

Notice of Availability
Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the
Nationwide Operation of Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems
United States Department of Homeland Security

Description: Interested parties are hereby notified that the United States (US) Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has prepared a Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for the Proposed Action described below.

Statutory Authority: This notice is being issued to all interested parties in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500-1508), and DHS Management Directive 023-01, rev. 01 (Implementation of NEPA).

Proposed Action: DHS proposes the ongoing use of small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS; i.e., drone) activities nationwide. The PEA analyzes sUAS as an asset to DHS mission and operations. DHS and its Components utilize sUAS (i.e., small unmanned aircraft that weigh less than 55 pounds) on a recurring basis to meet mission needs, and currently review proposed sUAS activities on a project-specific basis. DHS prepared the subject Draft PEA to streamline the review process and avoid duplicative, lengthy reviews for repetitive sUAS actions that may be broadly analyzed given their similar scopes.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide DHS with the capability to expand visual capability and gather information, surveillance, reconnaissance, and communications by employing remote controlled aerial reconnaissance equipment equipped with cameras, sensors, and other data collecting equipment. The continued use of sUAS would allow access to areas that are otherwise difficult to reach, and would support existing and emerging mission requirements of the various Components within DHS. The Proposed Action is needed to enhance and extend sUAS capability to DHS missions over various geographic areas in order to inform DHS operational and situational decisions, fulfill mission requirements, and ensure the long-term security of the US.

The Draft PEA evaluates the potential environmental, cultural, socioeconomic, and physical impacts of the No Action Alternative and Proposed Action Alternative to implementing the Proposed Action. The evaluation performed within this Draft PEA concludes there would be no significant adverse impact to the environment or quality of life as a result of implementing the Proposed Action, provided routine best management practices specified in the PEA are implemented.

Public Review: DHS would like to solicit public input or comments on the Draft PEA, which will be available for a 30-day public comment period from August 11, 2022, through September 10, 2022. The Draft PEA can be accessed online at: <https://www.dhs.gov/national-environmental-policy-act>.

Comments: Comments on the Draft PEA or inquiries regarding the document should be submitted during the 30-day comment period via electronic mail to Sarah Koeppel at sep-ephp@hq.dhs.gov. A mailing address to submit hardcopy comments can be provided upon request.