

Forest Products Modernization and Environmental Analysis and Decision-making Success Story

Southern Region Imagery Summit



Demonstration of an unmanned aerial system (drone) at the Imagery Summit. Photo by: John G. Church, USDA Forest Service.

In 2018, national forests in Alabama were looking for ways to increase efficiency across all resource areas and determined that many employees at the forest level were not up to speed on the new imagery and geographic information systems (GIS) technology and tools, such as unmanned aerial systems (UAS/drones), that are available to help them in their work. In November, the Regional Resource Information Management (RIM) team, the Geospatial Technology and Application Center (GTAC), and the National Forests of Alabama partnered to implement a 2-day summit to introduce geospatial and remote sensing topics to users and build good relationships between project managers and remote sensing and resource information experts.

Ingredients for Success

The success of the summit depended on the participation of the forests, the Regional Office (RO), RIM team, Fire and Aviation, and GTAC. The implementation team planned early to ensure the right group of people were scheduled to participate and also made sure to choose a good location with space and good connectivity, as well as an outside area for UAS demonstration flights.

The workshop did not seek to train participants on new technologies but, instead, focused on familiarizing users with a set of tools and developing good relationships so that project managers know who they can go to for support on geospatial projects.



Demonstration of a drone at the Imagery Summit. Photo by: John G. Church, USDA Forest Service.

Objectives

1. Build relationships between RO, RIM, GTAC, and the field units for technical support.
2. Increase awareness about available geospatial technologies.
3. Review appropriate applications.
4. Provide demonstrations that emphasize the use of geospatial technologies.
5. Create realistic expectations about the information ROs can provide (GIS products).

Lessons Learned

Geospatial technology, capability, and delivery move at a very fast pace. Most project managers on a district or forest have difficulty keeping up with what is available. Periodic reviews from program experts through regional summits like these can keep users updated.

Next Steps

The Project Managers at the district and supervisor's office level now know how to request help as they try new tools introduced at the summit. The RO and GTAC are using this summit as a model for future engagement with forests in Region 8.

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