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BOULDER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

SUBJECT: Use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems **NUMBER:** 512

EFFECTIVE: November 6, 2026 **SUPERSEDES:** December 26, 2023

POLICY:

It is the policy of the Boulder County Sheriff's Office to utilize Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) to augment traditional public safety techniques and resources. UAS platforms are operated either by Sheriff's Office designated, trained, and qualified UAS pilots or by other qualified entities under mutual-aid agreement or contract. These systems can be equipped to provide real-time and/or stored video reconnaissance, to provide communications relay capabilities or transport public safety items. UAS platforms are unarmed and shall not be used for generalized surveillance of individuals, groups, or locations absent a legitimate law enforcement, public safety, emergency response, training, or administrative purpose authorized by law.

The Sheriff's Office may deploy a UAS platform in a safe, and legal manner in public safety situations where an unmanned or aerial perspective enhances victim, public or responder safety. The Sheriff's Office may also deploy a UAS platform in support of other agencies under mutual-aid request, or for authorized internal administrative operations. UAS platforms assist with public safety incidents including search and rescue, wildfire, flood, and other disaster reconnaissance, in support of the Office of Disaster Management, Boulder County Bomb Squad or SWAT team during deployments, and crime scene documentation by providing a needed visual perspective not available by other means.

This policy works in conjunction with Federal and State of Colorado laws and regulations, other Sheriff's Office policies, UAS manufacturers manuals and the Sheriff's Office flight manual.

DEFINITIONS:

Administrative Use: Use of UAS for non-criminal/non-public safety agency approved flights. Including but not limited to infrastructure inspection, training or promotional use. These flights must conform with FAA Regulations and Colorado State law.

Aircraft Flight Log (AFL)**:** An electronic record of aircraft activity including when the aircraft was flown, at what time and will include all onboard flight data including inputs from the controller, altitude, speed, GPS data, gimble angle, etc.

Air Traffic Control (ATC): The FAA Air Traffic Control facility having responsibility for the geographic area of a UAS mission.

BCSO Flight Manual: The program manual containing descriptions and guidelines for the deployment, operation and maintenance of the Sheriff's Office UAS platforms.

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COA: Certificate of Operating Authority issued by the FAA to a public operator for specific flight activity in National Air Space.

FAA: Federal Aviation Administration

FCC: Federal Communications Commission

Flight Mission Report (FMR): An electronic record of aircraft activity including flight and maintenance activities, detailing flight planning information and completion information. The FMR is uploaded into the pilots training records and into the Records Management System (RMS) for case entry when an incident is documented.

National Air Space (NAS): Airspace under the authority of the FAA. Typically, this refers to all outdoor areas. The interior of a building or structure is not considered part of the NAS.

Part 107 Rules: Refers to the general FAA regulations promulgated under 14 CFR Part 107 governing the non-hobby use of small UAS platforms and the requirements for platforms and operator requirements when operating in NAS.

Pilot-in-Command (PIC): The person who has final authority and responsibility for the operation and safety of flight, has been designated as PIC before or during the flight, and holds the appropriate category, class, type rating, and certification, if appropriate, for the conduct of the flight. In some situations, this is also referred to as a Remote Pilot in Command (RPIC).

Remote Pilot-in-Command (RPIC): Synonymous with Pilot-In-Command for small UAS platforms.

Unmanned Aircraft Systems Subject Matter Expert (UAS SME): An expert in the deployment, operation and legal requirements of UAS platforms and related hardware and software systems.

Unmanned Aircraft Systems Pilot (UAS Pilot): The holder of a current FAA Pilot Certificate granting Remote Pilot privileges who has been assigned to the BCSO UAS program and who has been further qualified by BCSO to serve as a person-at-the-controls of a BCSO UAS Platform in preparation for, or during flight. BCSO UAS Pilots must maintain FAA and BCSO certification for the duration of their assignment as a UAS Pilot.

Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS)**:** The aircraft and related hardware and software components needed for the successful deployment and operation of an unmanned aircraft platform in performance of a mission. UAS platforms utilized by BCSO must be owned or leased by BCSO. The use of personally owned UAS for any non-administrative BCSO mission is prohibited.

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Visual Observer: A qualified person who assists the Pilot-in-Command and/or the person manipulating the flight controls of a UAS to see and avoid other air traffic or hazards aloft or on the ground.

Waiver: An FAA issued document providing the operating requirements to operate a UAS in the US National Air Space beyond rules specified in FAA Part 107 or under COA issued to BCSO.

PROCEDURES:

I. Personnel

A. The BCSO UAS Program is made up of the following collateral duty assignments;

1. An Operations Division commander who provides overall management of the program. This is a collateral duty assignment.

