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# CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

## California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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### **CAL FIRE arrests hobby drone operator for interfering with firefight**

**Foresthill** – CAL FIRE law enforcement officers arrested a Placer County man Friday who allegedly interfered with firefighting operations recently on the [Trailhead Fire](#) by flying a drone over the fire, forcing CAL FIRE to ground aircraft rather than risk a collision.

Information posted on social media helped lead law enforcement officers to Eric Wamser, 57, of Foresthill. He was arrested Friday afternoon, booked into the Placer County jail in Auburn and charged with interfering with firefighting operations, Penal Code Section 148.2.

This is the first arrest by CAL FIRE law enforcement of a drone operator for allegedly interfering with firefighting.

Over the past two years, fire officials have seen increasing numbers of hobby drones flying over wildfires and interfering with aerial firefighting operations. Airtankers and firefighting helicopters fly at low elevation to drop fire retardant and water, and when hobby drones fly in the same air space, fire officials are forced to pull back aircraft to prevent a collision. Hobby drones should never be flown in or around fire areas.

“When a hobby drone flies in the path of our aircraft, we have no choice but to pull back our airtankers and helicopters until the drone is removed,” said Chief Dave Teter, CAL FIRE deputy director of fire protection. “For hobby drone operators, it’s pretty simple: when you fly, we can’t! No hobby drones over fire zones.”

Wamser’s alleged actions delayed aerial firefighting on a fire burning in the steep canyon along the Middle Fork of the American River near Todd Valley. The Trailhead Fire started June 28 and is now 98 percent contained. It burned more than 5,600 acres and forced hundreds of residents of Placer and El Dorado counties to evacuate. Wamser allegedly flew his hobby drone over the fire during the evening of June 28 to take video and photos.

“The Trailhead Fire was burning in such a remote area that our aircraft were critical to stopping the fire,” said Chief George Morris III, CAL FIRE’s Nevada-Yuba-Placer unit chief. “Every minute we couldn’t fly our aircraft because of this drone, the fire was able to grow and do more damage.”

CAL FIRE asks the public to never fly drones near wildfires. Remember: If You Fly, We Can't! For more information visit [www.fire.ca.gov](http://www.fire.ca.gov) and download the free app by the FAA “B4UFLY” [https://www.faa.gov/uas/where\\_to\\_fly/b4ufly/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/where_to_fly/b4ufly/).

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## **MEDIA NOTES**

CAL FIRE Hobby drone webpage:

[http://www.fire.ca.gov/communications/communications\\_ifyouflywecant](http://www.fire.ca.gov/communications/communications_ifyouflywecant)

CAL FIRE Drone Safety Graphic: <http://calfire.ca.gov/communications/images/IfYouFlyPoster.jpg>

Video PSA: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=069w2Cf5eUQ>