



U.S. Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management Briefing Paper



August 31, 2013

Topic: Use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) on Rim Fire

Issue: Initial report for the use of a California Army National Guard MQ-1 Predator aircraft on the Rim Fire.

Background: The Rim Fire started August 17th on the Stanislaus National Forest. On Sunday August 25th the Forest Service became aware there was the possibility of an Unmanned Aircraft getting deployed on the fire. On August 27th a Request for Assistance (RFA) was created by the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC).

The mission has a Certificate of Authorization from the FAA and the aircraft operates above the Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) of the incident. The operation is integrated with the Type I incident management team at the Command and General Staff level. However, the chain of command for resource ordering and accountability are unclear. There are several business areas that need further clarification to ensure efficient operations in the future. These involve financial responsibility, ordering, reporting process and chain of command beyond the local IMT operations.

The mission is being executed with no immediate negative impacts to safety, operations, or the fire fighters and is providing some useful information in real-time/near real-time. However, there are significant limitations of the data that need to be addressed for future missions.

Tasking is shifting from a static task of perimeter mapping to monitoring dynamic fire information and providing 'over-watch' support. Aircraft employment is slowly shifting from 'flying the fire' into a more structured/managed process thru coordination with Operations. The team has identified missions and priorities that guide Predator operations. The Predator unit operates under direct control of 'CalFire' and coordinating with Team (OPS/IC) thru a CALFIRE Liaison.

Dissemination is limited primarily to C&G Staff. Streaming video is available at air ops, IC and Ops. GIS related data is provided via 'sneaker-net' to the Situation Unit for use in GIS based mapping products, Tactical reports are filtered thru Operations Chief (C&G level) and then disseminated to field.

Key Points:

- The aircraft is flying and live information is available to the Incident Management Team.
- It is very likely this kind of request and mission will occur more frequently.
- Mission requirements need to be developed and documented.
- Additional work will be required to fully integrate into wildland fire operations.
- The Incident Management Team has completed an initial after action report.
- A detailed lessons learned report has been started which will include areas for improvement.

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