

DRONES: Pendleton competes nationally for UAS

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staff and five to 10 independent contractors at any given time.

He also couldn't say the exact number of jobs created by the drone ranges, but estimated it was in the hundreds.

Companies and organizations like Arcturus UAV, a California drone company, and NASA are frequent customers at Nevada ranges. Delivery is a popular application tested at the ranges, with convenience store giant 7-Eleven teaming up with Reno UAS company Flirtey to test out product delivery.

Like Oregon, Kanda said Nevada is applying to be included in the FAA's UAS Integration Pilot Program, which allows test ranges to do more advanced operations like operations at night, flights over people, automated flights, and flights that are beyond the line of sight of the remote pilots.

Kanda said he's confident Nevada will be included in the program, which could continue to expand business in the state.

New York

Drones used to be the exclusive province of the armed forces, and when the test site program opened UAS to civilians, New York hired a man familiar with both sectors.

Marke Gibson, a retired major general in the U.S. Air Force and a former senior advisor on UAS integration to the deputy secretary of the FAA, is the CEO of the Northeast UAS Airspace Integration Research Alliance, a nonprofit comprised of 200 private and public entities and academic institutions who oversee New York's UAS systems.

New York's UAS system has been backed by \$50 million from the state, one of the biggest state investments anywhere in the country.

A bulk of that is from \$30 million the state granted in 2016 to establish a 50-mile unmanned traffic control system from Syracuse to Griffiss International Airport in central New York. According to a 2017 press release, the corridor would allow sensor companies, data integrators and UAS companies to test their products outside line-of-sight.

The alliance is based at Griffiss and employs 20 people, including six full-time staff.

A decommissioned Air Force base, Gibson said Griffiss already came with much of the infrastructure needed to run a test range and nearby personnel experienced in aviation.

Gibson said many test ranges expected the federal government to help finance operations, but Congress never appropriated any funds and the FAA didn't have room in its budget. That makes the level of investment from the state "a real blessing."

Some of the investment is already starting to pay dividends.

Although he was also unable to say how many jobs were generated from New York's UAS program, Gibson mentioned that the state's Genius NY competition has been a successful



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Engineers from the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory talk about the scientific payload of the ArticShark unmanned aerial vehicle to a group of Pendleton dignitaries in March 2017 at the Pendleton UAS Range.

recruiting tool.

Start-ups from around the world are given stipends, housing, resources, programming and networking opportunities while they develop a business pitch with a \$1 million grand prize as incentive.

While all companies are required to operate in central New York during the three-month competition and a nine month accelerator period, Gibson said many of the companies have chosen to stay.

The \$50 million initial investment is larger than most others states, and there could be more state money on the way. The Central New York Regional Economic Development Council recommended the state eventually invest \$250 million into UAS.

North Dakota

North Dakota is a world away from New York, but the sparsely populated midwestern state is keeping pace with Empire State by investing \$40-\$50 million in its UAS program.

The Northern Plains UAS Test Site is run through the North Dakota Department of Commerce, which was looking to diversify the state's economy beyond agriculture and oil.

Test site executive director Nicholas Flom said the program is based out of Grand Forks, but the FAA's flight authorization applies to all 71,230 square miles of the state instead of a specific area, a unique set-up for a test range.

While North Dakota isn't known for its temperate weather, the range advertises the extreme conditions customers can test their drones in, from subzero temperatures to triple digits.

The state also established the Grand Sky Business Park, an industrial park co-located at the Grand Forks Air Force Base that hosts top aviation companies.

Although Flom couldn't name how many permanent UAS industry employees were in North Dakota, Northrop Grumman built a 36,000 square foot aerospace manufacturing facility at Grand Sky, which the Department of Commerce website said employs more than 100 people.

General Atomics, a technology company with operations across the world, also built a 19,000 square foot aerospace training facility.

The test site is staffed by eight people and a dozen students from one of the

state's universities might drop in for research at any given time.

While North Dakota might enjoy low unemployment (2.6 percent according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics), Flom said the state has a scarcity of professional-level jobs.

With the UAS industry offering jobs in engineering, mission planning, piloting and more, Flom is optimistic about the state's prospects.

