



GUEST GUIDE

www.theoldwestballoonfest.com

 OldWestBalloonFest

August 14-17
2025



WELCOME TO

The Old West Balloon Fest

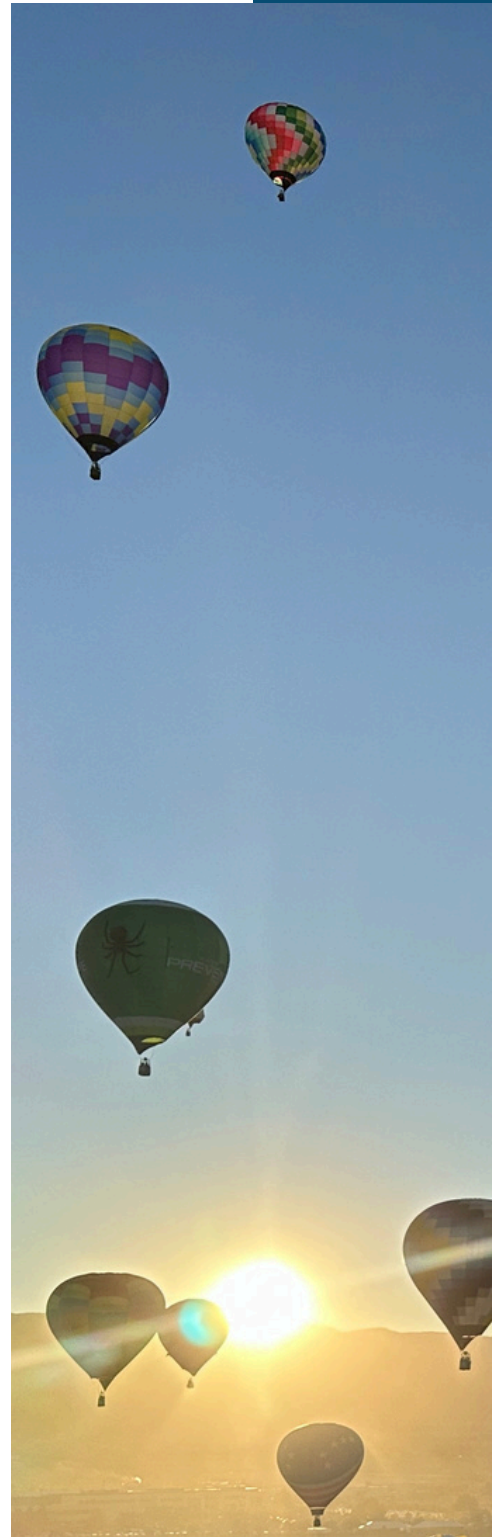
We're glad you've landed here with us for our 2025 event!

Our premiere hot air ballooning event originated in Western Nebraska in the 1980's and was 're-inflated' in 2015 after many years without an event. This year's 11th anniversary of the re-inflation will kick off in extra special fashion as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of our local Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC) by lighting up the skies of their campus with an evening balloon glow. Our festival weekend will be filled with an abundance of family-friendly events and entertainment for all ages from the spectacular morning mass balloon ascensions, a local craft fair, wiener dog races, evening balloon glows, drone show, and more!

A 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization, our event maintains a community-minded mission well grounded in our Western Nebraska roots.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 03 General Event Information
- 04 Schedule Overview
- 05 Frequently Asked Questions
- 08 Local Area Information
- 09 Competitive Flying
- 11 Ballooning Terminology
- 12 Our Contact Information





GENERAL INFORMATION



Mitchell Airfield

Primary Event Location

**60653 Mitchell South Rd
Mitchell, NE 69357**

Western Nebraska Community College

Host of the Opening Night Glow,
August 14

**1601 E. 27th Street
Scottsbluff, NE 69361**



Parking and Gates

Mass Ascensions: 5:30am

Night Glows: 5:30pm

See the [full schedule on our website](#) for more details



Event Passes

One low event pass price = fantastic value!

