FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Flagler County GIS team hosts state-sponsored drone exercise

January 27, 2021 – Flagler County GIS team hosted a state-sponsored drone exercise at the Emergency Operations Center. The training session was sponsored by the Florida Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Working Group based out of Tallahassee.

“These training exercises are a great opportunity for the County and municipalities to work through simulated disasters,” said Flagler County GIS Analyst / UAS Coordinator Matt Adams. “When an actual event occurs, we will have the advantage of already working together as a team so plans can be followed seamlessly.”

Locally, the two-day UAS training included pilots from Flagler County Fire Rescue, Fire Flight, City of Palm Coast, and Flagler County GIS, but agencies around the state also participated within their regions.

“In an emergency situation, information will be needed immediately,” said Flight Operations Chief Dana Morris. “That will not be the time to figure out the technology.”

This program provides support for law enforcement, public safety, and building inspections. The use of this state-of-the-art technology assists with risk management by effectively preventing hazardous accidents which often occur with roof inspections.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Flagler UAS Users Group met monthly. This group consists of pilots from local municipalities and neighboring agencies, such as St. Johns County and St. Johns River Water Management District. Going forward, the Flagler County Growth Management and Building Department will be joining the group now that team members have received their certifications.

The Flagler County UAS program was created in June 2019. Currently, there are 6 certified pilots with at least 6 more in the process of obtaining their Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Remote Pilot Certificate: 2 from the Building Department, 3 in Fire Rescue, and 1 in the Innovation Technology department.

There are strict local, FAA, and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations in place which must be closely adhered to. Prior to each flight, the team must notify the Dispatch Center and helicopter pilots. For
flights within the controlled airspace of the airport, FAA regulations are followed and the control tower is notified.

Flagler County has completed nearly 500 UAS flights total, with more than 200 flights that generated high quality imagery for further analysis, and have assisted with prescribed burns to locate spot fires before they get out of hand. Other capabilities include fire surveillance, missing-persons searches, and videography.

“UAS technology is a valuable tool that allows our first responders to have increased situational awareness,” said Adams. “We are planning additional monthly training opportunities in the near future similar to the one last week.”

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**Pictured from left to right:**
UAS Drone Training- Skyler Dixon, Matt Adams, Dana Morris, Dave Hudson, Mike LaGreca, Brant Gammon