"For decades, we've had a shrinking population," he said. "We're turning the corner."



Darryl Abling



Steve Chrisman

Oregon

For a few years, Oregon had a UAS nonprofit of its own that provided marketing and financial support for the ranges.

But the board behind SOAR Oregon recently voted the nonprofit out of existence, transferring the remains of the \$3 million grant the state gave it to the Oregon Department of Aviation.

Mitch Swecker, the director of the department of aviation, said the department will leave promotion up to test ranges and will distribute the remaining \$925,000 the three test ranges in Pendleton, Tillamook and Warm Springs.

If the state doesn't provide more funding for UAS, Swecker said the department's financial commitment will end when the grant funds are exhausted.

In total, Swecker estimated the state has invested \$4-\$7 million in the UAS test ranges, a shoestring budget compared to some of the other ranges across the country.

Between grants from Business Oregon, the governor's office and SOAR Oregon, Pendleton has received nearly \$2 million from the state for the test range.

"The funding is a little shallow, but we appreciate every dollar we get from the state," said Steve Chrisman, Pendleton airport manager and economic development director.

Although the city has applied to the department of aviation for more funding, Chrisman said it's his expectation that the Pend-

leton UAS Range will be completely self-sufficient by the first quarter of 2019.

While Chrisman could use a multi-million dollar investment to meet the demand for hangar space from UAS customers, he said Pendleton already has much of the equipment other ranges are investing in and the two full-time staff members who work for the range are sufficient.

Chrisman and range manager Darryl Abling are also comfortable with the range's ability to attract business.

"There's enough pie to go around," Chrisman said.

Each range has its own regional niche, he said, and there's opportunities to bring in companies from the Columbia River Gorge who would rather test in the Northwest than anywhere else.

And while many test ranges are research focused because of their affiliation with universities, Chrisman said Pendleton can be more business focus because of the leeway provided by the University of Alaska Fairbanks, which oversees the range.

Abling said the range's dedication to customer service and Pendleton's small-town charms give the range a unique advantage.

A veteran of UAS testing through his days at Northrop Grumman, Abling said its not often that drone testers feel positively about the town they're staying in, a compliment they often here from the customers who come through the range.

But the test range staff are also keeping note of the success other ranges have had in attracting facilities and jobs from top aviation companies.

Chrisman said a UAS industrial park on the north side of the Pendleton airport is still in the city's longterm plans.

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Staff photos by E.J. Harris

Democratic candidate Dr. Jennifer Neahring of Bend speaks during a Democratic candidate forum for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District on Friday at BMCC in Pendleton.

FORUM: 2nd district Dems presented a unified front

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leader in renewable energy. Jim Crary of Ashland, who lost to Walden in 2016, said he supports getting the county off fossil fuels by 2035. Jamie McLeod-Skinner of Terrebonne said she wants to streamline the process for new housing to incorporate green tech.

Most told the crowd of about a hundred they support a ban on assault weapons, but no one defined what an assault weapon is.

Tim White of Bend went further and advocated for a ban on all semi-automatic guns and limiting magazines to holding no more than five rounds. He did not say if there would be exceptions for law enforcement, for example.

Raz Mason of The Dalles said gun owners should carry liability insurance akin to vehicle owners. Burnette said there needs to be "generous" gun buy-back program. And Crary stated the ballot initiative out of Portland to confiscate AR-15 rifles is going to hurt Democrats and drive Walden's supporters to the polls.

The moderator also asked them about what they see as the biggest threat to safe and legal abortions. A couple said the future loss of Supreme Court Justice Ruth



Democratic candidate Jamie McLeod-Skinner of Terrebonne speaks.

Bader Ginsburg, who is 85. Neahring delivered the direct response, "A Republican Congress." Byrne rambled for a moment, then realized, "The biggest obstacle to safe access to abortions is men."

They talked about the value of social media in taking on Walden, who has far more campaign money, but McLeod-Skinner also emphasized the need for a solid "ground game" of meeting voters face-to-face.

While they all have long drives back home, several said they plan to be out tomorrow participating in the March for our Lives.

The primary is May 15. Walden, who has held the seat since 1999, faces Randy Pollock and Paul Romero in the Republican primary.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

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