October 12, 2001

Paul Kurtz
Director, Transnational Threats
National Security Council
The White House
Washington, DC 20504

Dear Mr. Kurtz:

The American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS) is a professional membership organization with approximately 6,000 members practicing in the areas of remote sensing, photogrammetry and geographic information science. Our membership consists of individuals employed in private industry, in government at all levels, and in academia. We also have approximately 150 corporate sustaining members, ranging from small mapping firms to some of the largest defense and information technology companies in the U.S.

We were all shocked by the senseless acts of terror on September 11, and collectively our membership understands the difficulties faced by you and your colleagues as you balance the safety of the general public with the desire to keep the economy strong. This letter addresses the urgent need for our members to once again gain routine access to "Enhanced Class B airspace" in order to perform their professional aerial imaging responsibilities.

Many of our member companies either acquire aerial imagery within Class B space, or rely upon that imagery, to provide professional services to a wide range of clients, including the Federal, State and local governments, utilities, planners and even disaster relief efforts. You may be aware of the value of these services since some of the very first waivers granted to general aviation traffic in the New York and Washington, DC areas were issued to our members to facilitate image and data acquisition over the crime scenes.

We recognize that relief has already been granted outside Class B space, and the industry certainly appreciates those decisions. However, we respectfully request that you authorize the FAA to work quickly with the aerial mapping community to establish appropriate operational and security procedures within Class B space that are sufficient to balance the competing needs of both safety and commerce. We request that those procedures be adopted to again allow aerial mapping overflights in Class B space nation-wide.

We have been working with our colleagues in the Management Association of Private Photogrammetric Surveyors (MAPPS) on these issues, and have attached a recent MAPPS White Paper addressing the issues and proposed solutions. This White Paper was prepared several weeks ago, and some of the proposals are no longer necessary. However, it provides a good

background on the subject and hopefully will communicate to you how flexible the industry is willing to be in order to resume airphoto operations.

We appreciate the many policy challenges currently facing the NSC and pledge our support to resolving these issues in a professional and timely manner. Please let us know if we can be of assistance in the resolution of this matter.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by

George Hepner, Ph.D.
President

Attachment – White Paper on Nature of Aerial Photography Missions

cc: Steven J. Brown
FAA Associate Administrator for Air Traffic Service

Attachment

White Paper: Nature of Aerial Photography Missions

Aerial photo missions for photogrammetry (mapping) are flown by a small and select number of aircraft and companies across the nation. These aircraft should be exempt from restrictions due to the fact that these aircraft have been operating for years and our aircraft and crews are familiar with local air traffic controllers.

Aerial photo aircraft do not carry passengers, but established crews and due to heavy camera equipment are generally already at gross capacity. The crews normally have flown together a number of years. Additionally, the aircraft are typically small, piston singles and twins and occasionally small turbines.

Because of the non-standard flight paths ("flightlines") and the flexibility needed to move from one project site to another based on cloud cover, sun angle, GPS constellation and satellite signal availability and other factors necessary to acquire imagery, such firms are experienced in the routine of providing maps of flight plans and working through the details with ATC. Our member firms have flown projects in restricted air space, in both P56A & B (the Mall and Naval Observatory) as well as P40 (Camp David) and other areas, where coordination between the government agency that is the aerial photo firm's client, as well as FAA and agencies such as DoD and the Secret Service is critical, and is carried out routinely. In the environment in which we find ourselves today, enhanced cooperation and coordination is possible between the contracting agency, the aerial photo firm, the FAA and any airspace restriction authority.

Since aerial photo flights are flown in good weather, they primarily fly VFR (Visual Flight Rules). The missions normally require altitudes that are not normally associated with strictly VFR or IFR, but are determined by the scale of the photography. Most aerial photo firms fly under Part 91. Aerial photography also requires a number of tight turns at the ends of flight lines in order to get on subsequent lines and occasionally it would appear from a distance that we are flying in circles. We also have to watch weather and at times jump from project to another.

Aerial photo firms have exemplary maintenance and safety records. The pilots normally have a number of years experience and a number are veterans and/or retired airline pilots. These personnel are very cognizant of the issues that currently face America, and the reasons why there are current restrictions on airspace. They and the companies they work for also highly cognizant of the importance of safety and security, and the need to operate within the law and regulations.

