



**For Immediate Release**

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**Thrush Aircraft Begins Exploration of Autonomous Air Tanker**

*Strategic alliance with Drone America anticipated to yield unmanned solutions to airborne wildfire surveillance and attack – and more.*

(Albany, GA) The arsenal of airborne tactics available to firefighters and first responders may soon grow significantly as Thrush Aircraft has formed a strategic alliance with highly-regarded unmanned aerial vehicle and systems manufacturer Drone America to begin development of the world's first autonomous air tanker.

The new tanker is expected to blend Thrush's large airframe and airborne delivery system expertise with Drone America's "Ariel" amphibious platform – resulting in an aircraft capable of delivering some 800 gallons of water or fire retardant, autonomously. The aircraft will also have the ability to conduct long-duration tactical surveillance flights over a fire to give firefighters, operations managers, and public safety coordinators on the ground real-time understanding of conditions and fire behavior.

"As the almost incomprehensible devastation of the 2017 fire season has shown, there is virtually no limit to the level of destruction to property and natural environments wildfires can cause," said Mike Richards, president and CEO of Drone America. "We founded our company on the belief that highly-reliable, well-integrated autonomous systems can significantly improve public and environmental safety. Our collaboration with Thrush represents a major step forward in achieving that goal, and we're excited to be joining forces in the fight against one of our country's most challenging foes: wildland fires."

Currently, only manned air tankers are used in airborne firefighting operations, and they are restricted from fighting fires during night hours. However, it is during this "dark window" that autonomous tankers can take special advantage of the cooler night temperatures and reduced fire activity to support tactical ground operations, without risking the lives of pilots.



In addition to tanker duties, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) orbiting high above other firefighting aircraft and equipped with infrared cameras, sensors and integrated communications equipment are particularly well-suited to systematically map and communicate fire intensity, rate and direction of spread. This high-level, on-scene intelligence gathering not only greatly enhances civilian and firefighter safety on the ground, but also helps solve one of the most vexing problems of disaster response: linking voice and data transmissions across different and otherwise incompatible communication systems.

In summarizing the new alliance, Payne Hughes, president and CEO of Thrush Aircraft, said: "Thrush prides itself in continuously bringing the highest levels of innovation and value to our industry – and joining in the fight to better control wildfires from the air is in perfect alignment with our recent introduction of the 510G Switchback and its advanced manned-aircraft firefighting capabilities."

"Collaborating with Drone America now gives us the ability to enhance airborne firefighting even more, by applying our design, manufacturing and flight test capabilities to a whole new generation of autonomous aircraft that can do things manned aircraft simply can't do safely, or as efficiently. We couldn't be more pleased to be getting this new relationship underway" he concluded.

In addition to unmanned air tanker capabilities, this new alliance represents the next step forward in a strategic push to integrate national disaster planning, public safety, and safe integration of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) into the National Airspace System – as well as a fresh look at current thinking surrounding airborne firefighting regulations and potential alternatives.

Teams from both companies will also explore other unmanned heavy-payload applications such as humanitarian aid, disaster relief, remote cargo transportation and maritime patrol, for which airframes from Thrush could be uniquely suited.



### **About Thrush Aircraft Company**

Headquartered in Albany, Georgia, Thrush Aircraft manufactures a full range of aerial application aircraft used in agriculture, forestry and fire fighting roles worldwide. Founded in 2003, Thrush is well-known for building the most durable aircraft in the aerial application industry, as well as the best flying – from both pilot and operator perspectives. All Thrush models provide superb visibility, light control response, and a high degree of maneuverability and speed, along with superior efficiency and low direct operating costs. Today there are more than 2,100 Thrush aircraft operating in some 80 countries around the world. More information can be found at: [www.thrushaircraft.com](http://www.thrushaircraft.com).

### **About Drone America**

Drone America designs and manufactures unmanned aerial vehicles and systems with the flexibility to capture and deliver multiple types of data. Drone America's unmanned aircraft have the ability to simultaneously operate multiple professional-grade sensors and payloads. Customizing payloads specifically for a mission gives operators the ability to streamline flight procedures, lower costs, and achieve a higher rate of successful multi-sensor data collection. In addition, Drone America offers Part 107 line-of sight (LOS) and beyond-visual-line-of sight (BVLOS) flight operation training nationwide. More information can be found at: [www.droneamerica.com](http://www.droneamerica.com).

### **Caption for attached photo**

Thrush Aircraft has entered into a strategic alliance with Drone America to begin exploring unmanned air tankers that could one day soon supplement the wildfire attack capabilities of its manned firefighting aircraft, such as the recently introduced Thrush 510G Switchback which is now entering service with the Georgia Forestry Commission.

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