

# Billings Public Safety Drone Programs



April 2024



**Billings**  
FIRE  
DEPARTMENT



BILLINGS  
**Police**

# Background

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Drones are increasingly common within public safety agencies as a low-cost tool to enhance situational awareness and responder safety on emergency scenes



# Background

## Billings Fire

- Program started in 2020 upon receipt of a \$300,000 Federal Homeland Security grant
- 4 drones, each with a different use case

## Billings Police

- Program began in 2020 using drug forfeiture money to purchase drones
- 5 drones, for rapid deployment

Both Fire and Police departments hold special authorizations from the FAA to operate drones for public safety



## Public Safety Drone Uses

- Structure and Wildland fire
- Search and Rescue
- Police standoff overwatch
- Hazmat response
- Suspect searches
- Crime scene documentation
- Arson investigation
- Pre-incident planning
- Video trainings and exercises for review



## Training

- Each drone pilot is certified through the FAA as a Remote Pilot
- Recertification required every two years
- Drone pilots maintain proficiency with monthly flights and trainings

# Inter-agency Cooperation

- Fire and Police department drone pilots train together
- Both teams work together to back each other up on significant incidents



# Notable Deployments

- June 2022 – Drones were used to survey the Yellowstone River and affected infrastructure during unprecedented flooding.
- August 2022 – A drone was deployed to assist in finding an elderly dementia patient who wandered away from home in the Alkali Creek area.
- March 2023 – Drones used to search for a missing mountain biker in the area of Zimmerman Park, allowing fewer responders to cover more area faster than they would on the ground.
- October 2023 – Multiple drones were used to provide overwatch while BPD and other local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies served a high-risk warrant regarding explosive manufacturing, enhancing situational awareness and responder safety on the incident.
- November 2023 – A drone with thermal camera and spotlight was flown at night to search for a shooting suspect over a large area of midtown.

July 2023

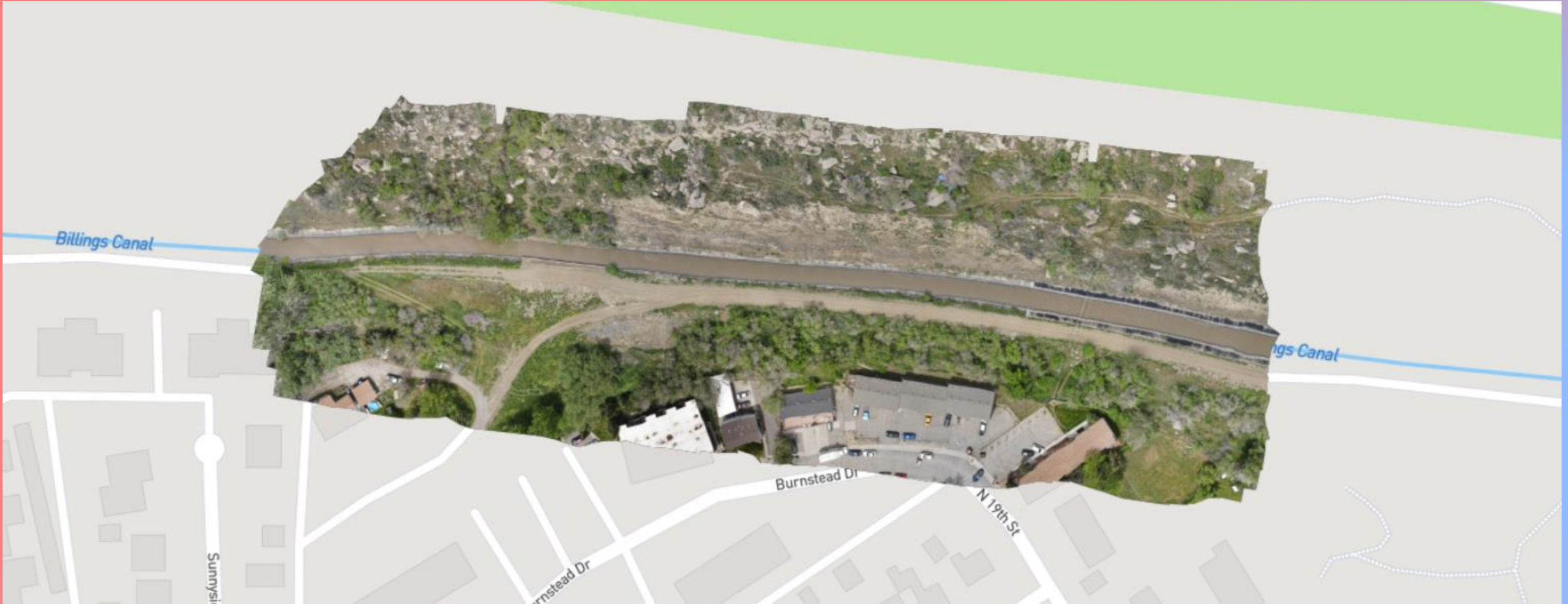
During a night-time river rescue call, a drone with a thermal camera was used to locate three people stranded in on an island in Yellowstone River. The drone then guided BFD and YCSO water rescue technicians to their location using an onboard lighting system.



August 2023

Drones were deployed to the scene of a disturbance involving a suspect who set brush piles on fire that threatened neighboring property. When fire crews arrived, the suspect threatened firefighters and law enforcement with a skid steer he was driving. Drones were used to monitor his movements and distract the suspect using the onboard lighting system, allowing deputies to safely take him into custody.





# BBWA Ditch Monitoring

Weekly flights over the ditch helped keep City officials informed.



# Questions

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