2. Operations Sergeant(s) who provides operational oversight. This is a collateral duty assignment.

3. UAS Program Advisor who manages certifications, training, and compliance with regulations. For purposes of FAA regulations, this position is synonymous with “program manager.”

4. UAS Pilots

B. The Operations Division Chief maintains overall authority and responsibility for the BCSO UAS Program and is responsible for the selection of its members.

C. The UAS Program Advisor is responsible for oversight of the program including adherence to all regulatory requirements, development, and update of the BCSO Flight Operations Manual, UAS Pilot training, and liaison with the FAA and other agencies related to the BCSO UAS Program. The UAS Program Advisor must hold a valid FAA Pilot Certificate granting Remote Pilot flight privileges for the duration of their assignment in this role.

D. The UAS Program Commander is responsible for the creation of job descriptions for each program position including but not limited to UAS Pilot and Visual Observer.

E. The UAS Program Advisor, or their designee, may designate any qualified member of the BCSO flight program or contracted partner entity as the PIC for any UAS flight event that occurs under a BCSO granted FAA Certificate of Operating

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Authority (COA) or in compliance with FAA Part 107 operations. Typically, the PIC will be the person-at-the-controls of an aircraft during flight, however, in some situations this may not be the case. In these situations, the PIC must be positioned and/or equipped to assume immediate control of the flight if required.

F. A member of the UAS supervisor team or the UAS Program Advisor may place a pilot in no-fly status when the pilot has:

1. Failed to meet training requirements; or

2. Failed to demonstrate ongoing platform proficiency; or

3. Demonstrated unsafe flight; or

4. For other performance or disciplinary reasons.

G. All UAS pilots and UAS program members that are not BCSO employees are subject to the Sheriff's Office criminal history and background investigation before assignment to the UAS program.

H. All UAS program members must obtain and maintain CPR and first aid certification during their work with the program.

I. BCSO employees are prohibited from operating a UAS in the performance their BCSO duties outside of this policy unless approved by a division chief for specific administrative use. This includes employees volunteering their time and/or the use of a personally owned UAS. For the purpose of this policy the term employee includes BCSO volunteers.

J. UAS Pilot

1. A UAS Pilot's primary duty is the safe and effective operation of the unmanned aircraft system in accordance with FAA Regulations, Colorado State law, the BCSO Flight Operations Manual, and the flight manual of the UAS manufacturer.

2. UAS Pilots must remain fully aware of all applicable FAA regulations, State of Colorado laws, applicable legal restrictions, BCSO Flight Operations Manual contents, BCSO policies and the UAS manufacturers' approved flight manual provisions.

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3. When performing as a PIC and their respective aircraft is powered up the individual must have no additional assigned responsibilities.

4. The assignment or dismissal of any BCSO employee or volunteer to the UAS program is the responsibility of the Operations Division Chief in accordance with BCSO policies.

K. Visual Observers

1. A Visual Observer's primary responsibility is to assist the PIC in maintaining required visual contact with an aircraft when in operation for the purpose of seeing and avoiding other air traffic or hazards aloft or on the ground.

2. Visual Observers must be one or more of the following:

   a. FAA Part 107 certified

   b. BCSO-trained and certified as a VO

   c. Recognized as a qualified VO by another public safety agency's flight program

3. Visual Observers must be in immediate communication with the pilot at all times, either by direct voice contact or a voice radio link dedicated for this use during flight.

4. While utilizing a Visual Observer, the Pilot at the controls retains primary responsibility for the safe operation of their UAS.

5. A Visual Observer must have no additional assigned responsibilities while their ship is airborne.

II. Training

A. The UAS Program Advisor in consultation with the program sergeant/s and commander is responsible for creating and maintaining a training program including certification for each position and platform on the UAS team.

B. Qualified personnel will conduct training and certification of UAS program personnel, in accordance with applicable law and FAA and other applicable regulations, the BCSO Flight Operations Manual and applicable BCSO policies and procedure.

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C. BCSO UAS Pilots must complete ongoing training in accordance with the requirements set forth in the BCSO Flight Operations Manual.

D. UAS SMEs shall be utilized as necessary to assure the UAS program's best practices.

E. The UAS Program Advisor is responsible for monitoring FAA regulations, and the development of curriculum and training as required, ensuring continued program compliance with FAA regulations and industry best practices.

III. Authorized UAS Platforms

A. Aircraft and associated components under the control of, or operated by, BCSO personnel must comply with Federal law and FAA/ FCC regulations.

B. BCSO UAS platforms must be FAA registered, appropriately marked, and perform as required by FAA regulations.

C. Except in exigent circumstances, BCSO UAS Pilots may not use personally owned UAS platforms for non-administrative BCSO missions.

