

WILDFIRE AERIAL RESPONSE SAFETY ACT

MARCH 16, 2026.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. GRAVES, from the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 6618]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 6618) to require the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration to conduct a study on drone incursions on wildfire suppression, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment and recommends that the bill as amended do pass.

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The amendment is as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Wildfire Aerial Response Safety Act”.

SEC. 2. STUDY ON DRONE INCURSIONS ON WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION.

(a) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section:

(1) **COUNTER-UAS SYSTEM; UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEM.**—The terms “counter-UAS system” and “unmanned aircraft system” have the meanings given such terms in section 44801 of title 49, United States Code.

(2) **UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEM INCURSION.**—The term “unmanned aircraft system incursion” means the operation of an unmanned aircraft system within any airspace for which the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration has issued a temporary flight restriction because of a wildfire.

(b) **STUDY REQUIRED.**—The Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through the Chief of the Forest Service, shall conduct a study on the effects of unmanned aircraft system incursions on wildfire suppression with respect to land managed by the Department of the Interior or the Department of Agriculture.

(c) **STUDY CONTENTS.**—In conducting the study required under subsection (b), the Administrator shall—

(1) determine, for each of the 5 most recent calendar years—

(A) the number of occurrences in which a unmanned aircraft system incursion has interfered with wildfire suppression; and

(B) the estimated effect of each occurrence described in subparagraph (A) on—

(i) the length of time required to achieve complete suppression;

(ii) any associated delay in the fielding of aerial firefighting response units; and

(iii) the amounts expended by the Federal Government; and

(2) evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of—

(A) the dissemination of educational materials relating to the effects of unmanned aircraft system incursions on wildfire suppression operations; and

(B) the deployment of approved counter-UAS systems by authorized entities as a means to detect, mitigate, and prevent unmanned aircraft system incursions during such operations.

(d) **REPORT.**—Not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall submit to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Natural Resources, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives a report describing—

(1) the findings of the study required under subsection (b); and

(2) any recommendations relating to those findings.

PURPOSE OF LEGISLATION

The purpose of H.R. 6618, as amended, is to require the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to conduct a study on drone incursions on wildfire suppression, and for other purposes.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

Today, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) are used to perform commercial, recreational, and defense activities across various sectors including agriculture, infrastructure, public safety, energy, and the delivery of consumer goods, among other things. While the FAA continues working to ensure the safe integration of UAS in the NAS, recent reported sitings, including those in New Jersey and California, have prompted critical discussions about UAS oper-

ations in United States airspace and how to appropriately address illicit, malicious, and potentially dangerous UAS operations.¹

According to the FAA, the number of registered commercial small UAS (sUAS), or those weighing 55 pounds or less, is forecasted to continue increasing from 951,000 in 2024 to approximately 1.12 million in 2028.² Over the same period, the FAA expects the number of registered large UAS, those weighing more than 55 pounds, to grow from approximately 4,000 in 2024 to more than 26,000 in 2028, a 550 percent increase.³ Currently, the FAA estimates more than one million drones are registered in the United States, of which 409,408 are commercial operators and 385,892 are recreational flyers.⁴

During a Federal, state, or local emergency response situation, the Administrator of the FAA will issue a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) extending three nautical miles (nm) around the scene.⁵ TFR's, distributed to pilots through the Notice to Airman (NOTAM) System, are meant to alert pilots to avoid the area until further notice as to not interrupt ongoing emergency response operations. Federal, state, and local law enforcement responses to wildfires are complex and dynamic, requiring sanitized airspace to ensure efficiency and timely mitigation. In instances of wildfires, the unauthorized use of UAS within TFR's pose a risk to the safety of first responders and can ultimately delay authorities' response to the situation.

One recent high-profile incursion occurred in January 2025, during the Pacific Palisades wildfires, when a sUAS, flying within a TFR, struck the wing of a fixed-wing Super Scooper aircraft over the Pacific, endangering the life of the pilot and causing more than \$65,000 in damage to the aircraft.⁶ According to the National Interagency Fire Center, between January 1, 2025, and September 15, 2025, there were 34 UAS incursions into areas where aerial wildfire suppression activities were taking place. Of those incidents, 29 disrupted or risked those aerial operations.⁷

H.R. 6618, as amended, the *Wildfire Aerial Response Safety Act*, requires the FAA, in concert with its Federal partners, to conduct a study identifying the effects that UAS incursions have on wildfire suppression operations and put forth recommendations related to the study's findings. H.R. 6618 will fill information gaps and allow policy makers to make data-driven decisions.

HEARINGS

For the purposes of rule XIII, clause 3(c)(6)(A) of the 119th Congress—The following hearing was used to develop or consider H.R. 6618:

¹Miriam McNabb, *DHS, FBI, FAA, and DoD Respond to Reported Drone Sightings*, DRONE LIFE, (Dec. 17, 2024), available at <https://dronelife.com/2024/12/17/dhs-fbi-faa-and-dod-respond-to-reported-drone-sightings/>.

²FAA, FY2024–2044 FAA AEROSPACE FORECAST (last updated Oct. 16, 2024), available at <https://www.faa.gov/dataresearch/aviation/aerospaceforecasts/faq-aerospace-forecast-fy-2024-2044>.

³*Id.*

⁴FAA, *Drones by the Numbers*, available at <https://www.faa.gov/node/54496>.

⁵49 U.S.C. § 40103(b).

