

The Debate Over Unmanned Aerial Systems in Acadia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Chris Buczko, Environmental Protection Specialist, Acadia National Park

In February of 2014 park officials reviewed a research application requesting permission to fly a Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) within Acadia National Park. In the past twelve months there has been dramatic growth in the number and use of unmanned aircraft, sparking debate over the appropriate role of UAS's as research tools in national parks.

Rather than host a debate on the potential scientific application of UAS's, this poster seeks to advise researchers of the current policy for UAS use within national parks and discuss the multifaceted viewpoints of researchers, park officials, and visitors. This poster outlines the key elements of the debate and solicits your feedback

What can I do:

Bringing the UAS debate to the 2014 Science Symposium is an opportunity for researchers to ponder the scientific applications of UAS's and ask, 'how would you respond if one flew overhead while on your favorite hike?' What concerns would you have? What values do you think the NPS should consider when crafting a policy regulating UAS use within national parks?

What allowances should the NPS make for UAS use?
What limitations on UAS's do you think are reasonable for researchers?

While the National Park Service (NPS) was debating the merits of allowing UAS's to operate within parks, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) lost a court battle (FAA v. Pirker) over the right to regulate UAS's under the current rulemaking process. The vacuum of FAA regulations increased uncertainty for NPS officials who had relied on protocols established by the FAA.

While current NPS management policies describe a process for determining appropriate park uses, the NPS has issued a moratorium on UAS use within national parks until the potential impacts to park resources, park values, privacy, and the visitor experience can be evaluated. Until such time a policy is drafted, all UAS use within Acadia is prohibited.



Photo credit: virginia guide
UAS - slate.com