

Operations Manual

April 30 – May 2, 2026
South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce
Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival

Principal Operations Inspector Alabama-FSDO
1500 Urban Center Dr., Ste. 250
Vestavia Hills, AL 35242
(205) 876-1300

Operations Manual

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 Balloon Competition on April 30, 2026 through May 02, 2026 during the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival, in Foley Alabama.

Table of Contents

- I. Purpose**
- II. Responsibilities and Procedures**
 - a. Duties of Personnel
 - b. Registration and Airworthiness Determination
 - c. Pilot and Event Flight Crewmembers
 - d. Pilot/Crew Briefing Responsibilities
 - e. Letter of Agreement
 - f. Event Documentation
- III. Ground Operations**
 - a. Clear Areas
 - b. Spectator Areas
 - c. Crowd Control Requirements
 - d. Landowner Relations/Notification
- IV. Flight Operations**
 - a. Areas of Operations
 - b. Types of Operations
 - c. Altitudes
 - d. Weather Requirements
 - e. Communications Requirements
 - f. Air Traffic Notification

FAA Approved-Date:

Principle Operations Inspector Alabama-FSDO
Vestavia Hills, AL

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 91, sections 91.119(b), 91.119(c), 91.130(c)(1) and (d) and 91.209 (a) by the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce. Specifically, the waiver will allow officially registered balloons to operate at an altitude of no less than five hundred (500) feet above the highest obstacle within 500 feet radius of the balloon en route to the target within a ten nautical mile radius of the designated launch field or goal. It will also allow for officially registered balloons to operate at seventy-five (75) feet AGL over spectators and to set goals and/or targets at a minimum distance of 200 feet from spectators as well as operate at thirty-five (35) feet AGL for tethered rides.

(No waiver is requested nor is a waiver required by 14 CFR for any mass ascension or pilot choice launches)

§91.119 (b): Minimum Safe Altitudes over a Congested Area The Waiver will allow officially registered balloons to operate over any congested area of a city, town or settlement and over any open air assembly of persons at an altitude of no less than 500 feet AGL above the highest obstacle within a horizontal radius of a ten (10) nautical mile radius of a point located on the 125° radial from Brookley (BFM) VORTAC at 25 NM, from the surface to 3000 feet MSL.

§91.119 (c): Minimum Safe Altitudes over Other than Congested Areas The Waiver will allow officially registered balloons to descend to the surface over open water or sparsely populated areas but no closer than 200 feet from any non-participating person, vessel, vehicle or structure.

§91.130 (c) (1): Operations in Class C Airspace - Communications

In accordance with a verbal agreement (Memorandum of Understanding, MOU) with the JKA, flight operations are authorized within the Class C Airspace designated for Gulf Shores International Airport, JKA without establishing communications prior to entering that airspace and maintaining communications while in that airspace. This deviation is valid only for the dates of the Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival.

§91.130 (d): Operations in Class C Airspace – Equipment Requirements

In accordance with an agreement (MOU) with the JKA, flight operations are authorized within the Class C Airspace designated for Gulf Shores International Airport, JKA without complying with 2 Section 1: FAA Waiver Balloon Operations

Manual the applicable equipment requirements specified in 14 CFR, § 91.215. This deviation is valid only for the dates of the Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival.

§91.209 (a): Aircraft Lights

Flight operations are authorized, without aircraft lights, within the temporary flight restriction (TFR) area of the JKA, at or below 8,000 feet MSL, for a period not to exceed 30 minutes prior to official sunrise. Ground operations (balloon glow) are authorized, without aircraft lights, within the temporary flight restriction (TFR) area of the JKA and while the TFR is in effect.

Section II

Responsibilities and Procedures

a) Technical Operations Procedures

- a. Event Director – Tommy Rachel
- b. Assistant Director – Rachel Spear
- c. Safety Officer –
- d. Launch Director – Tyler Higginbotham
- e. Crowd Control – Lt. Glenn Hartenstein

b) Certification/Airworthiness Procedures

Balloons flown at the event must have current certificate of registration and airworthiness, or in place of the latter, an equivalent document from the Federal Aviation Administration. Throughout the event the Safety Officer or his designees; and appropriate FAA personnel will be consulted as necessary.

c) Pilot and Air Event Flight Crewmembers

Each Pilot must hold the appropriate pilot certificate (Private or Commercial) with Lighter-Than-Air Category and Free Balloon Class Rating. Each pilot must show evidence of current Flight Review (FAR 61.56) and must also show evidence of currency per FAR 61.57.

Event flight crewmembers carried on board a balloon during the event must have been briefed by the pilot of the balloon. Each event flight crewmember must have read and understood the conditions of the waiver.

d) Pilots 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 rules prior to any competitive flight.

Before each flight all pilots must attend the flight briefing.

e) Letters of Agreement

Letter of agreement will be issued and signed as required for the specific type of event.

Event Director

The Event Director will remain in compliance with the waiver; ensure all weather briefings are properly administered, monitor change in weather conditions, ensure landowner relations and maintain compliance with all rules and regulations.

Assistant Director

The Assistant Director will coordinate pilot housing, verify propane is available for all flights, facilitate landowner relations, and assist Event Director in execution of all duties as needed.

Safety Officer

The Safety Officer will monitor all aspects of flight operation, ensure compliance with FAA regulations as modified by FAA waiver, monitor hazards to flight navigator within target area, provide primary safety briefing at pilot check-in and monitor check-in procedures to ensure pilot currency and compliance with 14CFR 61.57.