⁶Meredith Deliso, *Drone operator charged for hitting 'super scooper' plane during Palisades Fire*, ABC NEWS, (Jan. 31, 2025), available at <https://abcnews.go.com/US/drone-operator-charged-hitting-super-scooper-plane-palisades/story?id=118313936>.

⁷Nat'l Interagency Fire Ctr., UAS INCURSIONS: KNOW BEFORE YOU FLY (last updated Sept. 15, 2025), available at <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/uas-incursions>.

On Thursday, February 6, 2025, the Subcommittee on Aviation held a hearing entitled, “*Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems*.” At the hearing, Members received testimony from Dr. Catherine Cahill, PH.D., Director, The Alaska Center of UAS Integration, University of Alaska Fairbanks; Mrs. Lisa Ellman, Executive Director, Commercial Drone Alliance (CDA); and Mr. Chris McLaughlin, Executive Vice President of Operations, Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW). The hearing examined existing Federal counter-unmanned aircraft system (Counter-UAS) authorities that permit certain Federal agencies to detect and mitigate unauthorized or unlawful UAS operations. Additionally, the hearing examined what safe extension and expansion of these authorities might look like.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY AND CONSIDERATION

H.R. 6618, the “*Wildfire Aerial Response Safety Act*”, was introduced in the United States House of Representatives on December 11, 2025, by Representative Bynum (D-OR) and referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Within the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, H.R. 6618 was referred to the Subcommittee on Aviation. The Subcommittee on Aviation was discharged from further consideration of H.R. 6618 on January 21, 2026.

The Committee considered H.R. 6618 on January 21, 2026, and ordered the measure to be reported to the House with a favorable recommendation, with amendment, by voice vote.

The following amendment was offered:

An Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 6618, offered by Mr. Carson of Indiana; was AGREED TO by voice vote.

COMMITTEE VOTES

Clause 3(b) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires each committee report to include the total number of votes cast for and against on each record vote on a motion to report and on any amendment offered to the measure or matter, and the names of those members voting for and against.

No recorded votes were requested.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With respect to the requirements of clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee’s oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in this report.

NEW BUDGET AUTHORITY AND TAX EXPENDITURES

Clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives does not apply where a cost estimate and comparison prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office under section 402 of the *Congressional Budget Act of 1974* has been timely submitted prior to the filing of the report and is included in the report. Such a cost estimate is included in this report.

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

With respect to the requirement of clause 3(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 402 of the

Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has received the enclosed cost estimate for H.R. 6618 from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office:

H.R. 6618, Wildfire Aerial Response Safety Act			
As ordered reported by the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure on January 21, 2026			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2026	2026-2030	2026-2035
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	0	0
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	*	*	not estimated
Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	No
		Mandate Effects	
Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No
* = between zero and \$500,000.			

H.R. 6618 would require the Federal Aviation Administration, in consultation with the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, to report to the Congress on how certain drone operations affect efforts to suppress wildfires on federal lands. Based on the cost of similar activities, CBO estimates that implementing H.R. 6618 would cost less than \$500,000 over the 2026–2030 period. Any related spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

The CBO staff contacts for this estimate are Aaron Krupkin (for the Federal Aviation Administration) and Lilia Ledezma (for the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior). The estimate was reviewed by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

PHILLIP L. SWAGEL,
Director, Congressional Budget Office.

PERFORMANCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

With respect to the requirement of clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the performance goal and objective of this legislation is to require the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to conduct a study on drone incursions on wildfire suppression, and for other purposes.

DUPLICATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(5) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee finds that no provision of H.R. 6618 establishes or reauthorizes a program of the Federal government known to be duplicative of another Federal program, a program that was included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111–139, or a program related to a program identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

CONGRESSIONAL EARMARKS, LIMITED TAX BENEFITS,
AND LIMITED TARIFF BENEFITS

In compliance with clause 9 of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives, this bill, as reported, contains no congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in clause 9(e), 9(f), or 9(g) of the rule XXI.

FEDERAL MANDATES STATEMENT

An estimate of Federal mandates prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the *Unfunded Mandates Reform Act* was not made available to the Committee in time for the filing of this report. The Chairman of the Committee shall cause such estimate to be printed in the *Congressional Record* upon its receipt by the Committee.

PREEMPTION CLARIFICATION

Section 423 of the *Congressional Budget Act of 1974* requires the report of any Committee on a bill or joint resolution to include a statement on the extent to which the bill or joint resolution is intended to preempt state, local, or tribal law. The Committee finds that H.R. 6618 does not preempt any state, local, or tribal law.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE STATEMENT

No advisory committees within the definition of Section 5(b) of the appendix to Title 5, United States Code, are created by this legislation.

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the *Congressional Accountability Act* (Public Law 104–1).

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS OF THE LEGISLATION

Section 1. Short title

This section provides that this bill may be cited as the “*Wildfire Aerial Response Safety Act*.”

Section 2. Study on drone incursion on wildfire suppression

This section directs the Administrator of the FAA, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, to conduct a study on the effects of UAS incursions on wildfire suppression efforts with respect to land managed by the Federal government.

Additionally, subsection (c) requires the Administrator to determine the effects of UAS incursions on the length of time required to achieve total fire suppression, associated delays in fielding aerial response units, and the amounts expended by the Federal government as a result of such incursions. The study will also evaluate the feasibility of the dissemination of educational materials and the deployment of approved counter-UAS systems as a means of preventing incursions.

Lastly, subsection (d) requires the Administrator to submit a report to Congress, within 18 months of enactment, detailing the findings of the study and any recommendations related to those findings.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

As reported by the Committee, H.R. 6618 makes no changes in existing law.

