

NOAA testing unmanned aircraft at Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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PORT ANGELES, Wash. - NOAA has begun testing an unmanned aircraft system in the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary that could allow researchers to observe animals at relatively close range with minimal disturbance, and possibly locate marine debris in remote areas.



Launching UAS from deck of R/V *Tatoosh*. (Photo: Olympic Coast NMS)The test of the Puma system, which can fly lower and slower than manned aircraft and are much quieter, is taking place in and around the sanctuary through June 29 and is the first test of unmanned aircraft for use in the Olympic Coast. During the test, the aircraft is launched and recovered from the sanctuary's NOAA research vessel *Tatoosh*. The test mission will demonstrate the aircraft's camera resolution and allow researchers to explore the aircraft's potential to support management of Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary, the Washington Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Complex and other marine resource trustees.



Common murre seabird colony. (Photo: recorded by the UAS along Washington coast in Olympic Coast NMS)"The primary objective of the tests is to monitor seabird colonies along the coastline and offshore islands of Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary," said Carol Bernthal, sanctuary

superintendent. "We also plan to survey remote coastline and open waters for marine debris and other marine wildlife."The Puma is a 13-pound, battery-powered aircraft with a nine-foot wingspan, equipped with real-time video and still photo capability. The aircraft can be hand-launched from any location on land or at sea from a boat and is controlled remotely by an operator. Durable and rugged for deployment to remote marine areas and repeat usage, the aircraft can fly for up to two hours on a charge and cover a range of about 50 square miles.



Sea Otters. *(Photo: recorded by the UAS along Washington coast in Olympic Coast NMS)*NOAA is partnering with scientists and resource managers from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and coastal treaty tribes. If successful, unmanned aircraft technology could be used in marine protected areas worldwide. Possible uses include wildlife surveys for seabirds, marine mammals and sea turtles, surveys to locate and identify marine debris and scientific data collection. NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has developed use of aircraft for large-scale marine protected area management. NOAA's Unmanned Aircraft System Program represents the next development in marine resource monitoring - cheaper, greener, and safer than manned flights. NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources.

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