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Contact: Nicole Ingalls-Caley
nicalley@nd.gov

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Northern Plains UAS Test Site Welcomes New Executive Director Trevor Woods

GRAND FORKS, ND – The Northern Plains UAS Test Site (NPUASTS), one of seven Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) test sites, announces the selection of a new executive director. Trevor Woods, formerly the director of safety, was chosen by the Northern Plains Unmanned Systems Authority, which oversees NPUASTS, for his UAS expertise, business experience and future vision for the test site. The Authority is a commission chaired by North Dakota's lieutenant governor and composed of representatives from North Dakota's general aviation community, several state agencies and both major research universities within the state.

"We are very fortunate to have Trevor step up to take the reins at the NPUASTS," said North Dakota Lt. Gov. Brent Sanford. "Trevor was there when the test site began and has been there every step of the way through the federal testing contracts, Grand Sky, BVLOS investments, and now Vantis implementation. Trevor is at the top of this exciting new industry and we look forward to more exciting announcements to come."

Woods has been with NPUASTS since its inception and was part of the proposal team that pitched North Dakota to the FAA as an ideal test site location. At that time, Woods was working at the University of North Dakota, conducting UAS research, providing technical expertise to UAS projects within the university and managing all UAS-related waiver and regulatory submissions to the FAA. When the FAA selected NPUASTS as its first official UAS test site, Woods functioned as the test site's airspace manager, supporting UAS operations as well as building operational documents and writing procedures, and eventually becoming the director of operations in 2015.

"In the beginning, the test sites were a brand-new concept, so we knew what our big goal was – integrating UAS into the National Airspace System – but not really the how. There was no clear-cut, black-and-white set of tasks," Woods said. "One thing that was incredibly important to us was not to limit ourselves to a test range. All of the UND flights we'd been doing up to that point were out in the field, where the research was happening. We knew that was the future – UAS flights in the real world, where the need is."

As the test site grew, Woods took over as director of safety. This role, by its very nature, works extensively with the FAA on regulations and procedure, something Woods was well-versed in. With his long-term institutional knowledge, strong relationship with the FAA, and extensive knowledge and experience with both operations and safety, Woods was a natural choice for executive director.

"I'm excited for this new challenge," said Woods. "I'm incredibly confident in my team and what we're capable of. We've already accomplished so much that was once considered impossible. Getting to be at the forefront of this industry is incredible – we get to shape the future."



Trevor was also instrumental in the conception and development of Vantis, North Dakota's statewide UAS network, which is administered by NPUASTS. He contributed to the development of the first UAS corridor in the state, located between Grand Forks and Fargo, and directed safety efforts for this precursor to Vantis. He helped design the initial blueprints for a statewide beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) network and oversaw all safety protocols during its build-out.

"A major milestone for Vantis is getting FAA approval, which requires developing an impeccable safety case," said Jim Cieplak, Vantis program manager. "Trevor's long-standing relationships within the FAA and his wealth of safety and regulatory knowledge have been invaluable. I look forward to everything Trevor will bring to the Vantis table in this new role."

Trevor holds a Commercial Pilot License and is a certified flight instructor with instrument rating. He earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Aviation Management and a Master of Business Administration, both from the University of North Dakota. He has extensive experience pertaining to spectrum management issues related to UAS operations and was NPUASTS' lead on its involvement in the FAA's Integration Pilot Program (IPP) and its successor, the BEYOND program, both of which focus heavily on BVLOS flights and public acceptance of UAS.

About the Northern Plains UAS Test Site

The [Northern Plains UAS Test Site](#) is one of seven Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) unmanned aircraft system (UAS) test sites in the nation. The mission of the NPUASTS is to collaborate with FAA and industry partners to develop systems, rules, and procedures to safely integrate unmanned aircraft into the National Airspace System without negatively impacting existing general or commercial aviation. NPUASTS is administering Vantis.

About Vantis

[Vantis](#) is North Dakota's statewide unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) network, the first of its kind in the nation. Created by North Dakota with an initial investment in 2019, Vantis provides turnkey support to commercial and public UAS operators through infrastructure and regulatory approvals allowing applications and usability over a variety of industries. Visit [VantisUAS.com](#) for more information.