UAF unmanned aircraft program expands to Iceland

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Fairbanks, Alaska — The University of Alaska Fairbanks has partnered with UAS Iceland to expand unmanned aircraft operations in Iceland in early 2014.

The collaboration with UAS Iceland, via UAF's Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration, will support arctic science, including glacier studies, volcano monitoring, marine mammal research and environmental observations. The agreement also has the potential to support mapping efforts and search and rescue missions.

"We have opportunities here in Iceland every day for unmanned aircraft support," said Sigurdur Hrafnsson, president of UAS Iceland, a commercial company that consults with the Icelandic government. "Iceland is a very progressive country, but takes a thoughtful approach to unmanned aircraft technology and is rightfully looking at everything from the perspective of what is a safe and sustainable process."

The UAF Geophysical Institute has one of the most comprehensive non-military unmanned aircraft program in North America and is the leader in arctic UAS operations. The Iceland facilities include several well-maintained former NATO hangars, office and conference facilities, billeting and access to more than 20 airstrips with their associated infrastructure.

"High latitude science and research is the heart of UAF and the partnership with our friends and colleagues in Iceland is a logical extension of our current work," said UAF Chancellor Brian Rogers.

Operations between ACUASI and UAS Iceland are expected to begin this summer, according to Marty Rogers, ACUASI director.

The Federal Aviation Administration named UAF to operate one of six UAS test ranges in the country Dec. 30, 2013. The test range is called the Pan-Pacific Test Range Complex and includes partners in Oregon and Hawaii. UAF is a founding member of the University of the Arctic and Iceland is home to several UArctic partner organizations. The University of the Arctic is a cooperative network of universities, colleges, and other organizations committed to higher education and research in the North.

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