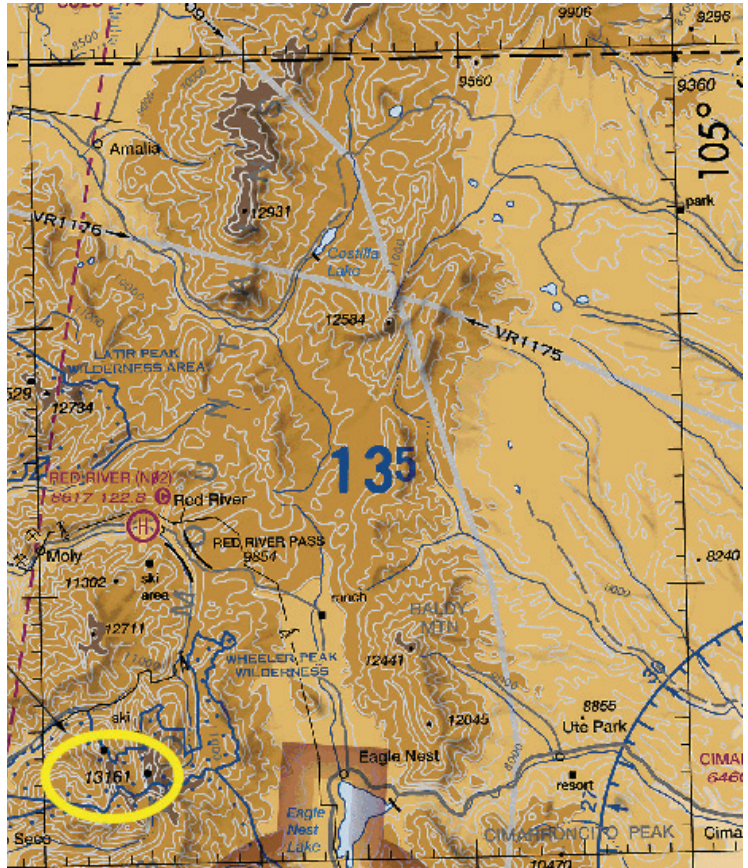
Possible vertical error +100

Obstacle Allowance +200

equals 13461

Raise to the following 100' level 13500

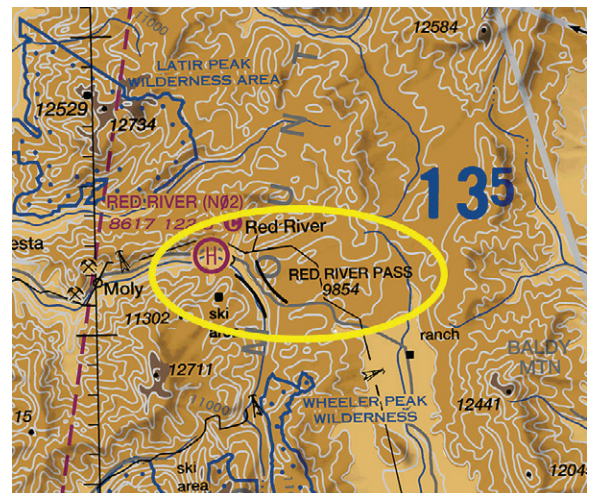
Maximum Elevation Figure (MEF) **135**



Pilots should be aware that while the MEF is based on the best information available to the Specialist, the figures are not verified by field surveys. Also, users should consult the Aeronautical Information Services website to ensure that your chart has the latest MEF data available.

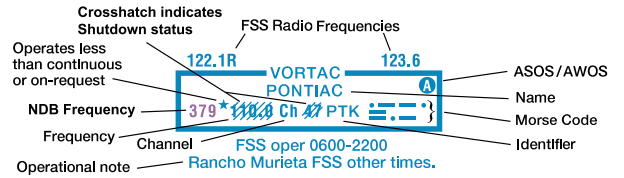
LAND FEATURES - MOUNTAIN PASSES

Mountain Pass symbol does not indicate a recommended route or direction of flight and pass elevation does not indicate a recommended clearance altitude. Hazardous flight conditions may exist within and near mountain passes.



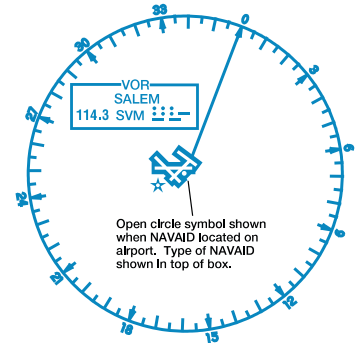
RADIO AIDS TO NAVIGATION

On VFR Charts, information about radio aids to navigation (NAVAID) are boxed, as illustrated. Duplication of data is avoided. When two or more radio aids in a general area have the same name with different frequencies, Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) channel numbers, or identification letters, and no misinterpretation can result, the name of the radio aid may be indicated only once within the identification box. Very High Frequency/Ultra High Frequency (VHF/UHF) NAVAID names and identification boxes (shown in blue) take precedence. Only those items that differ (e.g., frequency, Morse Code) are repeated in the box in the appropriate color. The choice of separate or combined boxes is made in each case on the basis of economy of space and clear identification of the radio aids.



A NAVAID that is physically located on an airport may not always be represented as a typical NAVAID symbol. A small open circle indicates the NAVAID location when collocated with an airport icon.

The type of NAVAID will be identified by: "VOR," (VHF Omni-Directional Range) "VORTAC" (VOR Tactical Aircraft Control), "VOR-DME," (VOR-Distance Measuring Equipment) or "DME" (Distance Measuring Equipment) positioned on and breaking the top line of the NAVAID box.



DMEs are shown without the compass rose.

