

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Reference Manual #60: Aviation Management

Chapter 16 – Cooperator Aircraft

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Prepared by the Branch of Aviation

Reviewed by the Chief, Division of Fire and Aviation Management

Signature / Date

Approved by the Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection

Signature / Date

16 Cooperator Aircraft

16.1 General

A cooperator can be:

- Military
- Other government agency
- Affiliate

Aircraft and pilots, both crewed and uncrewed, must be approved by OAS for point-to-point or special use activities through a Letter of Authorization.

Parks that would like approval to utilize cooperators must follow the process in [351 DM 4, Cooperator Operations](#). At a minimum, the following items be provided to the RAM who will forward the request through the NAM for approval to OAS:

1. Name of cooperator agency and point of contact.
2. Requested aircraft and pilots: aircraft make and model, pilot(s) name, and support equipment.
3. Intended use: (e.g., reconnaissance, resource, low level (below 500 ft. AGL)
4. Reimbursement: If reimbursement is agreed to by both parties, it will be up to the benefiting agency/bureau to establish the reimbursable agreement or payment vehicle with the servicing party.
5. The requesting park point-of-contact.
6. Period of need: one-time, repetitive, multi-year, etc.
7. When flights are concluded, a cooperator use report survey must be completed to report the flight time and other details related to all cooperator usage. The survey link is included in the OAS Cooperator Letter of Authorization issued after March 2024.

The NAM will determine if the aircraft requested can meet mission objectives and the desired level of operational efficiency. Then, the NAM will forward the request, with supporting documentation, to the OAS servicing Regional Office. The NAM, working with the RAM, will ensure that the parks understand and can properly manage the use of the Cooperator resource.

If approved, OAS will issue a Letter of Authorization or secure approval through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A LOA will be issued for short-term agreements, while a MOU may be used for longer-term or more complex cooperator agreements.

A qualified flight manager is required for all cooperator flights.

For a cooperator conducting life-threatening (emergency) or operational (urgent) flights a Helicopter Manager is recommended. However, if a Helicopter Manager is not available the crew chief (or equivalent) from the cooperator aircraft can fulfill this role. When this occurs all NPS personnel that board the cooperator aircraft, in a support role, will at a minimum be qualified as an Aircrew member. If external helicopter operations occur with the cooperator (hoist, short-haul, long-line, etc.) it must be approved in the OAS cooperator Letter of Authorization, and NPS personnel participating in those

activities must be current with IAT requirements for the specific mission or have documented training with the cooperator for the specific external operation occurring.

16.2 Use of Military Aircraft

In addition to the responsibilities identified above, the park identifying a projected need for the use of military aircraft shall:

1. Coordinate with the appropriate OAS regional director to assist in a search for commercial resource availability.
2. Identify and locate military aircraft capable of meeting mission needs.
3. Initiate a written request for non-emergency use to the appropriate OAS RD.

16.3 Affiliate Aircraft

Affiliates are cooperating parties, for example, privately owned aircraft and educational entities. Before accepting any such offers, consult with the appropriate RAM who will ensure compliance with [351 DM 4.2](#).

16.4 Cooperative Agreements

Cooperative agreements are the mechanism NPS uses to facilitate research by cooperators, such as the work by universities in parks. Cooperative agreements that involve the use of flight services must contain language stating that aircraft under the operational control of NPS are subject to this reference manual and DOI policies. While a cooperative agreement between NPS and the cooperator for the funding and research may be in place, a separate DOI aviation-specific Letter of Authorization is also required. See Chapter 15.5, *Exclusive Use Contracts*. Cooperative agreements involving aviation increase complexity, so parks should contact their RAM for additional guidance.

For each cooperator flight, NPS must track the flight time utilizing the QR code or weblink provided in the Letter of Authorization if issued after March 2024.