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## FAA seeks comments on test sites for drones in U.S. airspace

*The agency says the sites will play a key role in providing data so it can allow unmanned aircraft to fly in national airspace along with manned airplanes.*

March 08, 2012 | By W.J. Hennigan, Los Angeles Times

Looking to take the next step in integrating drones into U.S. airspace, the Federal Aviation Administration has asked for public comments on the agency's selection process for picking unmanned aircraft system test sites.

The FAA said Wednesday that the sites will play a key role in providing data so the agency can allow drones to fly in national airspace along with manned airplanes. The agency will accept comments for the next 60 days.

Currently, drones are not allowed to fly in the U.S. except with special permission from the FAA. The agency has said that remotely piloted aircraft aren't allowed in national airspace on a wide scale because they don't have an adequate "detect, sense and avoid" technology to prevent midair collisions.

Drones have entered the worldwide spotlight with the U.S. government's increasing reliance on the technology in combat. But as technology becomes more advanced and demand increases for using drones in the commercial world, the FAA has worked to ease restrictions. It aims for drones to be fully integrated into national airspace by 2015.

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

In this year's FAA reauthorization legislation, Congress called for the agency to establish six drone test sites.

The FAA has asked the public to weigh in on issues 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."

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