

**76<sup>th</sup> FAI/ISC PLENARY MEETING, 24-25 JANUARY 2026, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	<b>1 of 9</b>

Proposal by USA to amend CR/Canopy Piloting – 1 Dec 2025

Presented by Albert Berchtold

## Reimagining Canopy Piloting for Safety, Affordability, and Growth

Please accept the attached matter for serious consideration by the ISC. The thoughts below we have shared with many in casual conversation and during our meetings. But we believe these thoughts deserve more than casual conversation and now seek to see them addressed in a more formal manner.

I have broken these thoughts into three specific areas for discussion. The first is operational, the second is publicity and the future of our discipline, and the third relates to ethical and moral concerns.

**Background** - The first World Cup of Canopy Piloting took place in 2003 in Perris Valley, California, USA. They competed on speed, distance, and accuracy courses not much different than those used in 2025, 22 years later. Over those 22 years, much has evolved. New canopy technologies, lower drag lines, risers, & jumpsuits have come into existence. Piloting skills have grown immensely. And most recently, development in harness technology has pushed us forward again. As equipment and piloting skills have evolved, we have made small changes to the courses and the rules. A few examples of those...

- Creating maximum allowable weights based on jumpers dressed weight/exit weight.
- Creating maximum weight to be worn by any competitor
- Changes in buoy construction, diameter, and height,
- Adding a vertical extension at 50 (or 70 meters) into the distance event
- Adding dragging through, and then adjusting to “at or before” the entry gate in the distance event
- Changing the scoring of the water gates in Zone Accuracy
- Changing of the scoring of the land zones in Zone Accuracy

Based on how the discipline has developed, the current injuries and fatalities we are seeing, and how we might envision the future of this marquee discipline, I think we have reached a crossroads.

**1.Operational Concerns** - The changes bulleted above were sometimes implemented to reduce distances, so the discipline would not outgrow landing areas. Other times they were

**76<sup>th</sup> FAI/ISC PLENARY MEETING, 24-25 JANUARY 2026, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	<b>2 of 9</b>

efforts to make the courses more challenging or safer. And other times, to reduce the gaps or equalize competitive gaps.

Through all of these changes, we have seen competitors evolve. Changes in rules which were aimed at reducing distances or speeds were eventually overcome, and previous distances and speeds were surpassed.

Ponds which met the minimum requirements under the ISC rules were once seen as big. They provided adequate space prior to the gate for initial impacts as a result of misjudged approaches. They provided an adequate amount of water after the gates for subsequent “skips” to be into the water, rather than onto land.

As speeds have increased and rollouts have become longer, the amount of obstacle free space required before the pond has also increased. This includes not only the area at the end of the pond, but also the sides near the entry for speed event approaches and also carving approaches for distance and accuracy.

The landing area now necessary on the distance course exceeds 200 meters from the water's edge. And the speed course which is usually out to the side of the pond requires significant runout space after the exit gate as exit speeds can easily exceed 110 kph.

The expanding pond requirements, vast clear airspace and ground requirements in the approach area, and expansive landing area requirements make it a real struggle for existing venues to expand to meet the growing space needs of the discipline. It also makes it rather difficult for new dropzones wishing to create new venues for our discipline finding the space demands too much to accommodate.

For the discipline to continue to be accommodated in a reasonable space on dropzones as we know them, something needs to change.

**Publicity & the Future** - Conversations began to occur in earnest in the years leading up to the 2023 World Games in Birmingham, AL about adjusting events again to fit into the venue selected for Canopy Piloting. Adjustments were made, but I believe they were again “band aid fixes” to the existing events. If we truly want our discipline to be accepted into public venues and premiere communities like the World Games, we need to take a hard look at our events.

1. The current events are not formatted to be easily understood by spectators.
2. They are not easily accommodated into spaces without expansive landing areas.

**76<sup>th</sup> FAI/ISC PLENARY MEETING, 24-25 JANUARY 2026, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	3 of 9

3. The risk of grave or fatal injury is growing and will be unacceptable. (this will be discussed in Ethical & Moral Concerns)
4. The Discipline is shrinking

Looking at attendance at Category 1 events over the last 10 years, and USPA Nationals, the discipline is not growing in participation. There are surely multiple factors which may be contributing to that. High cost of specialized equipment. Increasing jump prices. Increasing registration costs. Appearance of the barrier to entry. Appearance of the barrier to becoming competent. Appearance of the barrier to becoming competitive at a high level. Simply sitting back and expecting these challenges to autocorrect themselves will result in the continued downward spiral of attendance and participation in the discipline. The appearance of what a would-be competitor sees when they consider whether or not to take up this discipline has become so overwhelming that they choose not to participate, or to show up once and never come back.

**Ethical & Moral Concerns** - We have again reached a crossroads for the discipline of canopy piloting. The risk of grave injury or death has always and will always exist in skydiving. We all assume that risk when exiting an aircraft. Pilot speeds continue to increase, and we are essentially competing on the courses created 22 years ago when speeds were a fraction of those today. We used to consider the risk of misjudgment and impact with the water would be having the wind knocked out of you, and a hard skip would break an ankle, leg, hand, shoulder, or maybe arm.

