



USDA FOREST SERVICE – FIRE AND AVIATION MANAGEMENT

NATIONAL HELICOPTER NIGHT FLYING OPERATIONS

STEERING COMMITTEE

CHARTER

Background

In 2010, the US Forest Service (FS) completed a Helicopter Night Operations (HNO) Study that reviewed the previous and current use of helicopters in support of helicopter night firefighting, analyzed available technology, and completed a risk assessment for helicopter night missions. The missions identified were:

- Water and retardant dropping, using a fixed tank with ground fill
- Aerial supervision
- Emergency medical transport (Hoist)
- Aerial ignition with plastic sphere dispenser

The risk assessment identified and categorized all hazards to be classified as Section 5 (c), FAA Circular 120-92. The Risk Assessment process determined that 130 mitigation measures would need to be implemented to establish and to maintain a FS helicopter night flying operations program.

The Chief of the Forest Service decided to implement helicopter night flying operations beginning in 2013 in Southern California. To implement the Chief's decision and develop and establish a National Helicopter Night Flying Operations Program, the Director of Fire and Aviation Management (FAM) has chartered the National Helicopter Night Flying Operations Steering Committee (HNOSC). The focus of the HNOSC initially will be in Southern California Forest Service- protected lands, including communities and homes within and adjacent to the Angeles, Cleveland and San Bernardino National Forests and the southern half of the Los Padres National Forest. Helicopter Night Flying Operations currently consists of coordination with the existing cooperators in five counties and two cities: Kern County, Santa Barbara County, Los Angeles County, Orange County, Ventura County, Los Angeles City and San Diego City through established fire suppression support agreements.

The Chief of the Forest Service has determined that initially the FS will contract one helicopter equipped to drop water and retardant only and augment local cooperator night flying capability. Future mission capability may expand to include the other missions identified above.

Name

The name of the committee hereinafter referred to as the **National Helicopter Night Flying Operations Steering Committee** of the Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management (FAM) program.

Authority

The Committee is established pursuant to the authorities granted by the Director of Fire and Aviation Management.

The deliberations of this Committee are exempt from the Federal Advisory Committee Act under section 204 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995.



The Committee receives leader's intent and direction from the Director of Fire and Aviation Management and reports to the Assistant Director of Aviation through the Branch Chief, Aviation Operations.

The Chair of the Committee is authorized to convene meetings, schedule agenda items, make contacts, negotiate work assignments, make commitments on behalf of the Committee, may charge members or technical specialists with tasks, create working groups and task teams, or commit such resources as available within the Committee or as authorized by the Director of Fire and Aviation Management.

Purpose

The HNOSC is chartered to develop and establish a Forest Service national helicopter night flying operations program.

Helicopter night flying operations will be a national program, management and oversight will occur at the national and regional levels. Region 5 will implement the program at the Forest level.

The HNOSC provides oversight for helicopter night operations in support of FS fire suppression; rotor wing aircraft mission requirements, rotor wing aircraft performance, associated acquisitions, operational compatibility, and operational policies and procedures for firefighting aircraft and ground firefighting operations.

The HNOSC will recommend night flying FS policy, operational procedures, standards, quality assurance, mission requirements, aircraft, NVG equipment and support services specifications for acquisition.

The HNOSC will address the risks, hazards and mitigations identified by the HNO Study's Safety Impact Analysis and Risk Assessment. The HNOSC will work with other federal agencies, aviation specialists and maintenance experts to ensure compliance with Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) and agency policy.

Organization and Membership

The HNOSC is composed of:

- Helicopter Program Manager – WO Boise - HNOSC Co-Chair
- Regional Aviation Officer – R5 Co- Chair
- Regional Aviation Officer- RAO Council designated
- Special Projects Program Specialist – WO HQ
- Branch Chief, FAM Budget & Planning – WO HQ
- Aviation Safety Inspector, Airworthiness – WO
- Regional Aviation Safety Manager - R5
- Regional Aviation Safety Manager – RASM Council designated
- Regional Helicopter Inspector Pilot – R5
- Rotor Wing Standardization Pilot – WO Boise

A Technical Specialist Working Group will support the HNOSC as required by tasking. These positions may include but are not limited to Branch Chief National Aviation Safety Management Systems; Regional/Forest Fire Operations Program Manager; Helicopter Operations Specialist; Aviation Safety Inspector, Avionics; Contracting Officer, Aviation Technology Specialist and DOI Aviation Specialist.

The Helicopter Program Manager – WO Boise is designated as the Helicopter Night Flying Operations Program Manager for the duration of this Charter.



