**For Immediate Release** **Contact**: Name; Phone number

**(UNIT NAME OR FIRE MANAGERS) URGE UAS, OR “DRONE”, OPERATORS TO AVOID (WILDFIRE NAME) FIRE AREA**

**BECAUSE “IF YOU FLY, WE CAN’T”**

 ***Month xx, (year)*** – (Unit Name or Fire Managers) urge individuals and organizations that fly Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), also known as “drones,” to stay away from the (Wildfire Name) Fire area to ensure the safety of firefighters and the effectiveness of wildfire suppression operations. The (Wildfire Name) Fire is located approximately (#) miles (direction) of (nearest community).

Aerial firefighting aircraft, such as Airtankers and helicopters, fly at very low altitudes,

typically just a couple of hundred feet above the ground, the same as UAS flown by individuals and organizations usually do. This creates the potential for a mid-air collision, or for a pilot distraction that could result in an accident, and seriously injure or kill aerial and/or ground firefighters. In addition, a UAS that loses its communication link could fall from the sky, causing serious injuries or deaths of firefighters on the ground.

Unauthorized UAS flights over or near the (Wildfire Name) Fire could lead fire managers to suspend aerial wildfire suppression operations – such as Airtankers dropping fire retardant and helicopters dropping water - until the UAS has left the airspace and they are confident it won’t return. Suspending air operations could decrease the effectiveness of wildfire suppression operations, allowing wildfires to grow larger, and in some cases, unduly threaten lives, property, and valuable natural and cultural resources. Suspended air operations can also delay transportation of firefighters to different locations and add to wildfire suppression costs.

“It may be hard for individuals and organizations who aren’t familiar with wildfire suppression operations to understand why it’s so dangerous for them to fly a UAS over or near the (Wildfire Name) Fire,” said (name), (title), (unit or incident management team name). “Firefighting aircraft typically fly in smoky, windy, and turbulent conditions. Safety depends on knowing what other aircraft are operating in the airspace and where they are at all times and this is compromised by the presence of unauthorized aircraft, including UAS.”

So far this year there have been at least (#) documented instances of individuals and organizations flying UAS without authorization over or near wildfires that has resulted in aerial firefighting operations being temporarily shut down on at least (#) occasions (see 2018 UAS Incursions graphic at <https://www.nifc.gov/drones/outreach.html> for current numbers and locations). In 2017, there were at least 38 documented instances of individuals and organizations flying UAS without authorization over or near wildfires in 12 states (Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming). This resulted in aerial firefighting operations being temporarily shut down on at least 26 occasions.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has imposed a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) over the (Wildfire Name) Fire area. Information about this TFR and others are available online at <http://tfr.faa.gov/tfr2/list.html> The TFR requires aircraft, manned or unmanned, that are not involved in wildfire suppression operations to obtain permission to enter specified airspace. The FAA and the USDA Forest Service consider all UAS, including those flown by members of the public for hobby or recreation purposes, to be aircraft and therefore subject to TFRs.

Individuals and organizations who fly UAS without authorization over or near wildfires may be violating federal, state, and/or local laws, regulations, and ordinances, whether a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) is in place or not. All unauthorized UAS flights over or near wildfires on National Forest System lands will be reported to the FAA and law enforcement agencies. Individuals who are determined to have interfered with wildfire suppression efforts may be subject to civil penalties of up to $20,000 and potentially criminal prosecution.

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