

# WHO'S DRIVING YOUR PLANE?

# DRONES IN THE BAKKEN

By Jason Spiess for the Tribune



Image courtesy of Carrington Research Extension Center  
UAS research at the Carrington Research Extension Center

**N**orth Dakota is on the cusp of yet another breakout industry driven by technology — aviation. More specifically unmanned aviation. This budding industry has increased its impact into our daily lives for the past decade through a variety of ways. As education and advancements in industry continues, the sentiment from the public has gone from science fiction threat to investment opportunity.

Although the idea of planes without pilots are nothing new, Austrians used to attached bombs to hot air balloons in the 1800s and Nikola Tesla spoke about fighting wars with fleets of pilotless planes in the early 1900s. And like most technologies and inventions in America, they come up through the military and the modern day drones are no different.

Understanding the good, the bad and the ugly of this industry is one of the main reasons the general public has not seen Black Friday sales on unmanned vehicles. There are real concerns in the world of safety, privacy and ethics, however, the benefits are becoming so strong, North Dakota became one of six states to become a Federal Aviation Administration selected test site. Alaska, Nevada, New York, Texas and Virginia, were the other states selected to research integrating Unmanned Aircraft Systems into the general population.

“I’ve actually developed some legislation that set up six pilot test sites around the country, we are one of them. We are the first one as it should be,” said U.S. Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D. “Now look, we are going to make sure that we get this right, that it is developed in a way that we insure general aviation can continue to function, that we protect privacy rights. That’s the point. The test site right here in North Dakota is going to figure out how we do this thing and how we do it right and well.”

North Dakota’s UAS Test Site is headquartered in Grand Forks and, like all the other UAS Test Sites, is expected to serve the needs of the FAA through at least February, 2017. Robert Becklund, director of the Northern Plains UAS Test Site, oversaw the very first federally