



## Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Flights on Wildfires and Prescribed Fires Fact Sheet

**Note: This document is intended to provide information about UAS flights on wildfires and prescribed fires to U.S. Forest Service (FS) staff and Incident Management Team (IMT) members assigned to wildfires on National Forest System (NFS) lands. Policy and guidance are evolving and will be revised as necessary and appropriate. Comments and suggestions for improvement are welcome and encouraged and should be sent to Jami Anzalone at [jamianzalone@fs.fed.us](mailto:jamianzalone@fs.fed.us) and Jennifer Jones at [jejones@fs.fed.us](mailto:jejones@fs.fed.us)**

*UAS, commonly referred to as “drones,” are any aircraft flown without a pilot on board. All information on this fact sheet pertains to all types of UAS, including small devices for personal use available for purchase from hobby or retail stores.*

- All UAS, regardless of size or weight, are considered aircraft by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the FS. Consequently, these aircraft are subject to FAA regulations and FS policy pertaining to aircraft acquisition and operation. This includes UAS flown by U.S. Forest Service staff, cooperators, hobbyists, recreationists, news media, video and film production companies, and others.
- FAA approval is required for ***all*** pilots and organizations to fly UAS for other than hobby or recreation purposes in the National Airspace System (NAS). This includes FS staff seeking to fly any type of UAS on natural resource management missions on NFS lands. Additional information is available on the FAA Public Operations (Governmental) website at [http://www.faa.gov/uas/public\\_operations/](http://www.faa.gov/uas/public_operations/) and the FAA Civil Operations (Non-Governmental) website at [http://www.faa.gov/uas/civil\\_operations/](http://www.faa.gov/uas/civil_operations/)
- UAS may not be flown within the boundaries of a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) area under any circumstances without prior approval by the FAA and the agency that requested the TFR from the FAA. Information regarding currently implemented TFRs in the U.S. is available at <http://tfr.faa.gov>
- FS units and IMTs are strongly encouraged to inform the public on a regular basis through a variety of means about the dangers associated with flying UAS over or near wildfires. Communication materials and tools that FS staff and IMT members can use are available at [http://www.nifc.gov/PIO\\_bb/fs.html](http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/fs.html)
- All individuals or organizations that fly UAS within a TFR without approval by the FAA and the agency managing the TFR should ***immediately*** be reported to Dispatch who will contact an FAA Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) to report a TFR intrusion.

IMTs should also file an Aviation Safety Communique (SAFECOM); report the incident to the FAA Aviation Safety Hotline online at [http://www.faa.gov/contact/safety\\_hotline](http://www.faa.gov/contact/safety_hotline) or by telephone at 1-866-835-5322 (option 4); and consider contacting agency law enforcement staff. Information for agency law enforcement staff is available online at [www.faa.gov/uas/law\\_enforcement](http://www.faa.gov/uas/law_enforcement) Any news release issued about a TFR intrusion should be coordinated with the FAA.

- All UAS operations, activities, concerns, or requests on NFS Lands shall be coordinated through the FS Regional Aviation Officer (RAO) (see list at the end of this document). All decisions to allow individuals or organizations to fly UAS over a wildfire or prescribed fire should be made collaboratively by the FAA (through their public and civil operations processes), the agency administrator, the incident commander, and unit and incident aviation management staff.
- Cooperators that have obtained all required FAA approvals may be approved to fly their UAS over wildfires or prescribed fires on NFS lands in accordance with National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group guidance on the Interagency Fire Use of UAS (NMAC Correspondence #2014-12, available at <http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/administrative/nmac/index.html>); the FS Chief's Letter on UAS (March 27, 2015), available at [http://www.nifc.gov/PIO\\_bb/fs.html](http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/fs.html) (URL), and; the FS UAS, Direction and Additional Guidance (April 17, 2015) available at [http://www.nifc.gov/PIO\\_bb/fs.html](http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/fs.html)
- Incident Commanders and other IMT members do not have the authority to permit a hobbyist or recreationist to fly a UAS within a TFR. Any hobbyist or recreationist requesting permission to fly a UAS within a TFR should be directed to contact the FAA.
- The FAA has determined that news media, as well as video and film production companies, are considered Civil Operations (Non-Governmental), which require FAA approval and cannot fly UAS under hobby/recreation use guidelines. Additional information is available at <http://www.faa.gov/uas/faq/#qn20> and in the "Protocols to Respond to News Media and Video and Film Company Requests to fly UAS on NFS Lands" document at [http://www.nifc.gov/PIO\\_bb/fs.html](http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/fs.html)
- All news media and video and film production companies that have received FAA approvals and seek to launch, operate, and/or land UAS on NFS land must request a special use authorization from the FS, which will be evaluated in accordance with agency and FAA requirements to determine if use will be approved. News media and video and film production companies should contact the FS office located nearest to the area where they want to fly an UAS for additional information.
- For more information, visit the FS website <http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/aviation/uas.html> or intranet site (FS employees only) <http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/fire/fam/aviation/uas/index.htm> or contact a FS aviation staff

member or FS UAS Advisory Group Chair Brad Quayle at [bquayle@fs.fed.us](mailto:bquayle@fs.fed.us) or 801-975-3737.

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