Purchasing an event pass gains access to all 2025 festival events for an entire carload. To purchase an event pass for tour buses, please email us at theoldwestballoonfest@gmail.com

2025 Event Passes are \$20

Three ways to PURCHASE EVENT PASSES:

1 Buy Passes Online

Get Tickets

2 In-Person

Event passes will be available for purchase at select event sponsor locations beginning on July 1, 2025

3 At the Gate

Event passes will be sold at the gates, but it's encouraged to purchase in advance online or in-person when possible.

Schedule Overview

A detailed schedule of events is available on our website Theoldwestballoonfest.com

THUR
14
AUG

NIGHT GLOW

Our 11th annual event kicks off with a night glow at Western Nebraska Community College as we share in celebrating their 100th anniversary.

FRI
15
AUG

MASS ASCENSION

Balloons take to the Western Nebraska skies just after sunrise for our first mass ascension of the festival weekend at Mitchell Airfield.

SAT
16
AUG

A FULL DAY OF FUN!

Morning: Mass Ascension from Mitchell Airfield

Daytime: Craft Fair and Wiener dog races

Evening: Night glow at Mitchell Airfield


SUN
17
AUG

MASS ASCENSION

The 2025 festival concludes with our closing morning Mass Ascension and Cowboy Worship Service at Mitchell Airfield.

The schedule of events and all activities for Old West Balloon Fest vary daily and are weather permitting. All festival events depend on prevailing weather conditions and are subject to delays or cancellations. Surface winds and winds aloft can vary greatly; maximum safe surface wind speeds are 8-10 mph. Although every effort is made for a successful balloon flight/glow, the safety of our pilots, volunteers, and spectators is our first priority. If extreme weather conditions exist, notices will be posted via our Facebook page and announced through Rural Radio 94.1. Remember that weather in Western Nebraska can change quickly and last-minute fly or no fly decisions have to be made. Many other activities are scheduled at Mitchell Airfield for you to enjoy!

Follow us on social and stay up to date!

 OldWestBalloonFest

The Old West Balloon Fest | Guest Guide

4

Frequently Asked Questions



Where is the festival located?

The Old West Balloon Fest takes place in Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska. In 2025, the opening balloon glow will take place at Western Nebraska Community College. The remainder of 2025 festival events will take place at Mitchell Airfield.

Western Nebraska Community College	Mitchell Airfield
1601 E. 27th Street Scottsbluff, NE 69361	60653 Mitchell South Rd Mitchell, NE 69357

What is the cost and where do I buy tickets?

2025 Festival Event Passes are \$20

One festival event pass is good for an entire carload and gains entry to all events throughout the full festival weekend. To inquire about pricing for tour buses please email us at theoldwestballoonfest@gmail.com

There are 3 ways to purchase event passes:

1. Buying Online
 - a. *We will begin mailing passes on June 1 and mail them through August 1, 2025*
2. In-Person sales will take place at our sponsor banks on July 1, 2025. For a complete list of our bank sponsors and locations, please visit our website.
3. *You may purchase passes at the gate, please plan on bringing cash.*

Event Passes are NON-REFUNDABLE.

When Should I Arrive?

Arriving early to events, especially most popular events such as the morning mass ascensions, is advisable. For morning mass ascensions, gates will open at 5:30am and for evening balloon glows, 5:30pm.

What do I wear and what is the weather like?

In the early mornings temperatures can be around 55°F, warming up to 80-90°F by mid-day. Dress in layers, including a jacket, with comfortable walking shoes. Most of the festival event grounds is mowed grass and has uneven surfaces. Bring sunscreen for after the sun is up and bug spray for the evening events.

How will I know whether or not the balloons will fly or glow?

All festival events depend on prevailing weather conditions and are subject to delays or cancellations. Decisions regarding mass ascensions and balloon glows are made during the Pilot and Weather Briefings. If changes to the schedule are deemed necessary, announcements will be made on the balloon field as well as on [our Facebook page](#) and on Rural Radio 94.1. Taking a “wait and see” approach in coming to the balloon field until the announcement is made may result in arriving too late and missing the balloons in all their glory.

In ballooning, last-minute decisions to fly or not to fly are based on prevailing and predicted weather. The safety of our pilots, volunteers, and the public are a priority for The Old West Balloon Fest.