With approach speeds now reaching or exceeding 100 mph the likelihood of death has become more apparent. At the 2024 World Cup in South Africa, we saw a fatality of a UK competitor in the first round of the distance event. In February 2025 in Eloy AZ, we saw a fatality of a top US competitor and FAI World Record Holder while practicing the speed event. Both of these tragic losses were from impacting the ground prior to the pond at an extremely high rate of speed. Separate from these two incidents, there is also consideration that the likelihood that a “skip off the water” will land your second impact outside the pond is also greater. In September 2025 at the World Cup, we saw a competitor from the UK hard skip off the water in Speed, land hard outside the course which resulted in a serious back injury requiring surgery. At that same meet we saw a Canadian competitor impact the ground at a high rate of speed before the pond resulting in serious back injuries as well. Both of these competitors required life flight services to transport them to trauma centers.

**76<sup>th</sup> FAI/ISC PLENARY MEETING, 24-25 JANUARY 2026, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	<b>4 of 9</b>

If you skip off the water and the water absorbs your mistake, you and your fellow competitors have a good laugh and we all continue. But that's not the case anymore... and I would suggest that the cost of that error is getting a lot more expensive than wet clothes and maybe a twisted or even broken arm or leg.

Canopy Piloting has always been harsher in scoring than in some other disciplines. If you err in 4-way Formation Skydiving, you lose a point or two. If you goof up a little in CP and miss a gate by an inch, you're off the podium.

Has the cost of victory become too high?

Do we think the discipline as it exists will reach public acceptance with the risks that currently exist? People enjoy watching NASCAR or F-1. They love speed and they love crashes. And when there is a crash, the driver almost always climbs out of the vehicle. Do you think it would be as popular if the driver went flying out of the car with no protective gear on but a helmet, and impacted the ground at 100mph? Would it be acceptable for young people to watch? Those who have watched a high-speed CP accident in recent years know they are horrible to watch.

We have long looked at fatalities in the sport of skydiving too softly. No other sport does that, and definitely no sport which exists in the Olympic movement, or serious desires to join it. There are risks of injury in many sports, but the risk of a broken bone is quite different than having events which reward or even require, dancing with death to win.

By adding to that risk, it is not adding to the discipline but rather detracting from it. As a public-facing discipline in our sport, it has not become easier to watch. It has not become easier to judge. It has not become easier to participate in. The gap between the newer competitors and the best has become so wide that those who are new in the discipline are no longer motivated to continue and grow in it but rather are deterred. The shrinking attendance at Cat.1 events in CP, and the growing gap between the highly experienced tenured competitors and the newer competitors support this.

So what is the way forward? The first step is to acknowledge that we face a problem that requires meaningful action and change. If the enclosed event format proposal does not sufficiently address these needs and is not approved, then we must at a minimum insist that the CP Committee to conduct a thorough review of the discipline's operational requirements, its ethical and safety implications, and its long-term viability as an activity historically regarded as one of our strongest opportunities for public promotion of the sport.

**76<sup>th</sup> FAI/ISC PLENARY MEETING, 24-25 JANUARY 2026, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	<b>5 of 9</b>

Two full rule sets for alternative events for consideration and replacement of the current speed and distance events are attached below. These are events which have been run at non-sanctioned events in the U.S. and were designed to be challenging, fun, and spectator friendly.

Respectfully Submitted,

Albert Berchtold, USPA Executive Director

**76<sup>th</sup> FAI/ISC PLENARY MEETING, 24-25 JANUARY 2026, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	<b>6 of 9</b>

**Rule Changes:**

1) Eliminate the following event formats from the CR 4.1 and 4.2, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, Annexes B.1, B.2, C.1, C.2, F.1, F.1.2, F.2.1, F.2.2

- Carved Speed 70m
- Drag Distance 50m
- Drag Speed 50m
- Max Speed 50m
- Max Distance

2) Add as the primary formats for Speed & Distance:

4.1.1 Carved Drag Speed: To navigate a parachute in as fast a time as possible between G1 & G5 while dragging at or before G1 as well as in all 4 other zones between the gate markers. See §6.3 for additional requirements regarding scoring.

4.1.2 In-Lane Distance: To navigate a parachute from the water surface through the water line (exit gate) while touching water in each of WZ1 to WZ10. See §6.2 for additional requirements regarding scoring.

## 6.2 Scoring in In-Lane Distance

6.2.1 Missed entry (ME) is assessed when no water is touched and results in an MR. Touching water - whether in a scoring Zone or not - results in at least a DR.

6.2.2 Competitors will make contact with as many zones as possible for the highest score. The zones may be touched in any order.