Recommendations to Permit Resumption of Aerial Photo Flights

We completely understand the need at this time to closely monitor all flights in the U.S.. As an avenue to re-instate Part 91 we would suggest having all aerial photo pilots file a VFR flight plan and use "Flight Following". In the "long run" we also suggest that aerial photography for mapping aircraft have its own Part in the FAR.

Options that the FAA may want to consider is to allow the aerial photography companies to fly IFR to the project site, with VFR flight of the project utilizing the same transponder or beacon code and then returning to IFR.

Another alternative would be to utilize VFR flight following the entire time. In both cases the flight plans for the projects would be submitted to the closest ATC Center before flight, clearances with ATC would be requested before taking to the air, the aircraft would keep in touch with the controlling agency throughout the flight so that their is no miscommunication and the plan would be terminated immediately after landing.

It may be advisable to require flight crews to have security clearance.

It may also be feasible to assemble a national registry of approved aerial photo providers. These aircraft as well as their crews could be easily registered by a Federal agency.

The aircraft number should be on record with the FAA as possible aerial photo aircraft, along with company information, if needed.

Call signs could be used with each company, showing that company and pilots have been security cleared.

The crew should have FAA issued photo ID card's (badge), each with a unique FAA assigned number.

Perhaps a phone number that the FAA could call to verify that the planned flight crew and aircraft are indeed on a photo mission. This could be a third party or an industry point of contact and could be called before - during - or after the planned flight. We could even have an assigned 'code - or password' to give the briefer/flight controller when asked.

On preflight briefings with the FAA, the pilot's ID badge number and the aircraft number could be verified by the FAA as a photo flight and given the official blessing of the FAA with a transponder code (as if it were an IFR flight plan).

We would willing to be required to do what we usually do most of the time, a flight review with the FAA briefer on our planned route, photo area, and return or continuing route, even providing a copy of the planned flight.

For VFR flights, fully participate in ATC radar environment with VFR radar services (mode C Transponder discrete ID code).

This type of coordination is required for IFR flights in Class A airspace (above 18,000' MSL) and will enhance communication for VFR aerial acquisition flights by providing details of who, where, when and how we propose working in the National Airspace System.

We would strongly recommend the FAA assign aerial photo firms a Discreet Code to work within the system that is already in place. For example, a Discreet Transponder Code (squawk) 7700 is an emergency code, 7600 is radio failure, 1200 is VFR. For instance, aerial photo could be assigned a Discreet Code of 1111. We could always be recognized as aircraft flying a photo mission in the air system.

A Discreet Code is important for the following reasons:

We do not fly from point A to point B and land. We do not fly at FAA's altitude for directions. Our altitude is determined by the scale of photography we are flying and most likely will be different than IFR or VFR regulatory requirements. We cannot follow a pre-defined agenda. If clouds move in or shadows cover our site, we have to change our flight operation at any time during a photo mission.

We often fly one area for 4 to 5 hours at one time on a block of photography. We never fly photography IFR unless we know in advance that we are at an IFR altitude through flight planning or are above 18,000' MSL. Above 18,000' there is less of a problem in continental airspace and IFR flight plans are always filed per regulations. But again, we do not fly from point A to point B.

Conclusion

Aerial photo operations are neither joy-riders nor tourists. Our work is extremely important to the economy and infrastructure of the United States. Our clients consist of government at the Federal, state and local levels, architects, engineers, land surveyors, developers and natural resource companies. Aerial photography is essential to America getting back to work as the President has suggested.

Aerial photo firms are small businesses that cannot afford the financial hardship of a prolonged shutdown. The Federal Government has now denied these firms their only source of revenue for a full week. It is essential that a safe, secure process for permitting these firms to resume operations is established and implemented immediately.

MAPPS recognizes the challenge that FAA and other Federal officials, agencies, authorities and decision-makers confront. We offer these suggestions in order to get our member firms back in the air, in a safe and secure manner, in order to get through the current situation.

We look forward to discussing these suggestions with the FAA and other Federal officials, and working to develop a solution that benefits our members and our great Nation.

Just as FAA has approved a special provision for aerial observation surveys of pipelines and powerlines in FDC 1/0111, we would urge similar treatment of aerial photo missions.

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(Information current as of 9/18/01)