Crowd Control

The Crowd Control Coordinator will monitor crowd movements in and around target area and monitor designated alcohol consumption area.

f) Event Documentation

All relevant registration files, tasks data sheets, pilot registration information etc., will be maintained by the organizer at least sixty 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 the pilot briefing.

Section III

Ground Operations

a) Clear Areas

Clear areas are established at each target site. These areas are kept clear of spectators. Launch officials will police any area such as target areas to keep unauthorized persons out. In the Minimum Altitude Diagram, this is referred to as the “Target Area”.

b) Spectator Areas

The primary competitive spectator area is located at the main launch site. Crowd control is handled by law enforcement officials.

Official and balloon recovery vehicles are parked in restricted areas. Traffic is controlled by local police as required. Use of existing and temporary barriers secures spectators from briefing area and headquarters (see additional remarks under “ALTITUDES”). It should be noted that the flight of the balloon is occurring at sufficiently low speeds that people have ample opportunity of movement away from approaching balloons.

Scoring/measuring officials control these areas as determined by conditions, but in general isolate the area surrounding the goal/target from any unauthorized personnel.

c) Crowd Control

Crowd control will be provided by the appropriate local law enforcement agencies and officials of the balloon event.

d) Landowner Relations

Positive landowner relations are vital to the continuance of sanctioned events. There is an ongoing effort by all involved persons to maintain good landowner relations for the event. Additionally, pilots must obtain permission for launch from private property. Landowners may request that their property be indicated on the competition map as a Prohibited Zone (PZ).

Section IV

Flight Operations

- a) Area of Operation** (A ten (10) nautical mile radius of a point located on the 125° radial from Brookley (BFM) VORTAC at 25 NM, from the surface to 3000 feet MSL)
- b)** The operations will occur within a 10 nautical mile radius of the launch field located in the vicinity of OWA, 101-N South OWA Blvd., Foley, AL 36535. Headquarters for the event operations will be located at the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, with daily operations being conducted from the Pilot Briefing area, located at OWA Field.

c) Types of Operations

The event will consist of single and multiple tasks as called by the director 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 task will include:

1) FLY IN TASK

Pilots find their own launch areas and attempt to reach a set goal or target.

2) HARE AND HOUND

A hare balloon will fly from the launch area and each pilot will attempt to fly near the final landing place of the hare and drop a marker.

3) JUDGE DECLARED OR MULTIPLE JUDGE DECLARED GOAL

Each pilot will fly from a launch area and attempt to drop a marker close to a goal or goals.

d) Altitudes

These altitudes effective only under waivered portions of 14CFR 91.119 B and C and 91.209 A for the event only. 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 over the designated spectator areas at an altitude of not less than seventy-five (75) feet above ground level. The balloons must have attained a state of altitude equilibrium at this 75 feet minimum altitude and not be descending while passing over designated spectator areas. It is felt that this altitude is sufficient to allow for unusual circumstances with an adequate margin of safety for 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 also advise the spectators of the possibilities of both low flying balloons over the area and of markers being dropped in this area. Maximum altitude will be restricted to 3000 feet MSL.

e) 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 FAR 91.155

Maximum demonstrated surface winds must be 12 knots or less.

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 Director after consultation with appropriate safety officials and the FAA Monitor (if available).

f) Communications

Primarily by required pilot briefing. Most pilots carry either FM, CB or aircraft radios and some communication is possible by radio.

g) Air Traffic Notification

A NOTAM will be requested from the Flight Services advising air traffic of numerous balloons in the Foley area at varying altitudes from April 30th through May 2nd, 2026 during the three hours immediately after sunrise and three hours prior to sunset, ending 10:00 p.m. on May 2, 2025.

APPENDIX

FAA Approved-Date:
Principle Operations Inspector Alabama-FSDO

Vestavia Hills, AL.
2026 Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival

Crew Member Statement

The following person/persons have been designated as a CREWMEMBER and have been given appropriate training in the conduct of his or her duties. They have been briefed and understand the limitations of the waiver under which he or she is operating during the specific flight.

Crew Member Name	Crew Member Signature	Date

Pilot Name: _____

Pilot Signature: _____

Date: _____

FAA Approved Date:
Principle Operations Inspector Alabama-FSDO
Vestavia Hills, AL.

2026 Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival IMPORTANT NUMBERS

EMERGENCY.....	911
LOST BALLOON: Cody Rhodes	251-979-5413
Balloonmeister: Tommy Rachel.....	251-747-0252
Event Coordinator: Rachel Spear.....	251-233-9470
Safety Officer: David Sullivan.....	678-357-3271
Crew Coordinator: Tyler Higginbotham	251-424-2035
Crowd Control: Joey Darby.....	251-424-0176
Med Star Ambulance Service.....	251-943-8388
South Baldwin Regional Medical Center.....	251-943-3400
Foley Police Department.....	251-943-4431
Baldwin County Sheriff's Office.....	251-972-6802
Foley Fire Department.....	251-943-1710
Riviera Utilities.....	251-943-5001
Baldwin EMC.....	251-989-6247
Alabama/Northwest Florida FSDO	205-876-1300

Thank you for supporting the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce!

FAA Approved – Date:
Principle Operations Inspector Alabama-FSDO
Vestavia Hills, AL.