Zone 1 - 12 points

Zone 2 – 12 points

Zone 3 – 10 points

Zone 4 – 8 points

Zone 5 – 8 points

Zone 6 – 8 points

Zone 7 – 8 points

Zone 8 – 10 points

Zone 9 – 12 points

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	7 of 9

## Zone 10 – 12 points

6.2.3 Water Landing (WL) applies and results in a DR.

## 6.3 Scoring in Carved Drag Speed

6.3.1 The competitor must break the sensor beam(s) with some part(s) of the body at G1 to start and at G5 to stop the timing. The competitor must also drag/touch water before G1 and must touch water or land in every Zone between gate markers and within the course boundaries. Failing to meet the drag requirements in any zone results in a DR.

6.3.2 Vertical Extension (VE) and Out flying (OF) do **not** apply.

6.3.3 Off-course landing (OC) and Canopy down (CD) apply after G1 has been scored, but before G5 has been scored.

6.3.4 Marker Strike (MS) applies at G1 & G5.

6.2.4 A competitor's score for the jump is the time taken to navigate the course and is measured to the thousandth of a second.

## Annex B: SPEED COURSE SPECIFICATIONS

### B.3 Carved Drag Speed

B.3.1 All requirements of Carved Speed (B.1) are to be followed with the following exceptions:

B.3.1.1 The total course length measured along the centreline shall be 60 metres.

B.3.1.2 The total angle of arc shall be 85 degrees.

B.3.1.3 The course markers at G2, G3, G4, shall be of the “ball” type with diameter 20-60cm. G1 & G5 markers shall be 1.5m tall.

B.3.1.4

Zone 1 is defined as the space at or before the trailing edge of G1.

**76<sup>th</sup> FAI/ISC PLENARY MEETING, 24-25 JANUARY 2026, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	<b>8 of 9</b>

Zone 2 is defined as the space after Zone 1 and before the trailing edge of the G2 ball marker.

Zone 3 is defined as the space after Zone 2 and before the trailing edge of the G3 ball marker.

Zone 4 is defined as the space after Zone 3 and before the trailing edge of the G4 ball marker.

Zone 5 is defined as the space after Zone 4 and before the trailing edge of the G5 marker.

B.3.1.5 Markers for Gates 1-4 must all be on the water. Gate 5 markers may be on land, and any portion of Zone 5 which is on land may be touched to legally score Zone 5.

#### Annex C: DISTANCE COURSE SPECIFICATIONS

##### C.4 In-Late Distance

C.4.1 The course width is 2 metres.

C.4.2 The full length of the pond (up to 100 meters maximum from one waterline) shall be divided evenly into 10 zones each. For ponds longer than 100 meters, Z10 borders one waterline while Z1 starts furthest from that waterline.

C.4.3 Zones are delineated by pool noodles of alternating colors.

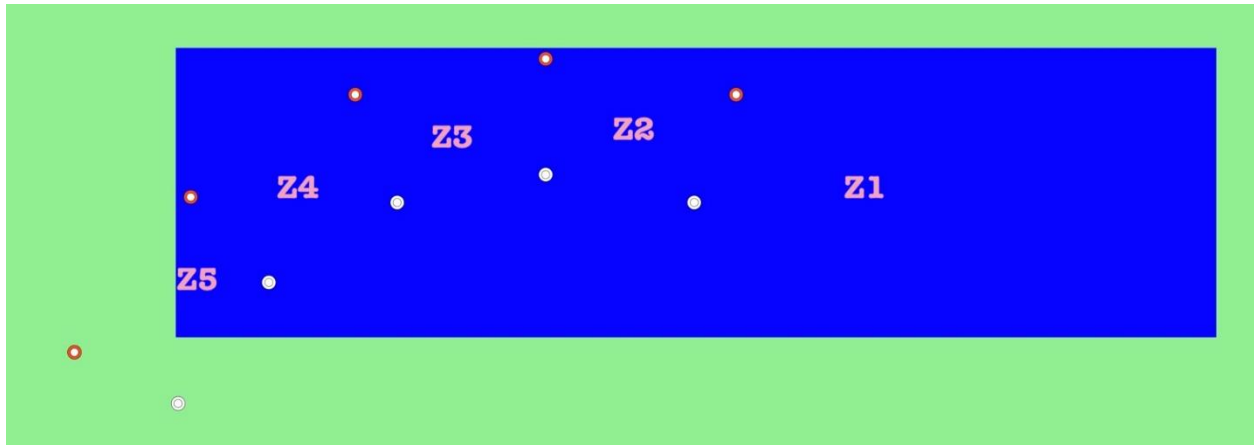
#### Annex F: Examples of Course Layouts

##### F.1.3 Carved Drag Speed (more detail needed)



76<sup>th</sup> FAI/ISC PLENARY MEETING, 24-25 JANUARY 2026, RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA

<i>SUBJECT:</i>	Proposal by USA to amend the Canopy Piloting CRs	<i>AGENDA #</i>	17.1.1
<i>AUTHOR:</i>	Albert Berchtold, Alternate Delegate USA, and USPA Executive Director		
<i>DATE:</i>	1 December 2025	<i>PAGES:</i>	9 of 9



F.2.4 In-Lane Distance (more detail required)

