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Aviation Safety, Training, and Operations Center

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APHIS is a multi-faceted agency with a broad mission area that includes emergency response, administering the Animal Welfare Act, and carrying out wildlife damage management activities. One way the agency accomplishes its responsibilities is through the use of aircraft.

Wildlife Services (WS) aerial operations employs a fleet of approximately 35 agency owned, borrowed, or leased fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft, and employs approximately 30 pilots. Additionally, WS uses approximately 20 Contractor owned fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft, and approximately 20 contract pilots. WS provides capable, mission-ready aircraft and professional crews trained to conduct the WS mission wherever and whenever required, in our Eastern and Western Regions, Hawaii and Guam.

Aviation operations range from the use of small single-engine aircraft to helicopters, and larger twin-engine aircraft. Some of the aviation missions WS carries out include bird surveys, mammal surveys, livestock search and rescue, pest control, wildlife management, aerial application, research and development, and training. The two core aviation programs consist of wildlife management and delivery of oral rabies vaccines (ORV).

Aerial Operations Functions

The WS program has an Eastern and Western region, as well as Hawaii and Guam, and aviation activities occur in both regions. The types of missions flown and the types of aircraft and equipment utilized vary between the two regions. In the Eastern Region, aerial mission are primarily flown to distribute ORV in specific locations to reduce the spread of raccoon and canine rabies, and utilize larger twin-engine aircraft. This region also uses smaller single-engine aircraft to conduct wildlife population survey work as well. The Eastern Region currently uses turbine helicopters for feral swine management but on a limited basis. Historically, aerial wildlife management activities occur less frequently in the Eastern Region, but are expected to become more frequent due to increased damage being caused by feral swine.

In the Western Region, aerial missions are flown almost exclusively to protect valuable livestock (sheep, cattle, and goats) from predators. These missions use single-engine Super Cub or Top Cub aircraft flown at low altitude, and at relatively slow speeds. Turbine helicopters are also used in specific locations for specific requirements where the use of single-engine aircraft is not practical or appropriate.

Aviation Safety

The WS aviation mission exists in a complex, high-risk environment. Known hazards must be managed with effective and reasonable mitigation to achieve successful outcomes. The WS Aviation Safety Program is founded on the philosophy that all aircraft mishaps are preventable. As such, the aviation organization aggressively applies the principles of risk management.

The desired end product of all we do as WS employees is the preservation and protection of our persons, property, and wildlife. As WS employees, it is our responsibility to report hazards that could cause a mishap. All hazards that could potentially jeopardize our mission should be reported.

WS Aviation Safety Services provide aviation policy for aviation safety management, and aircraft mishap prevention oversight to the organization in the direct support of all WS aviation activities. The core goal is to ensure the safety of aviation activities and prevent all WS aviation accidents. The strategic direction of Aviation Safety Services is to ensure the stability/continuity and where appropriate, elevate aviation safety standards, increase efficiency, and promote a risk-managed operation of aviation activities for internal and external customers. WS aerial operations embrace high standards of ethics, integrity, safety, and accountability, and accomplishes its objectives through oversight and training. Objectives under this goal define WS Aerial Operations commitment to address safety challenges and to ensure exceptionally safe operations.

In order to promote this culture of safety, WS follows the principles of the Four Pillars of the Safety Management Systems (SMS) approach. These “four pillars” consist of Promotion, Risk Management, Assurance and Policy. SMS can be used as a means of providing a formal process and structure to control the risk associated with the vast array of aviation missions.

It is the goal of SMS to create a positive safety culture where participants continually challenge the processes, the culture and the systems to identify weaknesses and identify where improvements can be made.

Aerial Operations Training

Most agencies utilize aircraft in support or accomplishment of their programs and projects. These aircraft users are as many and varied as the types of aircraft used. A WS aerial operations goal is to provide unmatched training services to personnel. Increasing employee awareness of agency policy, procedures, and safe practices must receive the highest priority. Aviation training, whether basic safety training, specialized training, or advanced training is a method to increase safety awareness and a key to meeting this goal.

Wildlife damage management techniques are constantly changing in response to new science, changes in public policy, advances in technology, and safety lessons learned. WS Aviation Training Services provide aviation policy for aviation training management and personnel training oversight to the organization in the direct support of all WS aviation fleet activities as well as within Commercial Aviation Service operations. To do so, WS Aerial Operations must provide the training management oversight and appropriate resources to meet the missions of each customer in the most efficient manner available. To ensure employees receive the best training possible, WS Aerial Operations will focus on strengthening training services provided. WS Aerial Operations will continue to train, retrain, and develop a high-performing workforce. Furthermore, WS Aerial Operations will examine its process to determine the optimal mix of classroom, web-based, and practical training to demonstrate commitment to training.

Achieving WS Aerial Operations mission and goals relies heavily upon the training and productivity of its workforce. WS Aerial Operations training must ensure that it is creating an environment that is both meeting current and future training needs and challenges. WS Aerial Operations vision and planning must enable the organization to establish creative and flexible training programs linked to meeting the goals and objectives of WS. State-of-the-art training is the key to continued success of WS Aerial Operations. The WS Aviation Training and Operations Center (ATOC) is fully committed to continually assess and improve upon WS aviation training requirements and methods.

Related Information

- View Federal Aviation Administration
- View GSA Aviation Management

- View WS Vacancies on USA Jobs
- View Veteran information at OPM
- View WS Publications
- Locate a WS State Office

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