

Drone (Unmanned Aircraft Systems) Use on National Forest Lands

Forest Service Unmanned Aircraft Systems Use Policy

There is federal legislation ([law](#)) that describes how, when, and where individuals can fly drones for recreational purposes. All persons are considered a recreational UAS user if they fly the aircraft (Drone) for fun. It is important to know when and where persons are allowed to fly UAS and how those aircraft must be registered. [Recreational Flyers & Modeler Community-Based Organizations](#) Link provides the most up to date information to assist with guidance when communicating with hobbyists.



Individuals and organizations that fly UAS for hobby or recreational purposes may not operate them in areas of National Forest System (NFS) lands that have [Temporary Flight Restrictions \(TFRs\)](#) in place, such as wildfires. Never fly your UAS over or near any wildfire or prescribed fire operation. UAS flights over fire operations disrupt aerial firefighting operations and create hazardous situations. The Forest Service regularly flies aircraft at low altitudes to perform natural resource management. It is the UAS Operator's responsibility to be aware of these flights and take the steps necessary to avoid them. Contact the local Ranger District Office or the FAA for scheduled flights in the area.

Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers

Recreational use of UAS in Wilderness is prohibited. UAS are considered aircraft according to the FAA and both "motorized equipment" and "mechanical transport" under Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. As such they cannot take off from, land in, or be operated from congressionally designated Wilderness Areas (see also Aeronautical Information Manual 7-4-6. Flights over Chartered U.S. Wildlife Refuges, Parks, and Forest Service Areas). Flying over wilderness is otherwise discouraged and not recommended.

*No commercial use of UAS in the Wilderness will be authorized. See Section 4 (c) in the Wilderness Act.
What are recreational Flyers?

The Exception for Limited Operation of Unmanned Aircraft ([USC 44809](#)) is the law that describes how, when, and where you can fly drones for recreational purposes. Following these rules will keep people, your drone and our airspace safe:

1. Fly only for recreational purposes (enjoyment).
2. Follow the safety guidelines of an FAA-recognized Community Based Organization (CBO).

Note: We have not yet begun officially recognizing CBOs. Recreational flyers are directed to follow the safety guidelines of existing aeromodelling organizations or use the FAA provided safety guidelines per [Advisory Circular 91-57B](#).

3. Keep your drone within the visual line of sight or use a visual observer who is co-located (physically next to) and in direct communication with you.
4. Give way to and do not interfere with manned aircraft.
5. Fly at or below 400' in controlled airspace ([Class B, C, D, and E](#)) only with prior authorization by using [LAANC](#) or [DroneZone](#).
6. Fly at or below 400 feet in Class G (uncontrolled) airspace.



for the greatest good

Note: Flying drones in certain airspace is not allowed. Classes of airspace and flying restrictions can be found on our [B4UFLY](#) app or the [UAS Facility Maps](#) webpage.



7. Take [The Recreational UAS Safety Test \(TRUST\)](#) and carry proof of test passage.
8. Have a current [registration](#), [mark](#) (PDF) your drones on the outside with the registration number, and carry proof of registration with you.
9. Do not operate your drone in a dangerous manner. For example:
 - a. Do not interfere with emergency response or law enforcement activities.
 - b. Do not fly under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Individuals violating any of these rules, and/or operating in a dangerous manner, may be subject to FAA enforcement action.

Commercial Use of UAS

Commercial use of NFS lands requires a special use authorization 36 CFR 251 Subpart B. For commercial UAS operators conducting their own business not for the Forest Service, but on NFS lands, there is no UAS specific special use authorization (SUA). UAS are tools or equipment of the trade and would be authorized under permits such as outfitter/guide or utility line and incorporated into an Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Plan. The operator of a UAS for business on NFS lands will need to have a special use permit for the activity that requires the use of a UAS.

Protect Wildlife & the Environment

- Do not fly over congressionally designated Wilderness or Primitive areas as many people seek these places for the opportunities for solitude and quiet that they provide.
- Do not fly over or near wildlife as this can create stress that may cause significant harm, and even death.
- Pursuit, harassment, or an intentional disturbance of animals during breeding, nesting, rearing of young, or other critical life history functions is prohibited unless legally approved as research or management.
- Follow state wildlife and fish agency regulations on the use of UAS to search for or detect wildlife and fish.
- Launch the UAS more than 100 meters (328 feet) from wildlife. Do not approach animals or birds vertically with the UAS.
- Birds are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and bald eagles are also protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act which, among restrictions for causing harm, also prohibits harassment and disturbance of bald and golden eagles.

See these websites for additional information:

[Wilderness Areas of the United States \(arcgis.com\)](#)

<https://umontana.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=a415bca07f0a4bee9f0e894b0db5c3b6>

[Recreational Drone Tips | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/visit/know-before-you-go/recreational-drone-tips>

[Recreational Flyers & Modeler Community-Based Organizations \(faa.gov\)](#)

https://www.faa.gov/uas/recreational_fliers/

USDA Forest Service is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



for the greatest good