COMMENTS BY WAYNE OVERBECK, N6NB, REGARDING RECENT CHANGES TO ARRL VHF CONTEST RULES AND WHEN THEY WILL BE APPLIED

_____

On Thursday, January 22, 2015 2:39 AM, "Overbeck, Wayne" <woverbeck@Exchange.FULLERTON.EDU> wrote:

I'd like to thank Duffey (KK6MC) for spreading the news that the ARRL Board of Directors has approved the new VHF contest rules in essentially the same form as the draft proposal that was placed online for public comment in the fall. (I understand that there has been some fine-tuning and wordsmithing in response to suggestions from the amateur community.)

There could well be a lot of confusion this weekend under the old "new" rules--and again in June under a very different set of even newer rules that have now been approved by the ARRL board. Here's what has happened, as best I can decipher it.

A new set of rules was announced in December for the January contest. Those rules will apply ONLY in January. Still another set of rules (the ones just approved by the ARRL board) will go into effect in June.

During January 2015 (this weekend) here are the highlights of what is new:

*Three new categories are being created: single operator high power unlimited, single operator low power unlimited and single operator portable unlimited.

*In those three categories and in the multioperator categories, "assistance" will be allowed. But rovers who use assistance will be moved to the unlimited rover category where they will be ineligible for the club competition.

*Assistance is limited to passive monitoring of spotting information, with no "self-spotting" allowed.

Starting in June 2015, here is what will happen:

*The three new "unlimited" categories being created for the January contest will cease to exist. Those three categories will be in effect for only one contest.

*"Self-spotting" will not only be allowed--it will be encouraged as a way of increasing interest in the contests. It will be okay to self-spot on the internet, via repeaters, via email and telephone. Anyone can monitor anyone else's spots by any means, including APRS. If those who control a repeater or an online reflector don't mind, it will be okay to post or announce something like, "this is N6NB/R. I just arrived on Frazier Mountain, DM04ms, and I'm looking for contacts on 144.220" or "I'm QRV.

*EVERYONE in all categories, including rovers, will be free to use assistance under a very broad new definition of assistance.
on WSJT right now. Anybody wanna run with me?" Anyone can monitor and post in any amateur or non-amateur medium of communication.

***

My reaction to this: it is clearly intended to stimulate a new level of interest in VHF+ contests. There is a precedent for this in how the 10 GHZ and Up Contest works in California and adjoining states. For many years most of the real-time coordination has been on an inter-linked repeater network (the Cactus system), at the invitation of the system's management. If you monitor Cactus during the 10 GHz contest, what you will hear may sound like chaos, but it's a well-disciplined kind of chaos. Everybody makes really brief announcements of their location and availability. It's impossible to listen for long without getting caught up in the enthusiasm. It's fast and intense. You have to be quick to get a word in edgewise. It's NOT boring.

The result: More logs are often received (with more unique call signs in them) from the sixth call area than from any other call area. That is almost never true in the other VHF contests. The bands are w-a-y too quiet out here during most VHF contests. Unless six meters is open, VHF contests are almost never fast and intense out here.

I'd like to thank W9XA, the chairman of the board-level VHF Contest Revitalization Committee, for moving so quickly to get this proposal to the Board of Directors. Thanks to the board for addressing the concerns of the VHF community and unanimously approving this first step in the process of stimulating interest in VHF contests.

73, Wayne Overbeck, N6NB
...a licensed VHF contest-watcher for 58 years