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News Release

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Fire Managers Urge Public Not To Fly Drones Over or Near Wildland Fire Operations to Ensure Safety of All

Williams, Ariz., Feb. 7, 2017—For Immediate Release. Kaibab National Forest officials along with all federal, state, and local wildland fire agencies are reminding members of the public not to fly “Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)” or drones over or near wildfire or prescribed fire operations at any time.

With fire season rapidly approaching, land managers are taking a proactive approach to alert recreationalists and forest users of the inherent dangers of flying drones near fire management activities. Unauthorized UAS flights can potentially cause serious accidents, disrupt aerial firefighting operations, and pose significant safety hazards to both the public and personnel working in the air and on the ground.

Air tankers and helicopters are valuable resources used to rapidly curtail the spread of unwanted wildfires that can often be very difficult to suppress. They are sometimes the deciding factor in successfully stopping a fast moving wildfire. These aircraft typically fly at very low altitudes and UAS interference can instantly stop operations requiring air resources to be grounded due to the potential for a midair collision. Unforeseen intrusions of this nature impede suppression efforts and compromise the safety of firefighting personnel. The impending consequences have the potential to threaten communities and endanger lives.

With interest and popularity rising steadily in this recreational activity, documented incidents of drone incursions on wildland fire incidents have doubled over the last two years and trends are indicating more of the same as the numbers of UAS sales continue to climb.

A number of websites are available to the public to obtain more information about UAS safe practices and Federal Aviation Administration requirements. For guidance see http://www.faa.gov/uas/model_aircraft/

Also, available is a UAS awareness campaign called “If You Fly, We Can’t” designed to keep UAS pilots away from airspace used by firefighters. See: <https://www.fs.fed.us/fire/aviation/uas.html>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KV18UJEAIZI>

To learn more or to report a safety-related UAS event, go to the FAA's Aviation Safety Hotline website at https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/aae/programs_services/faa_hotlines/

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