Recreational Drone Use on Public Lands

Jennifer D. Allen
University of Montana, jennifer2.allen@umontana.edu

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Recreational Drone Use on Public Lands
Jennifer Allen, Jerry Townsend
& PTRM 484 Field Techniques Students
Instructor: Jennifer Thomsen

Background and Objectives
- Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) or drones have become a widespread issue due to the explosion in popularity in the last decade.
- Since personal drone usage is a relatively new enterprise there has been little research done on public perception of drones to inform management and policies.
- Drones can cause many issues including safety, privacy, and impacts to wildlife and resources.
- There are also many opportunities for drones to be used by public land managers for science, monitoring, and engaging with visitors in unique ways.

Methods and Study Sites
- Data was collected from October 17th-30th in 2017 in and around Caras Park, the Kim Williams Trail, and other public locations in Missoula.
- 267 individuals were survey using handheld tablets or paper surveys.
- Question topics included impacts from drones based on sight and sound, acceptability of drone use in different public lands, opportunities and concerns related to drones, and acceptability of different management actions.

Results: Opportunities
- Unique viewing of wildlife and resources
- Access to remote or sensitive sites
- Engaging youth and new audiences
- Wildlife and resource monitoring
- Drone racing and competitions
- Photography and video access
- Monitoring for illegal activities
- Engagement with audiences who can’t physically access site

Results: Concerns
- Lack of opportunities to fly
- Too expensive
- Too noisy
- Negative impacts on the visitor experience
- Negative impact on wildlife
- Don’t like seeing drones
- Security and privacy
- Lack of training and oversight
- Not safe

Recommendations
- Create drone tours that can capture unique footage of wildlife and landscapes.
- Create drone zones where drones can be flown to ensure appropriateness for drones use based on concerns identified.
- Offer online and local training and registration would be required to fly a drone in a drone zone to ensure safe flying and appropriate behavior.

Conclusions and Future Research
- Drone technology is constantly changing and policies should be informed by research.
- Drone management plans are needed to protect people’s privacy as well as wildlife and natural resources.
- Drones can be useful tools for managers to monitor resources and creatively engage with visitors.
- There is varied acceptability for different management options and for which types of public lands are appropriate for drone use.