



File Code: 5100; 5700

Date: April 17, 2015

Route To:

Subject: Unmanned Aircraft Systems, Direction and Additional Guidance

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

This letter will provide the field with direction and additional guidance in support of the recent correspondence (March 27, 2015) from the Chief's Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Letter.

A UAS is an "aircraft" as defined in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) authorizing statutes and is therefore subject to regulation by the FAA. Forest Service policy states UAS must be considered the same as manned aircraft, in terms of acquisition, approval and carding of pilots and aircraft, inspections, maintenance, avionics, training, and operations. Where this manual or FSH 5709.16 states aircraft, this must include UAS. The acquisition or lease of UAS (of any size) will be approved by the Washington Office Director, Fire and Aviation Management.

The Agency plans to support a limited number of UAS missions on National Forest System Lands utilizing partners and cooperators.

All UAS Missions

- All UAS operations shall adhere to FAA UAS regulations.
- Federal Partners – Forest Service units may use UAS approved by Federal Partners for specific special missions without re-inspection.
- An approved agreement/MOU specific to UAS operations is required to utilize Federal Partner/ Cooperator aircraft on Forest Service system land and for Forest Service benefit.
- Cooperators – Use of cooperator operator/UAS shall be approved by official letter by the Regional Aviation Officer (RAO), FSM 5712.41.
- All UAS operations, activities, concerns, or requests shall be coordinated through the Regional Aviation Officer (RAO). This includes resource (non-incident) and incident operations and any clarification of hobby or recreational use of remote controlled aircraft on Forest Service lands.
- The RAO shall be notified prior to Federal Partner/Cooperator resource (non-incident) and incident UAS operations.
- In addition to FAA requirements, commercial UAS operations may require a special use authorization from the local Forest consistent with 36 CFR 251 and FSM and FSH direction.

- The FAA has advised the Forest Service that news media must meet requirements for civil operations (non-governmental) and may not fly under model aircraft operations guidelines.
- SAFECOMs shall be used to report any condition, observation, act, maintenance problem or circumstance with personnel or the aircraft (UAS) that has the potential to cause an aviation-related mishap.
- UAS use through end-product contracts have additional considerations and should not be used to circumvent the direction in this letter. End-product contracts shall be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Regional Aviation Officer.

Resource missions (non-incident)

- An approved Project Aviation Safety Plan (PASP) is required for all resource (non-incident) aviation missions.

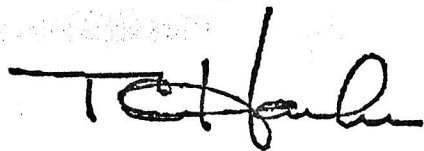
Incident (fire and fire management)

- Incidents must be Unified Command (Forest Service and Federal Partner, state or local agency). The cooperator shall retain operational control.
 - In situations of Unified Command, if the Federal Partner/Cooperator agency orders the UAS they are considered to have “operational control” of the aircraft and may be utilized under their authority to accomplish the unified mission.
- Incident UAS use shall be coordinated through the incident commander.

All employees must be aware of the Federal regulations and Forest Service policy for the acquisition and use of UAS.

The UAS advisory group website provides extensive resources to for reference. <http://www.fs.fed.us/science-technology/fire/unmanned-aircraft-systems>. Additional Agency communication material can be found at: http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/fs.html

The direction and guidance in this letter expires December 31, 2015, or when rescinded.



TOM HARBOUR
Director FAM

cc: Maria Knott, Art Hinaman, Paul Linse, Drag Sharp, Engineering, Research and Development, Acquisition Management, Regional Fire Directors, Aviation Branch Chiefs, Walker Craig, Tom Ricks, John Nelson, Gary Sterling, Rock Parrilla