What Is All the Buzz About Drones?

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Publications

One can hardly turn on the news or read a newspaper (online, of course) without running across a story about unmanned aerial systems (or "drones"). Small drones (usually quad-copters) were favorite gifts over the holidays; I even bought my kids a little quad-copter. But hobby use is not where the use of drones presents its most interesting challenges, questions and opportunities. Commercial drone use is coming, like it or not, and brings with it opportunities, but also questions and challenges.

But as someone who spent a number of years in military aviation before entering law practice, I confess my initial thoughts on drones involved some hesitancy. After all, one of my squadronmates planted an aircraft in a North Carolina swamp after taking a Canadian goose down the right engine (everyone ejected safely). Drones could pose a threat to traditional aircraft similar to the threat posed by birds, but, unlike birds, drone flight is within someone's control, at least one would hope. But as I have started helping clients with drone use, my opinions have changed. Commercial use of drones will happen in some form or fashion and, as long as safety remains paramount, it is an exciting new technology. And for those who desire to use drones for commercial purposes, clarity appears to be on the horizon. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has been looking at the issue for several years and is expected to enact rules designed to address commercial drone use in a more comprehensive way.

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