



State Conservation Commission

CONSERVATION DISTRICT DRONE UTILIZATION POLICY
EFFECTIVE 1-19-21

Background:

- ▶ The use of drones is growing quickly in natural resource management, engineering, surveying and general agriculture operations.
- ▶ Conservation districts are beginning to utilize drones for a number of different purposes.
- ▶ A number of districts have recently asked if they could use drones for delegated and contracted program duties

Purpose of Policy

- ▶ To ensure that districts have a **written plan** in place prior to utilizing a drone for any activity carried out by the district.
- ▶ To ensure that staff have all necessary **written approvals** before utilizing a drone for any purpose.
- ▶ To stress the need for all districts utilizing a drone to be compliant with **local, state and federal requirements** (training, licensing, etc.).

Three Basic Components

- ▶ Drones Use for State Delegated/Contracted Programs
- ▶ Drone Use for Other District Programs
- ▶ General Provisions

Drones Used for State Delegated/Contracted Programs

- ▶ Requires written authorization from deputy secretary of state agency delegating/contracting the program
- ▶ Requires agency to provide written guidance on acceptable use
- ▶ Requires district board approval
- ▶ Requires district to adopt written policy
- ▶ Requires compliance with “General Provisions” outlined below

Drones Used for Other District Programs (non-state delegated/contracted)

- ▶ At the discretion of the district board
- ▶ Requires district board approval
- ▶ Requires compliance with “General Provisions” outlined below

General Provisions

- ▶ Must be used in compliance with local, state and federal requirements
- ▶ Ensure adequate insurance coverage
- ▶ Take reasonable steps to ensure that any contractor hired to use drone is in compliance with local, state and federal requirements, and with the requirements of this policy.
- ▶ Recognize potential liabilities

General Provisions (Continued)

- ▶ District must develop and implement written policy (SOP) that outlines
 - ▶ Specific use authorized
 - ▶ Specific program authorities under which these uses are authorized (e.g. XYZ Program Guidelines for Drone Utilization for Site Inspection)
 - ▶ Any use restrictions or limitations based on these authorities (e.g. only for site inspections with prior written authorization of landowner)
 - ▶ Operator qualifications
 - ▶ Individuals authorized to operate drone
 - ▶ Procedures established to protect public safety
 - ▶ Procedures established to protect individual privacy

Wrap-Up

- ▶ To ensure that districts have a **written plan** in place prior to utilizing a drone for any activity carried out by the district
- ▶ To ensure that staff have all necessary **written approvals** before utilizing a drone for any purpose.
- ▶ To stress the need for all districts utilizing a drone to be compliant with **local, state and federal requirements** (training, licensing, etc.).
- ▶ To **use drones in a safe, responsible way** that furthers the mission and purpose of the district.
- ▶ To date, no state agency has approved the use of a drone by districts for any state delegated/contracted program.



**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

February 5, 2021

To: Conservation District Managers

From: Karl G. Brown, Executive Secretary *(K.G.B.)*
State Conservation Commission

RE: Conservation District Drone Utilization Policy

On January 19, 2021, the State Conservation Commission adopted a policy governing the use of drones by county conservation districts. The policy is effective immediately and a copy is attached for your review and use.

The overall purpose of this policy is to ensure that conservation districts have a written plan in place prior to utilizing a drone for any activity carried out by the district, and that staff have all necessary written approvals in hand before utilizing a drone for any purpose. In addition, all districts utilizing a drone for any purpose must be compliant with local, state and federal laws governing their use.

Please note that the use of a drone by a conservation district for a state delegated or state contracted program requires prior written approval by the agency delegating the program authority to the district or contracting for services with the district. To date, the use of drones by conservation districts for state delegated or state contracted has not been authorized by any state agency.

If you have any questions regarding this policy, please feel free to contact the Commission Office or your DEP Conservation District Field Representative.

State Conservation Commission
Conservation District Drone Utilization Policy

(Rev. 1-19-21)

A. Drones Used for State Delegated and State Contracted Programs

A county conservation district may not use a drone to carry out any state delegated or state contracted program duties unless the following occur:

1. The state agency (DEP, PDA, SCC, etc.) which has granted the district the authority to carry out the program through a delegation agreement or contract has provided specific written authorization to allow the conservation district to utilize a drone for program duties. Written authorization by the agency shall be from the Deputy Secretary or Commission Executive Secretary that is responsible to oversee the duties and responsibilities that are delegated or contracted to the district.
2. The agency delegating or contracting the duties has provided written guidance regarding how the drone may be utilized for the program duties carried out by the district.
3. The conservation district board has approved the use of the drone, has developed a written policy as required in Section C below, and is compliant with all other requirements of this policy.

B. Drones Used for Other District Programs.

1. A county conservation district may use a drone for other district programs (i.e. non-state delegated, non-state contracted) at the discretion of its board.
2. Other program purposes may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Monitoring of BMP installation
 - b. Crop monitoring and inspection
 - c. Educational and academic uses
 - d. Aerial photography
 - e. Stream corridor mapping and monitoring
 - f. Road corridor mapping and monitoring
 - g. Engineering data collection and design work
 - h. General conservation efforts
3. Any conservation district that chooses to use a drone for other district programs (i.e. non-state-delegated and non-state-contracted) must have written authorization through an action of its board prior to its initial use and must be compliant with all applicable requirements of this policy.

C. General Provisions

1. Conservation districts that operate drones for any purpose must comply with all Federal, State and local laws and regulations governing their use.
2. Conservation districts that operate drones for any purpose must develop, adopt and implement a written policy and or written standard operating procedures, that at a minimum outlines:
 - a. The specific authorized uses of the drone;
 - b. The specific program authorities, if applicable, under which these uses are authorized;
 - c. Any use restrictions or limitations based on these authorities;

- d. Operator qualifications;
 - e. Individuals authorized to operate the drone;
 - f. Procedures established to protect public safety; and
 - g. Procedures established to protect individual privacy.
- 3. Conservation districts that authorize the use of a drone for any purpose must ensure that they have secured adequate insurance coverage or other protections necessary to minimize their liability and legal exposure related to the use of the drone.
- 4. Conservation districts that hire another individual, business or any other entity to use a drone on their behalf or provide services to a conservation district that involve the use of a drone must take reasonable steps to ensure that the individual, business, or other entity is in compliance with all requirements of local, state and federal law pertaining to the operation of drones, as well as the applicable requirements of this policy.
- 5. Conservation districts that authorize the use of a drone should recognize they may be liable for damages caused by the use of the drone under applicable local, state and federal laws.

D. This policy was adopted by the Commission on January 19, 2021.