

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 30, 2015

The Honorable Michael Huerta  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta:

We write to express our strong concerns regarding the increased reports of civilian drones interfering with wildfire suppression activities. We urge the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to consider all the tools at its disposal to prohibit this dangerous and irresponsible use of civilian drones, which have already endangered the lives of civilians and firefighters.

As you may be aware, the U.S. Forest Service, as well as the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, have had to delay or abort a number of wildfire suppression flights due to commercial drones. This happened most recently during “North Fire” near Cajon Pass when firefighting operations had to be halted shortly before the wildfire jumped Interstate 15 because of a recreational drone, causing motorists to abandon their cars and flee for their lives.

First responders must have the ability to address wildfire activities quickly and be uninhibited by unforeseen circumstances, such as a civilian flying their commercial drone in the vicinity. Not only do these drones put first responder pilots’ lives at risk, they also prevent these firefighters from helping to contain wildfires and put the lives of ordinary citizens at risk. For example, a June 25<sup>th</sup> Los Angeles Times article reported that a DC-10 Air Tanker and two smaller planes were forced to divert and drop their fire retardant cargo elsewhere due to a commercial drone flying in the area. Not only did this cost taxpayers between \$10,000 and \$15,000, it shut down further missions and allowed the wildfire to spread. In the early stages of a wildfire, time is of the essence and even an hour of delay can be the difference between containment or an uncontrollable burn that destroys thousands of acres and threatens lives and property.

As commercial drones become more widespread, the U.S. Forest Service and state forestry services are likely to experience an increase in civilian operated drones interference with emergency first responders. We understand the FAA is in the process of finalizing rules to regulate the operation of small commercial drones, and we urge you to use this process to incorporate measures directed at preventing the operation of drones in a manner that interferes with first responders. We believe this review should include the possibility of requiring technological measures, such as “geo-fencing,” in commercially available drones that prevent them from being flown within a geographic area where they are likely to interfere with firefighting activities, as well as the study of other proven drone mitigation technologies. The FAA should also consider a campaign to ensure that civilian drone operators understand the dangers of operating drone in restricted airspace, and the potential harm that this irresponsible behavior could cause.

With California in the middle of a multi-year drought, we can expect to see more wildfires that threaten the lives and homes of many families. We urge the FAA to ensure that our first responders battling these fires are not inhibited in any way from carrying out their duties. Thank you, and we look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



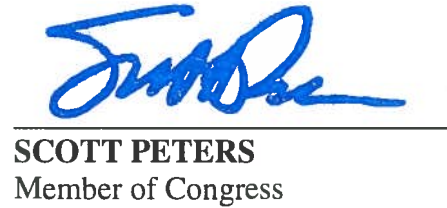
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**SCOTT PETERS**  
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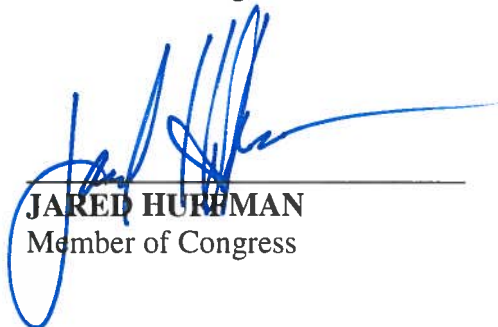
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