Is there seating available?

Seating is not provided near the balloon launch and glow field(s), so bringing a lawn chair or blanket is encouraged if you wish to sit while viewing the balloons. There will be a limited number of tables and folding chairs near the food vendors in the hospitality tent.

Can I park an RV at the festival?

RVs can be parked within our general parking at the festival; however, they may not stay overnight. Please reach out to our festival staff prior to the festival if you are considering parking an RV.

Are there places to eat?

Yes! There will be numerous food trucks and community organizations serving a variety of foods and beverages. A complete list of food and beverage vendors will be available on our website July 1, 2025.

Is smoking or vaping allowed?

Absolutely no smoking or vaping is allowed at the festival. No smoking includes electronic cigarettes. The hot air balloons use propane and an open flame to fly. This presents a dangerous situation for everyone. Please respect the safety of festival participants.

Are pets allowed at the festival?

The only animals allowed are ADA service animals that are specially trained for a specific job or task. Any other animal that does not qualify as a service animal under the ADA is not allowed on the balloon field. Emotional support animals are not classified as service animals. Please do not leave your pet in your vehicle. Summer temperatures heat up quickly and the safety of your beloved pet is primary.

Can I talk to the pilots?

Absolutely! The balloon pilots are very happy to explain the process of inflating and flying their balloons. Please be mindful and stay clear of the inflator fans, balloon fabric (*called the envelope*), and the flames as the balloons are preparing for takeoff.

Don't forget to ask pilots for an official balloon trading card!



Are paid balloon rides available?

A very limited number of paid ride spots are available for the festival dates and will fill quickly. To reserve your spot, please contact The Old West Balloon Fest via email: theoldwestballoonfest@gmail.com

Are there other things to do at the Festival?

The Old West Balloon Fest will have a discovery center where you can learn about the science behind hot air ballooning, pick up your free program, and purchase official festival merchandise.

Can I fly my drone to capture the event?

Come enjoy the festival but leave your drone at home. For the safety of the balloon operators and spectators, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has established a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) area that will make the Old West Balloon Fest a No Drone Zone. Only official drone operators who have received permission from the FAA and the festival will be able to conduct drone operations.

Could I arrange attendance for a tour group?

Yes! We are happy to discuss group tour options for our festival. We kindly ask that you connect well in advance of festival dates:

theoldwestballoonfest@gmail.com

How can I volunteer?

The Old West Balloon Fest, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, relies on hundreds of volunteers to make this family-friendly, fun, community event a success. Volunteers help in all areas, including balloon chase crews, parking attendants, ticket sales, and kids camp support, to name a few.

If you would like to volunteer, please visit: <https://theoldwestballoonfest.com/volunteers/>

Still have a question?

Reach out to us via our [contact us page](#), and we will respond as soon as possible.

What can I do during the day?

Hot air balloons do not fly during the day due to the heat. This is the perfect time to visit the many attractions in our community. Visit [Scotts Bluff National Monument](#) or hike the many trails around [Wildcat Hills](#). Explore [Legacy of the Plains Museum](#), [Riverside Discovery Center](#), or attend one of our local theaters. Experience our unique local dining scene, shopping, or visit one of our local breweries and wineries. Scotts Bluff County has so much to offer.



Area Attractions



[View Website](#)

Shopping



[View Website](#)

Food and Beverages



[View Website](#)

Accommodations



[View Website](#)



COMPETITION FLYING

Competition ballooning follows the standard rules established by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI). These rules outline the tasks that can be included in a competition and the criteria for determining the champion pilot. In the United States competition ballooning is sanctioned and regulated by the Balloon Federation of America. The BFA has a division called the Hot Air Balloon Competition Division that is comprised of a board of directors who regulate competition flight at the local, state and National level.

Competition ballooning requires a flying set of pre-determined tasks. Each flight includes several tasks, which are determined prior to takeoff by the event director after evaluating weather conditions and other factors. The tasks may consist of flying to a target on the ground or flying through virtual targets in the air. Virtual targets are scored using a GPS device. Competition flights emphasize skillful maneuvering. Pilots must navigate their balloons over a designated course with specific goals, targets, scoring zones, and time or distance constraints.



