Federal Aviation Administration

Press Release – FAA Asks for Public Input on UAS Test Site Selection

For Immediate Release

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WASHINGTON– The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) today asked for public input on the agency's selection process for six unmanned aircraft system (UAS) test sites. Once the pilot program is established, the agency expects it will provide valuable data to help the FAA safely and efficiently integrate UAS into the same airspace with manned airplanes.

"Unmanned aircraft can help us meet a number of challenges, from spotting wildfires to assessing natural disasters," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. "But these test sites will help us ensure that our high safety standards are maintained as the use of these aircraft becomes more widespread."

Through the National Defense Authorization Act and the 2012 FAA Reauthorization bill, Congress mandated that the FAA establish UAS test sites. In order to ensure that all factors are taken into consideration when choosing the six sites, the FAA has asked for comments from the UAS user community and the public at large. Specifically, the request for comment asks for input on several important questions, such as public versus private management of the sites, research activities and capabilities of the test areas, the requirements for test site operators, and the geographic and climate factors that should influence site selection.

The feedback obtained through this transparent process will help the FAA develop UAS test site requirements, designation standards and oversight activity. This will help the FAA design the process and criteria prior to issuing a request for proposals to select UAS test areas that will allow integration of these innovative aircraft into the National Airspace System by 2015. The FAA will accept comments for the next 60 days.

"The FAA has a proven track record of safely introducing new technology and aircraft into the NAS, and I am confident we will successfully meet the challenges posed by UAS technology," said FAA Acting Administrator Michael Huerta.

The UAS pilot program mandates the FAA select six test sites to do the following:

Safely designate airspace for integrated manned and unmanned flight operations in the national airspace system
Develop certification standards and air traffic requirements for unmanned flight operations at test ranges
Coordinate with and leverage the resources of the NASA and the Department of Defense

Address both civil and public unmanned aircraft systems
Ensure that the program is coordinated with the Next Generation Air Transportation System
Ensure the safety of unmanned aircraft systems and related navigation procedures before they are integrated into the national airspace system.

As part of the process, the FAA will consult with the Defense Department and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which already operate their own test ranges. The Defense and FAA reauthorizations do not provide any funding for these test sites.

Since 2005, the FAA has completed more than 50 research studies on UAS. The agency has access to hands-on experience with the various types of UAS and has partnerships with other government agencies, industry, and academia.

The FAA is working toward publication of a proposed rule on small UAS this year. The agency also has convened an Aviation Rulemaking Committee that includes a number of aviation and industry experts studying a wide range of UAS integration issues.

The request for comments, including instructions for filing comments, will be published in the *Federal Register*
on Friday, March 9.

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