**Northwest Public Power Association**

**Resolution 2016-17**

**Support Use of Drones by Consumer-Owned Utilities**

**Background**

The electric utility industry sees significant potential benefits from the use of drones, or Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), to help ensure the reliability, safety, security, and resilience of the electric grid and the safety of utility workers who maintain electric transmission and distribution facilities.

Working on and around electric power equipment can be hazardous, costly, and time consuming. For utility crews climbing on equipment, and for those working in manned aircraft flying near the equipment, it can be particularly dangerous, especially during a crisis situation. Hazards present during even routine maintenance procedures are multiplied when equipment has been damaged, or the surrounding terrain has been made hazardous by storms, hurricanes, fires or even terrorist attack.

UAS equipped with high-resolution cameras can provide substantially better information than utility crews performing visual inspections, either from the ground or after climbing equipment. In the case of disaster recovery assessments, using UAS to conduct inspections of damage removes the threat to health and life to the crew, or those flying manned aircraft around damaged equipment or in severe weather. Night-time assessments and damaged equipment assessments can also been done much faster, and more efficiently, which could help restore power sooner.

Recent research from Electric Power Research Institute shows that UAS could reduce these hazards, while increasing electric reliability and reducing the duration and impact of outages. For example, UAS can do an hours-long transmission line inspection over mountainous terrain that would take a ground-based crew weeks to accomplish. Moreover, the costs of purchasing and operating UAS are a fraction of the costs compared to purchasing and operating a helicopter to inspect lines or disaster-related damage.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is working to finalize federal regulations to govern the use of commercial drones by businesses and public agencies. Congress may also legislate in this area, given the increased use and serious safety hazards resulting from increased use of consumer drones for recreational and other purposes.

**NWPPA’s Position**

* NWPPA supports policies that allow utility’s use of UAS to enhance electric reliability, by helping maintain electric power delivery services and restoring electric power more quickly and safely after an outage.
* NWPPA supports FAA rules that will ensure safety and privacy, while allowing UAS use to enhance essential public services.
* NWPPA strongly supports regulations or legislation that qualifies the use of drones by public power utilities as a “public aircraft operation” carrying out a “governmental function.”
* NWPPA also supports asking for FAA clarification that drones flown by governmental entities performing a public works function be considered a public aircraft operation “when the projects belong to and are funded by a governmental entity and the operations do not also constitute a commercial purpose.”

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