



Drones: Do and Don't

Hobby use of unmanned aircraft systems (also known as drones) is becoming more popular as recreationists seek creative ways to capture the extensive visual beauty of public lands. However, there are important rules, regulations, and best practices that drone operators should be familiar with before flying. These tips are intended for recreational drone users only; researchers and commercial operators may be subject to additional rules and regulations. Get in touch with land managers working with the public lands where you have planned a flight.

DO: Know agency policies for where you're flying.

- Many BLM lands in Utah border other federal and state lands. Familiarize yourself with the policies of the USDA Forest Service, National Park Service, or other land management agencies you may fly over before crossing boundaries.
- Even within BLM Utah lands, drone policies may differ due to special designations (such as wilderness study areas or monuments). See below for more information.

DON'T: Launch or land your drone in designated wilderness.

- Designated wilderness is protected by Section 4(c) of the 1964 Wilderness Act. The public is prohibited from landing, taking off, or operating a drone within wilderness unless such aircraft use is specifically described in a particular wilderness area's enabling legislation.

DO: Respect other living beings on public land.

- Many people visit public lands to enjoy solitude and quiet. Consider how flying your drone over developed recreation sites, campsites, and trails might impact others' enjoyment of the landscape. Follow [guidelines for neighborly drone](#) use in order to respect others' privacy.
- Wildlife on public lands is protected by law. It is illegal to harass animals with a drone. It is particularly important to give space to birds you're sharing airspace with. If an animal notices you or your drone, it is a sign that you are too close.

DON'T: Fly drones near wildfires.

- When a drone is in the airspace over or near a fire, wildland fire managers may have to ground aerial firefighting resources until the airspace is clear, delaying important firefighting work and risking firefighters' lives.
- Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) are typically put in place during wildfires to keep the skies clear for firefighting. It is illegal to operate a drone where a TFR is in place. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) handles TFRs and updates the list of them here: <https://tfr.faa.gov/tfr2/list.html>

DO: Know what policies apply to the height at which you're flying.

- The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) provides regulation and guidance governing drones in airspace; however, the BLM regulates drones while they are on or immediately over the ground. When they are involved in any phase of take-off or landing, drone users must follow Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) regulations as defined in [43 CFR 8340](#). This means that you must launch and land your drone on designated routes only.
- If you are planning a flight that will take place at 400 feet or higher, you may need to contact the FAA and obtain an authorization to do so.

Resources

- BLM Travel and Transportation Management Manual: [BLM Manual 1626 \(Section 6.10\)](#)
- Code of Federal Regulations (BLM Off-Highway Vehicles): [43 CFR 8340](#)
- Federal Aviation Administration & Drones: <https://www.faa.gov/uas>
 - o Current TFRs: <https://tfr.faa.gov/tfr2/list.html>
- Guidelines for Neighborly Drone Use: www.knowbeforeyoufly.org