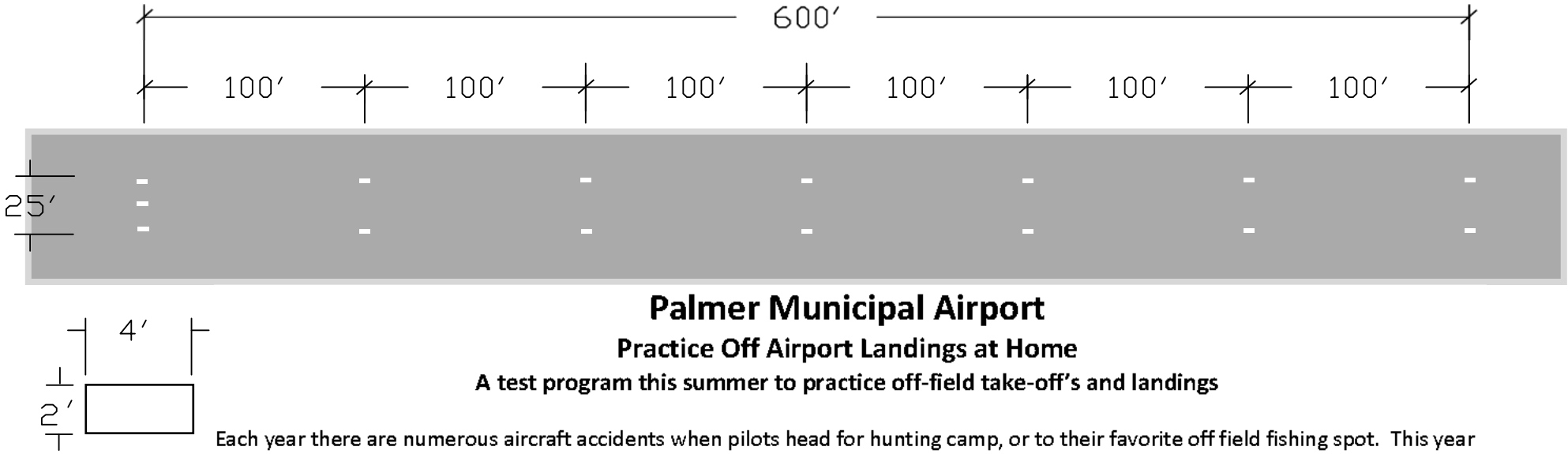
Markings for a "Practice Runway" in a larger gravel runway.



Palmer Municipal Airport

Practice Off Airport Landings at Home

A test program this summer to practice off-field take-off's and landings

Each year there are numerous aircraft accidents when pilots head for hunting camp, or to their favorite off field fishing spot. This year there is an effort under way to allow pilots to sharpen their skills before heading to the field. In a collaborative effort by the FAA, several aviation organizations, pilots will have a chance to practice at home. After the snow is gone, and the runway has recovered from break-up, a trial program will be launched to mark a simulated off field runway on Palmer Municipal Airport ski strip. A six hundred foot long by twenty five foot wide, "practice runway" will be marked by shooting white paint directly on the gravel surface on both runway ends. The first markings will coincide with the runway threshold. The rectangle marks are 2-feet by 4-feet and the 25-foot dimension is measured from outside to outside leaving 21-feet of no paint between the marks. Pilots will be welcome to make take-off's and/or landings to see if they can maintain directional control by keeping the tires inside the paint markings, and stopped before running beyond the paint markings. Given that the markings are in the middle of a larger conventional gravel runway surface, the consequences of not getting it right the first time are more to the ego than to the airplane, with the opportunity to try again. Ultimately, the pilot should know that they are "getting it right" before putting their airplane on the line on that short off airport strip.

This is an experimental program. The FAA Airports Division has studied and approved the marking pattern shown above. Volunteers and/or airport staff are working on the details to make this program fit into their operations. Pilot feedback will be important to let us know if this helps improve pilot skills before taking on all the unknowns of a true off-field landing area.

The plan this season is to create a "practice runway" on the ski-strip at Palmer Municipal Airport, and possibly another airport in interior Alaska. This fall the proponents will review stakeholder feedback to evaluate the program, including comments received from users, cost of the program, operational issues or other factors, to see if this idea is worth continuing and expanding to other locations. As we implement the program, watch for NOTAMS introducing this program. Paint will be applied to the gravel surface during the first week of May. We will evaluate the longevity of the markings and apply a touchup coat of paint in the Fall, before hunting season.

Remember, simultaneous parallel operations with Runway 16/34 are not allowed. It is recommended that aircraft contact Palmer FSS on 123.6 when the FSS is open or they should self announce when the FSS is closed.

A process to collect user feedback will be implemented in a future Letter to Airmen.