



Drone Rules for the Outdoorsman

The sky isn't the only limit for these fast-evolving devices.

Over land or sea, drones provide a fresh look at Florida. Above: Horses roam a cattle lease that is also a popular hunting area. Right: Up, up and away.

Using drones in the pursuit of fish and game has raised legal and ethical issues that are being debated all over North America. This relatively new technology has given rise to questions about what the term "fair chase" means to the modern outdoorsman. In an effort to level the playing field, many states have already enacted fairly strict policies on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in both hunting and fishing.

In Florida, for example, it would be illegal to set up your duck blind and then send out a drone to the other end of the lake to flush up birds in the hopes they would fly your way. Florida rules prohibit the use of aircraft (manned or unmanned) to take, drive or herd wildlife (Rule 68A-12.002(7), FAC).

However, if you went to the lake a day

before the season opens, you could send a drone out to find where the ducks were currently feeding so you would know where best to set your blind.

You are out fishing and have anchored up over a reef. Off in the distance you see a flock of birds diving into the water. Wouldn't it be helpful to send a drone over the area to see what attracted them to the spot? It would be illegal in Florida. Spotter planes (a UAV would be considered a spotter plane) are not generally allowed (Rule 68B-4.013).

There are some wildlife management issues where the use of UAVs could be very helpful. They are already being used in Florida to monitor shark activity along public beaches. Wild hogs are a huge problem and are considered an invasive and destructive species. Why not send up a UAV with a thermal-imaging camera and find out where they hang out at night and then hunt them the next day?

There are three other Florida laws that affect our use of UAVs in the wild. You cannot use remote control hunting equipment to take wildlife when the person is not physically in the presence of the gun (Rule 68A-4.001(7), FAC). This prevents hunters using UAV mounted guns with remote firing capability. In addition, a person cannot use a UAV to harass hunters legally pursuing game

(379.105, Florida Statutes). This was put in place to stop groups like PETA from bothering hunters in the field. Lastly, drone operators need to study the new Florida Freedom From Unwarranted Surveillance Act. It states in part that drones can't be used for unlicensed surveillance and only allows a person licensed by the state to perform "reasonable job-related tasks."

One federal rule Florida outdoorsmen must consider is the National Park Service directive prohibiting the use of "unmanned aircraft systems" in National Parks. This includes Everglades National Park, Dry Tortugas NP and Biscayne NP—three areas with beautiful seascapes that would otherwise make tempting backdrops for drone photography or video.

Using technology to follow fish and game is hardly a new phenomenon. Fish and wildlife management entities, both state and federal, are struggling to find that "right" balance between the hunted and the hunter. **FS**



Drone Registration

The FAA recently enacted mandatory registration regulations that require every drone, including the equipment it will carry, that weighs between 0.55 pound to 55 pounds, to be registered with the FAA. Owners may register through a web-based system at www.faa.gov/uas/registration. The web application will generate a Certificate of Aircraft Registration/Proof of Ownership that will include a unique identification number for the UAV owner, which must be marked on all the aircraft he or she owns. The registration is valid for three years and costs \$5.

According to Michael Heurta, Administrator of the FAA, "Registration gives us the opportunity to educate these new airspace users before they fly so they know the airspace rules and understand they are accountable to the public for flying responsibly."

Drones can be a lot of fun. Get them registered and use them responsibly.