D. In limited circumstances, BCSO UAS Pilots may use UAS platforms owned or operated by other public safety entities if necessary to achieve a public safety objective, when a BCSO UAS is not available or does not have the needed capabilities. In such cases, the BCSO UAS Pilot must be sufficiently familiar with the operation of the UAS platform being used to safely and effectively operate it.

E. The selection process for all UAS platforms for non-administrative use and support equipment shall be managed by the UAS Program Commander. Final determination of UAS fitness-for-use within the BCSO is the responsibility of the UAS Program Advisor.

F. It is the responsibility of the UAS Program Advisor to assure that each UAS platform remains compliant with all applicable laws, rules and regulations for their intended use.

IV. Operations

A. Request for UAS Operations

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1. For pre-planned operations, requests for UAS operations should be directed to a UAS supervisor for authorization, consultation, and planning.

2. For in-progress events, UAS assistance may be requested by any involved deputy and may be deployed at the discretion of an available BCSO UAS Pilot. If a BCSO UAS Pilot is not on-duty, a mutual aid request can be made to another public safety entity, or a BCSO UAS Pilot may be paged for a response, at the discretion of the on-duty BCSO supervisor.

3. A request for UAS Operations from an outside agency follows normal BCSO mutual aid request procedures.

4. Prior to each UAS flight the PIC must determine if the flight will be conducted under FAA Part 107 rules or under an applicable FAA COA or other FAA flight authorization.

5. It is required that all UAS missions performed under FAA COA be performed within the geographic region authorized by the COA.

    a. An FAA geographic waiver is required before undertaking any deviation from a COA's geographic limitations. The Program Advisor is responsible for the initiation of the waiver application when it is determined that the use of a~~n~~ UAS requires a waiver and may aid in the resolution of a planned event. Waivers for real-time public safety events may also be applied for by the mission's PIC. The UAS Program Advisor, or PIC when applicable, may designate the responsibility to obtain waiver(s) for a flight to a qualified UAS team member or a member of the Boulder County Office of Disaster Management familiar with processing such requests.

B. Pilot-in-Command and Pilot Responsibilities

1. The PIC is the final authority over the operation of the unmanned aircraft. This applies both when the PIC is the UAS Pilot for a mission as well as when a non-PIC UAS Pilot is at the controls.

2. The pilot controlling the aircraft is responsible for obtaining clear direction from the PIC and is also responsible for safe and compliant flight operation.

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3. No member of the Sheriff's Office, regardless of rank, or any other person, is authorized to order a PIC or UAS Pilot to make a flight, or modify a flight, when, in the opinion of the PIC or UAS Pilot, it cannot be done safely.

4. PICs and UAS Pilots are responsible for compliance with this policy, the BCSO Flight Operations Manual, Colorado State law, applicable legal restrictions, and FAA Regulations.

5. UAS Pilots are to document each mission and training use of unmanned aircraft as designated in the BCSO Flight Operations Manual.

6. If the purpose of a UAS flight is pursuant to a search warrant, it is the responsibility of the PIC to ensure that the location identified in the warrant is the target identified for flight and is within the mission operation area.

C. Records Produced During Use

1. Any video/audio or images generated or captured by a UAS related to a call for service or public safety activity shall be retained and disposed of in accordance with the BCSO retention schedule.

   a. Any video/audio or images generated from administrative or training flights are not retained.

2. All FMR's generated will be added into the pilots training records and entered into the RMS for attachment to any associated case number.

3. All individual AFL information will be uploaded to evidence as needed or at the ships end-of-life for retention in accordance with the BCSO retention schedule.

V. Safety

A. All UAS missions are to be conducted in adherence to a risk/benefit analysis during mission planning. A mission or training exercise must be terminated when the situation changes in such a way that safety guidelines are exceeded or compromised.

B. The Program Advisor is responsible for scheduling a safety "stand-down" annually. All members of the UAS program team are required to participate in the review of

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the program and identify hazards, review program safety criteria; program procedures, and conduct safety and other training as identified.

C. During the "stand-down," normal flight operations are suspended to assure undivided attention on the safety and efficacy of the program.

VI. Emergency Procedures

A. Any unmanned aircraft event that causes injury to any person, damage to private property or to UAS equipment is reported through the management structure of the UAS program. This is in addition to any other reporting or documentation requirements imposed by law, FAA regulation or BCSO policy.

1. Ensuring medical response and providing immediate medical aid to any injured person is the primary responsibility of on-scene personnel.

B. Reporting beyond the UAS program is not required for damage isolated to UAS aircraft during training unless the damage is beyond the repair capabilities of the UAS program personnel or not covered under the aircraft's warranty. Additional reporting of training damage will be at the discretion of the UAS Program Commander.

By Order of the Sheriff,

Curtis Johnson
Curtis Johnson

November 6, 2026
Date