The terms of tenure will be for the duration of this charter for the HNOSC. Technical Specialist Working Group members will be assigned as needed. The chairs are authorized to convene meetings and to schedule agenda items. The chairs are also authorized to make contacts, negotiate work assignments, make commitments on behalf of the HNOSC, and to commit such resources as are available within the Working Group or as authorized by the Director of FAM.

Responsibility

The HNOSC has the primary responsibility of developing the National Helicopter Night Flying Operations program.

HNOSC:

- Responsible for the development of an HNO action plan with deadlines to address all mitigations listed in the HNO Study's Safety Impact Analysis.
- Develop a first year and subsequent year budgets, submitting the program of work on time.
- Responsible for determining and directing helicopter operation requirements between the FS, vendor companies, cooperators and FAA to ensure safe and efficient helicopter NVG night firefighting operations.
- Support National management oversight and continued evaluation of the NVG night operations program, executed to accomplish Agency aviation objectives.

HNOSC Chairs:

- Provide program direction, leadership, and management of the HNOSC, including coordination of HNOSC activities with the RAO and RASM councils, other staffs, agencies and groups. In addition, the HNOSC will develop project and operational plans, budget requests, draft policy and quality assurance plans.
- Contact and coordination point for industry groups and cooperating agencies, regarding contract HNO helicopter approvals and operations.

Aviation Safety:

- Implement Day of Operational Risk Assessment (DORA) use for all aspects and phases of the HNO program.
- Responsible for oversight and for determining that all safety management systems are in place, see that risk assessments are produced and that hazard mitigations are used and understood by all parties involved on the night firefighting operations.
- Develop and maintain a Safety Management System process that links all duties and operations involved in firefighting (air and ground support), aircraft mission requirements, aircraft performance, aircraft and systems maintenance, operational compatibility, and operational policies and procedures for firefighting aircraft and ground firefighting operations.

Airworthiness and Avionics:

- Responsible for determining all aircraft and support systems meet or exceed FS and FAA airworthiness requirements and to coordinate all FS required inspections and approvals in accordance with FAA approved inspections.



- Perform National and Regional Aviation program airworthiness quality assurance, inspections, and evaluations to support FS and cooperator HNO.
- Evaluate compliance with FS policy and Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR) with respect to airworthiness, maintenance, preventive maintenance, and alteration programs.
- Prepare and review technical specifications for aircraft, night vision equipment, aircraft equipment / modifications, maintenance, and inspection requirements.

Rotor Wing Standardization Pilot:

- Responsible for determining pilot training requirements and Practical Test Standards associated with NVG pilot training.
- Coordinate pilot approval with regional/interagency pilot inspector.
- Coordination and oversight of FS and vendor pilot certification requirements and all applicable FAA requirements involved in NVG night firefighting operations.
- Responsible for the development of content and methodology and implementation of a night operations helicopter pilot and training program.
- Identify and approve qualified helicopter NVG pilots.
- Maintain current listings, including all mission and aircraft authorizations of all inspector pilots.

Deliverables

The HNOSC will:

Develop and submit to the Branch Chief, Aviation Operations and the Assistant Director of Aviation a National HNO action plan, with estimated costs and options on a timeline established by the Assistant Director of Aviation. The action plan will outline how mitigations will reduce identified risks to an acceptable level. The plan will be approved by the Director of FAM.

Develop a National HNO Program which consists of FS policy, program and operational procedures and standards and is consistent with and compatible with the FARs and FIRESCOPE Night Flying Guidelines.

The HNOSC will recommend and submit any policy, guides or plans to the RAO and RASM Councils, Aviation Branch Chiefs and Assistant Director of Aviation for review.

Approval of policy will be by the Deputy Chief State and Private Forestry. Approval of HNO operational plans or guides will be by the Director of FAM.

Develop a first year budget and work plan within constraints established by the Director of FAM. The budget will be reviewed by the Branch Chief, Aviation Operations and Assistant Director of Aviation and approved by the Director of FAM.

The HNOSC will review existing approval letters with the appropriate cooperators to ensure that FS policy, procedures and standards are included in the agreements.

The HNOSC will establish a Quality Assurance process and plan for the entire night flying operations program, including the planning phase through the establishment of FS night flying, taking into account the use of cooperator aircraft on FS protected land.

The HNOSC will document meeting highlights including HNOSC decisions. Meeting notes will be emailed to the Assistant Director of Aviation and National Aviation Team Branch Chiefs.

**Cooperation and Coordination**

The Committee will cooperate and coordinate with interagency partners and other key stakeholders as identified.

Steering Committee Life Limit

The HNOSC will sunset in 3 years from the recognized approval date, as stated below, unless re-chartered by the Director of FAM.

Charter Approval

This charter is effective as of the date of approval and shall remain in effect until revised or revoked.

Approved:

Tom Harbour
Director, Fire and Aviation Management

27 SEPT 12

Date: