UAF to head one of six FAA unmanned aircraft system test sites

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 30, 2013
CONTACT: Amy Hartley, UAF Geophysical Institute information officer, 907-474-5823, amy.hartley@gi.alaska.edu

Fairbanks, Alaska— The University of Alaska will serve as one of six official Federal Aviation Administration unmanned aircraft system test sites, the federal agency announced today.

The Pan-Pacific UAS Test Range Complex will be managed by the University of Alaska Fairbanks and includes key partners in Oregon and Hawaii. The complex, with its geographic diversity in landscapes spanning seven climatic zones, will allow UAS manufacturers and potential users the ability to test their equipment in the Arctic, the tropics and arid environments. The test site will build on the ongoing work of the Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration, which is part of the UAF Geophysical Institute.

The six FAA Unmanned Aircraft System Test Sites are congressionally mandated and will conduct research into certification and operational requirements necessary to safely integrate unmanned aircraft into the national airspace over the next several years.

“The University of Alaska Fairbanks’ reputation as an experienced, safe and savvy operator using a variety of UAS types in diverse missions and locations all over the globe undoubtedly played a major part in our selection,” said Ro Bailey, deputy director of ACUASI and the intended Pan-Pacific UAS Test Range Complex director. “Alaska, Oregon and Hawaii offer exceptional climatic and geographic diversity, lightly populated airspace and overwater test opportunities that can support the majority of FAA needs.”

The Pan-Pacific UAS Test Range Complex offers 13 test ranges, six of which are located in Alaska. All of the ranges allow for UAS flight after the aircraft passes rigorous evaluations for safety, reliability and usability. None of the ranges are in or establish new restricted airspace, but the Pan-Pacific Test Range Complex operators will collaborate with the Alaska National Guard and Alaska Command. This collaboration will allow for access to restricted airspace for operations that require a greater margin of safety.
The Pan-Pacific UAS Test Range Complex has a strong safety and data collection team in place and partners in all three states hope significant business, both in the form of site users and entrepreneurs seeking to support test site operations, will follow.

Operations of the test range complex are slated to begin in mid-2014.

The Pan-Pacific UAS Test Range Complex was conceived by the Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration, which was established by the University of Alaska Board of Regents in December 2012. However, ACUASI operated UAS for science and civil support for several years before its formal designation as a center. The UAF-based team supported Interior wildfire mapping projects, marine mammal population studies in the Aleutians, scanned the trans-Alaska pipeline and much more since the mid-2000s.

ADDITIONAL CONTACTS:
Ro Bailey, Pan-Pacific UAS Test Range Complex director, 907-322-2255 or via email at rbailey11@alaska.edu.

Marmian Grimes, UAF public information officer, at 907-474-7902 or via e-mail at marmian.grimes@alaska.edu.

ON THE WEB: http://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/uas/