



United States Department of the Interior
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To: State Directors, District and Field Office Managers
From: Acting Assistant Director, Fire and Aviation
Subject: Appropriate use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)

There is growing interest throughout the Bureau to utilize UAS to accomplish or support agency work, and increasing pressure from private industry to demonstrate the capabilities of UAS technology which may benefit Bureau programs. The purpose of this document is to clarify existing departmental and bureau policy on the use of UAS and provide guidance to all employees.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is in the process of developing regulations that will enable commercial UAS operations to be integrated in the national airspace system. Operations of UAS under FAA Advisory Circular AC 91-57 (Radio Controlled Aircraft) are intended for hobbyists and not government or commercial operators. **Employees are not authorized to use personally owned UAS for any agency work.**

The overall responsibility for managing a UAS program and any operations within the Department of the Interior (DOI) rests with the Office of Aviation Services (OAS). Departmental policy for UAS operations is addressed in Operational Procedures Memorandum OPM-11. **All UAS are considered aircraft by the FAA and DOI. All aircraft and pilots utilized for Agency benefit must be approved by OAS.** The DOI OPM-11 can be located at:
http://www.doi.gov/aviation/library/opm_index.cfm

All Bureau of Land Management (BLM) UAS operations must be conducted under an FAA Certificate of Authorization (COA) or through the existing Memorandum of Agreement between DOI and the FAA. The method of authorization is determined at the national level by the BLM National Aviation Office (NAO), the National Operations Center (NOC), and OAS. The DOI and FAA agreement can be referenced at: <http://oas.doi.gov/library/ib/library/FY2014/IB1403.pdf>

The BLM procedures for planning projects and utilizing UAS for field work are provided in the National Aviation Plan (NAP), Sections 3.16 and 5.29. For wildland fire use of UAS, Chapter 16 of the 2015 Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Redbook) provides

supplemental guidance. All data requests should be routed to the appropriate State Office Remote Sensing contact, or the BLM NOC Geospatial Section. If it is determined that the requests can be met with a DOI aerial photography platform or a UAS, the request will then be routed to the respective Unit or State Aviation Manager where the project will occur. Proposals will then be forwarded to the NAO and OAS for further consideration. The approval process may take several months to be completed. A workflow diagram is provided in the NAP to illustrate the process. Additional coordination with the respective State Office Information Resource Management (IRM) staff and the NOC is required when remote sensing data will be downloaded and stored on the BLM server. The BLM National Aviation Plan can be located at: <http://www.blm.gov/nifc/st/en/prog/fire/Aviation/avlibrary.html>

All Bureau UAS operations in which a DOI agency or bureau has operational control require OAS approval of the aircraft and operators and an approved Project Aviation Safety Plan (PASP). The BLM Line Officers and Supervisors that utilize UAS for agency projects must be current with the appropriate Interagency Aviation Training (i.e. M-3 Aviation Management for Supervisors) as required in Office of Personnel Management OPM-4.

Procurement of UAS flight services or aircraft for Bureau use, regardless of size, weight or cost, must follow the established DOI acquisition processes as required by 353 DM1 and 2. **Procuring even small, lightweight, inexpensive UAS using a government credit card or micro-purchase authority is not authorized.** Those who operate UAS for Bureau projects must meet the training, certification, and currency standards for UAS operators as defined in OPM-11.

Cooperator UAS missions in which the Bureau retains operational control requires OAS approval of the cooperator aircraft and crew. Occasionally, a university or a State Cooperator agency may request permission to takeoff or land on DOI lands or conducting flights over public lands for remote sensing purposes. For these types of operations, the Cooperator shall follow bureau land use permitting procedures, and secure an FAA COA. A copy of the COA must be provided to the BLM State Aviation Manager (SAM) who will forward it to the BLM NAO and OAS for review prior to a permit being issued. The DOI will not sponsor a Cooperator COA or assume operational control for these types of missions.

It is essential for all employees to consult with their appropriate Unit or State Aviation Manager and refer to the policies referenced in this document in order to remain within the scope of one's employment and avoid deviations that may result in adverse disciplinary action. If you have any questions, please contact your respective BLM SAM, or call Gil Dustin, BLM National UAS Program Manager, at 208-387-5181.

Signed by:
Ron Dunton, acting
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