

UXO Prompts High Tech Drone in Firefighting Operation

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Flagstaff, Arizona The U.S. Forest Service is trying a unique approach to monitor the Maroon Fire burning in the Coconino National Forest through the use of a drone equipped with an infrared camera and other high-tech sensors. Officials opted for the drone approach over explosive safety concerns from UXO in the area.

Currently, drones cannot be flown over or near wildfire or prescribed fires, because they can cause hazards to other aerial operations like helicopters and airplanes. In order to navigate the restriction, operators had to obtain a waiver approved by the FAA and coordinate their flights with local aircraft towers.



The drone shown above is only one owned by the Forest Service. Although the technology is promising, the future for the tool is not clear at this time as drones with high-tech sensors can be costly (the current system is reportedly valued at over \$40,000) and they require a certified pilot to operate.

As of June 5, the Maroon fire has burned over 8,500 acres and is 50% contained. The fire was reportedly caused by a lightning strike in the area.