

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 14, 2017

Michael Huerta, Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 1022  
Washington, DC 20591

Ryan Zinke, Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

Tony Tooke, Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
Yates Building, 4 Central  
201 Fourteenth Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Administrator Huerta, Secretary Zinke and Chief Tooke,

For several years, we and our constituents have witnessed first hand the devastating impact forest fires have had on our communities. These natural disasters have forced families to abandon their homes on short notice, eviscerated the habitat of Oregon's native wildlife and scenic areas and are proving costly to contain.

Just this year, over 7.65 million acres have burned across Oregon and the western United States. Two fires, the Eagle Creek fire and the Chetco Bar fire, have been particularly damaging in our home state. Right now, one-third of all the acres burning in the west, 500,000 out of 1.5 million acres, are burning in Oregon alone.

These tragic yet foreseeable events make it necessary to explore all ways to better fight wildfires. Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) have the potential to help this effort significantly. UAS technology is being used today, and can be used more, to assess the seriousness of wildfire damage, gather information during large fires and create digital and infrared maps of the affected area. In addition, UAS technology can increase strategic and tactical awareness for firefighters and first responders and even identify the source of the fire. These technologies can also improve safety by identifying additional hazards as well as any infrastructure, property or wildlife that is in the path of a fast-moving fire.

In order to continue our efforts to deploy more UAS to fight wildfires and improve response times to suppress fires, could you provide us the following;

- A status update on how each of your agencies is implementing Section 2204 of the FAA Extension Act of 2016, Public Law 114-190, which Ranking Member DeFazio championed, directing the Federal Aviation Administration to enter into agreements with the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, as necessary, to continue the expeditious authorization of safe, unmanned aircraft system operations in support of firefighting operations.

- An update on how long it takes private industry to get approval, also known as Certificates of Authorization, for the use of a UAS to assist first responders, when approved by localities and relevant agencies.
- Whether your agencies have established a point of contact, staff phone number, mass email push or other resources for state and local governments and private entities to help provide and coordinate support, as well as encourage the use of UAS technologies in this way. Please be specific as to the efforts your agencies are undertaking to expand this useful technology.
- Lastly, if you or your agency staff have any recommendations as to how to expand the use of UAS technology in the context of wildfire fighting we would be very happy to receive those ideas.

Thank you for responding to this request. The overall gains of using UAS to fight wildfires, to improve data collection, to reduce the physical risk to first responders, and to allow for rapid response times to mitigate damage and extinguish fires faster, is well worth this effort. We look forward to continuing this effort with all of you.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
U.S. Senator



Peter DeFazio  
Member of Congress