AIRPORTS

Airports in the following categories are charted as indicated (additional symbols are shown later in this Section).
Public use airports:

- Hard-surfaced runways greater than 8069' or some multiple runways less than 8069'
- Hard-surfaced runways 1500' to 8069'
- Other than hard-surfaced runways
- Seaplane bases

Military airports:

- Other than hard-surfaced runways

Hard-surfaced runways are depicted the same as public-use airports.

U.S. military airports are identified by abbreviations such as AAF (Army Air Field), AFB (Air Force Base), MCAS (Marine Corps Air Station), NAS (Naval Air Station), NAV (Naval Air Facility), NAAS (Naval Auxiliary Air Station), etc. Canadian military airports are identified by the abbreviation DND (Department of National Defense).

Fuel Available:

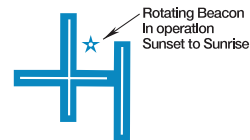
- Fuel availability indicated by use of tick marks around the basic airport symbol. Consult Chart Supplement for details and availability.

Other airports with or without fuel:

- H
- F
- U
- R
- X

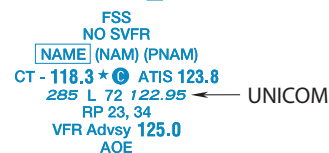
Airports are plotted in their true geographic position unless the symbol conflicts with a NAVAID at the same location. In such cases, the airport symbol will be displaced, but the relationship between the airport and the NAVAID will be retained.

Airports are identified by their designated name. Generic parts of long airport names (such as "airport," "field," or "municipal") and the first names of persons are commonly omitted unless they are needed to distinguish one airport from another with a similar name.



The figure at right illustrates the coded data that is provided along with the airport name.

The elevation of an airport is the highest point on the usable portion of the landing areas. Runway length is the length of the longest active runway, including displaced thresholds and excluding overruns. Runway length is shown to the nearest 100', using 70 as the rounding point; a runway 8070' in length is charted as 81, while a runway 8069' in length is charted as 80. If a seaplane base is collocated with an airport, there will be additional seaplane base water information listed for the elevation, lighting and runway.



FAA Chart Users' Guide - VFR Terms and Symbols

<i>Flight Service Station on field</i>	FSS	<i>Elevation in feet</i>	285
<i>Airports where fixed wing special VFR operations are prohibited (shown above airport name) FAR 91</i>	NO SVFR	<i>Lighting in operation Sunset to Sunrise</i>	L
<i>Indicates FAR 93 Special Air Traffic Rules and Airport Traffic Pattern</i>		<i>Lighting limitations exist; refer to Chart Supplement</i>	*L
<i>Location Identifier</i>	(NAM)	<i>Length of longest runway in hundreds of feet; usable length may be less</i>	72
<i>ICAO Location Identifier</i>	(PNAM)	<i>Aeronautical advisory station</i>	122.95
<i>Control Tower (CT) - primary frequency</i>	CT - 118.3	<i>Runways with Right Traffic Patterns (public use)</i>	RP 23,34
<i>Star indicates operation part-time. See tower frequencies tabulation for hours of operation</i>	*	<i>See Chart Supplement</i>	*RP
<i>Follows the Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF)</i>	(C)	<i>VFR Advisory Service Shown when ATIS is not available and frequency is other than the primary CT frequency</i>	VFR Advsy 125.0
<i>Automatic Terminal Information Services</i>	ATIS 123.8	<i>Weather Camera (Alaska)</i>	WX CAM
<i>Automatic Flight Information Service</i>	AFIS 135.2	<i>Airport of Entry</i>	AOE
<i>Automated Surface Weather Observing Systems; shown when full-time ATIS is not available</i>	ASOS/AWOS 135.42	<i>When information is lacking, the respective character is replaced by a dash. Lighting codes refer to runway edge lights and may not represent the longest runway or full length lighting.</i>	

Airports with Control Towers (CT) and their related data are shown in blue. All other airports and their related data are shown in magenta. The **L** symbol indicates that runway lights are on from dusk to dawn. ***L** indicates that the pilot must consult the Chart Supplement to determine runway lighting limitations, such as: available on request (by radio-call, letter, phone, etc), part-time lighting, or pilot/airport controlled lighting. Lighting codes refer to runway edge lights. The lighted runway may not be the longest runway available, and lights may not be illuminated along the full length of the runway. The Chart Supplement has a detailed description of airport and air navigation lighting aids for each airport. A dash represents no runway edge lights.

The symbol **★** indicates the existence of a rotating or flashing airport beacon operating from dusk to dawn. The Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) thoroughly explains the types and uses of airport lighting aids.

Aeronautical Chart User's Guide 14th Edition

*The definitive FAA reference source for understanding
and interpretation of all aviation charts*



**Aeronautical Information Services
Federal Aviation Administration**

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) publishes aeronautical charts for each stage of visual (VFR) and instrument (IFR) flight, including training, planning, departure, enroute (low and high altitude), approach, and taxiing. This guide is an excellent reference for novice and experienced pilots alike, as well as for international pilots becoming familiar with U.S. charts. This 14th Edition of the *Aeronautical Chart User's Guide* is the definitive learning aid, reference document, and introduction to the wealth of information provided on FAA charts and in chart navigation publications.

Produced by the FAA's Aeronautical Information Services branch, it explains all the symbology for FAA sectional, terminal area, flyway planning, helicopter route, enroute low- and high-altitude, and oceanic route charts, as well as standard terminal arrival routes, standard instrument departures, and instrument approach procedures. Also includes chart legends, airspace classification tables, and is illustrated throughout with full-color graphics.

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TRANSPORTATION USD \$16.95

ISBN 978-1-64425-144-7



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