

# Updates

## **Drones in Canada's National Parks**

Look up! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's... surprisingly close to the ground and making a lot of noise!

There's no denying the recent surge in popularity of stunning videos and other forms of photography taken from Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, also known as "drones" or "quadcopters") as they swoop through the air on their flybys of cities and other landscapes.

But like with any technology, inappropriate or excessive use of UAVs may be harmful. Few studies have examined specifically the effects of drone noise on wildlife. However, the decibel levels of UAVs can be significant and comparable to levels that have been demonstrated to be harmful. This presents a serious problem especially when you consider that many drones could be used in a single area and they could fly close enough to wildlife to frighten them. We know that drones have disturbed herds of bighorn sheep in Zion National Park in Utah.

Part of the drone problem also stems from the diverse array of UAVs available on the market. Drones come in a wide variety of different models, all with different capabilities, flight modes, altitude potentials, and noise levels. There is currently no general regulation governing this emerging technology. According to Parks Canada, they currently consider UAVs to fall under regulations governing aircraft, which would be sufficient to prevent them from disrupting wildlife. While AWA hopes Parks Canada's opinion is on firm legal ground this approach may invite litigation.

With the exploding popularity of UAVs and UAV-based photography, AWA would like to see regulations enacted now to specifically address this technology and how it may be used.

UAV-based photography has great potential to showcase the beauty of parks and wilderness areas, when performed sparingly and responsibly. However it also could be very damaging to those same parks and wilderness if UAV use becomes a free-for-all.

In June 2014, the US National Park Service took the step of banning UAVs in national parks, save for their use under the auspices of a special use permit. AWA would like to see a similar step taken by Parks Canada.

- Sean Nichols