US National Hot Air Ballooning Championships 2026-2028

Scotts Bluff County will host the US National Hot Air Ballooning Championships 2026-2028. Many competitors will participate in The Old West Balloon Fest in 2025 to practice for nationals and familiarize themselves with the competition area.

Determining a national champion that can move on to the world competition starts at the local level. Sanctioned BFA competitions are held in smaller communities and at the state level. The scores awarded to competitors are reported to the BFA and become part of the National Eligibility List or NEL. In order for task scores to qualify for submission for inclusion to the NEL, ALL of the following conditions must be met during competition:

- A minimum of six (6) HACD cardholders must be registered, present and 50% of the pilots must be flying the tasks called.
- 50% or more of the total pilots registered (competitive field) must launch.
- A minimum of six (6) of the registered pilots must fly.

The qualifying scores are submitted throughout the year to the NEL manager, compiled, and the top 50 pilots are invited to fly in the US National Hot Air Balloon Championships.

COMPETITION FLYING

Key Factors in Competing

Wind Speed and Direction:

Pilots need to accurately assess the wind's speed, direction, and strength, while also predicting any forecast changes. Wind direction is typically linked to altitude, wind can change direction at different altitudes. Knowing this information is determined by a pi-ball (helium-filled balloon). The pilot takes note of which direction the helium balloon goes at different altitudes so that they can determine a flight plan

Reading a Map and onboard instruments:

The pilots must have a good understanding of the competition area based on the rules of the competition. Most pilots fly with instruments that have specific target locations on an electronic device. There are other instruments that tell the pilot how fast they are traveling, how fast they are ascending and descending, and the temperature inside the balloon.

Team Collaboration:

Although a hot air balloon is controlled by a single pilot, teamwork plays a critical role in the competition. A ground crew is essential for retrieval of the balloon, and their accurate information from the ground helps the pilot navigate through the race.

Controlling the Balloon:

The only way to control a hot air balloon is by operating the burner and vent (the opening in the top of the balloon that releases hot air). The pilot must be able to accurately maneuver the balloon to the target without over-burning or venting too much.

How do you determine who wins the competition?

Scoring Points:

Points are awarded for each task, and the balloon with the highest score wins. There are several tasks that are possible to score. The event director determines which tasks to call based on wind speed and direction. Those tasks are given to the pilot during pilot briefing.

Scoring Results:

Results of competitors are calculated by the distance between their markers and goals or targets. A pilot who drops his marker closest to the target will be scored the most points.



Ballooning Terminology



MASS ASCENSION

The Mass Ascension is when all balloons take off from the same location in a coordinated launch.



STATIC

A static display may take place on the balloon field when the weather has not been deemed safe for flight.



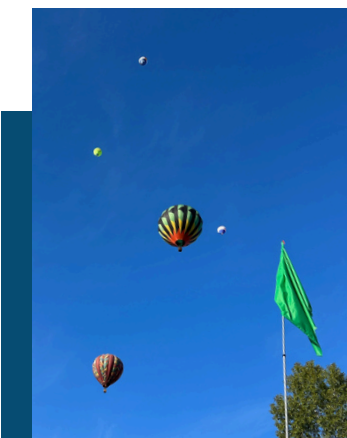
GLOW

A Glow is a display of balloons after sunset where their burners illuminate the envelope. They do not fly.



CANDLESTICK

A Candlestick is when a basket and burner system are set up and flames are used to create the show.



WEATHER FLAG

Green: Field is open for flight
Yellow: Weather hold
Red: Unsafe flight conditions for balloon flight



CHASE CREW

The Chase Crew is a volunteer flight crew that helps launch, chase, and retrieve the balloon.



Our Contact Information

Get in touch with Us!



<https://theoldwestballoonfest.com/>



[OldWestBalloonFest](#)



theoldwestballoonfest@gmail.com



Mailing Address
P.O. Box 251
Mitchell, NE 69357



Mitchell Airfield
60653 Mitchell South Rd, Mitchell, NE 69357