

OUTSTANDING GOVERNMENT SERVICE



THOMAS WALLS Department of Transportation, Division of Aviation

Thomas Walls serves the Department of Transportation's Division of Aviation as an Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Operations Specialist. In this role, he is the first and only full-time professional drone pilot for the State of North Carolina.

In September 2018, during his first week on the job, Hurricane Florence struck North Carolina. Walls supported 260 drone missions that captured videos and images used by emergency responders to route traffic and monitor the condition of transportation infrastructure, winning the respect and gratitude of emergency management officials on the local, state and federal level.

Walls work has caught the attention of national news outlets several times, first for making North Carolina the first state to conduct a bridge inspection using out-of-sight drones and later for the deployment of tethered drones on Incident Management Assistance Patrol (IMAP) trucks to help assess highway incidents more quickly and safely.

Walls has worked with government agencies at every level and has consulted on drone operations with the FBI, Secret Service, FEMA and more. Thousands have attended his presentations on North Carolina's drone usage. He is an advisor and subject matter expert for companies using this technology to deliver medical supplies. Walls has trained hundreds of state employees from many agencies to help them adopt this new technology, earning the admiration of many. With his support and training, more agencies are embracing drone usage. Eager to keep up this momentum during the pandemic, Walls provided self-paced, online courses for drone instruction.



From searching for archeological remains to providing support to first responders during natural disasters, Thomas Walls has proved time and time again his commitment to his work. He not only benefits the Department of Transportation but all agencies that request his support and services. The State of North Carolina thanks him for his groundbreaking work and is honored to call him a state employee.