

Using ForeFlight to Get WX Information

One of the best features about ForeFlight (FF) is the ability to rapidly retrieve and use weather data to preview and obtain a weather briefing.

Here are some steps. For details, suggest you use the current owners manual.

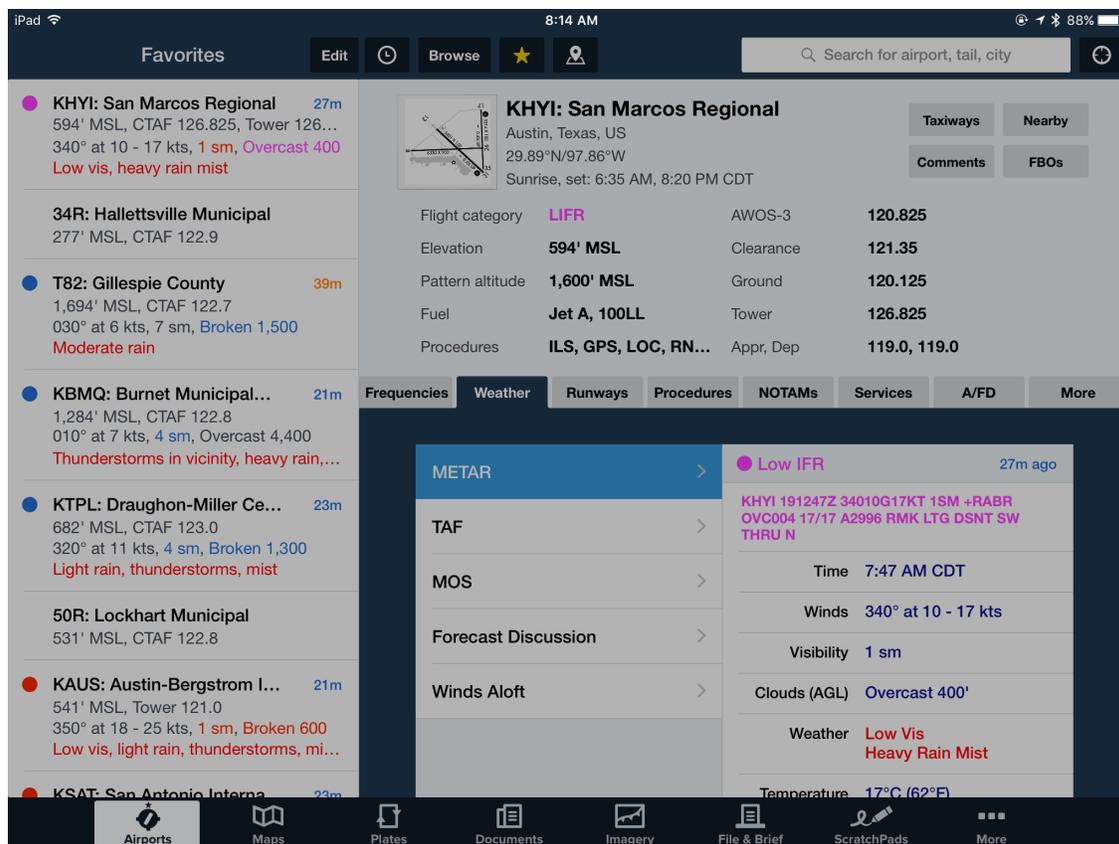
Build a favorite airport database: Once you have a list of your favorite airports, it is easy to scroll down them in the airports tab. The picture below shows how they are color coded by current weather.

Magenta – LIFR

Red – IFR

Blue – MVFR

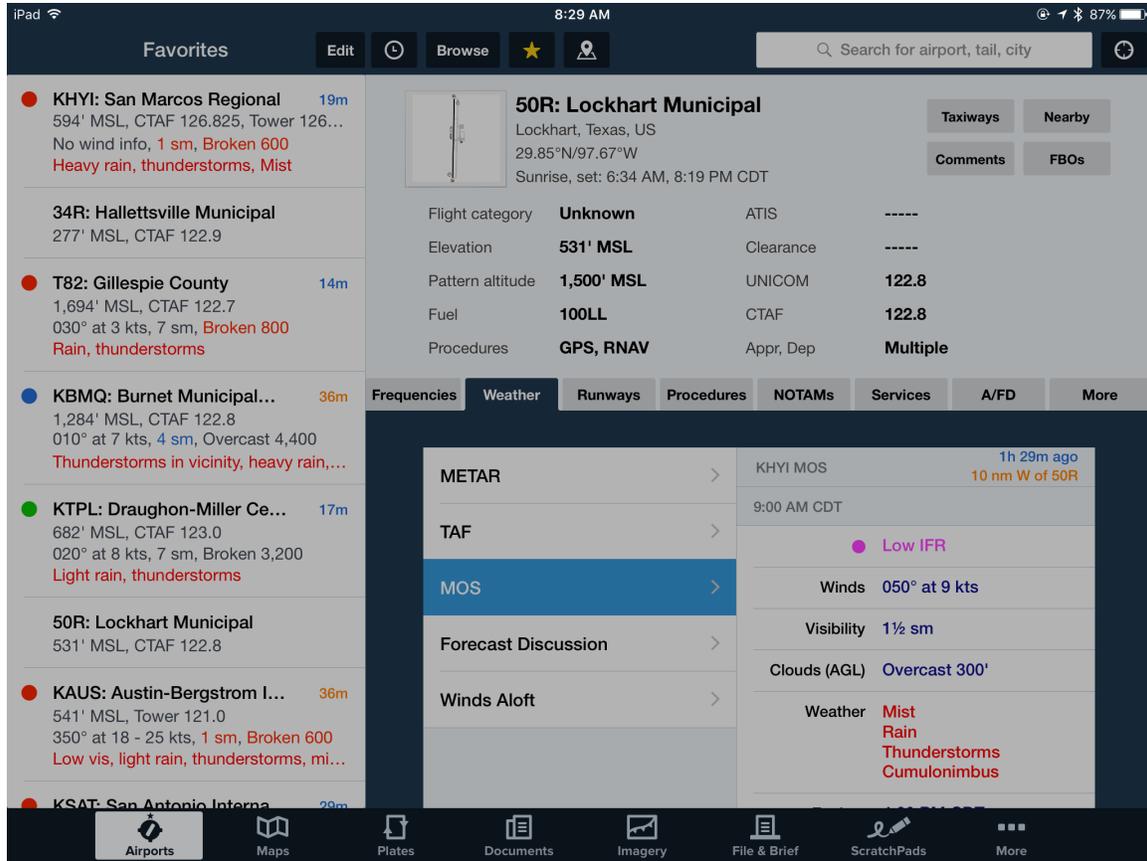
Green – VFR



Note, not all airports have an AWOS or ASOS. For example, Lockhart 50R will not have either a METAR or a TAF. Likewise, unless an airport has a qualified ASOS or weather forecaster, there will be no TAFs issued for that aerodrome. Here is where the Model Output Statistics (MOS) can be used to *augment* an area forecast (FA).

The next screenshot shows the MOS data for 50R.

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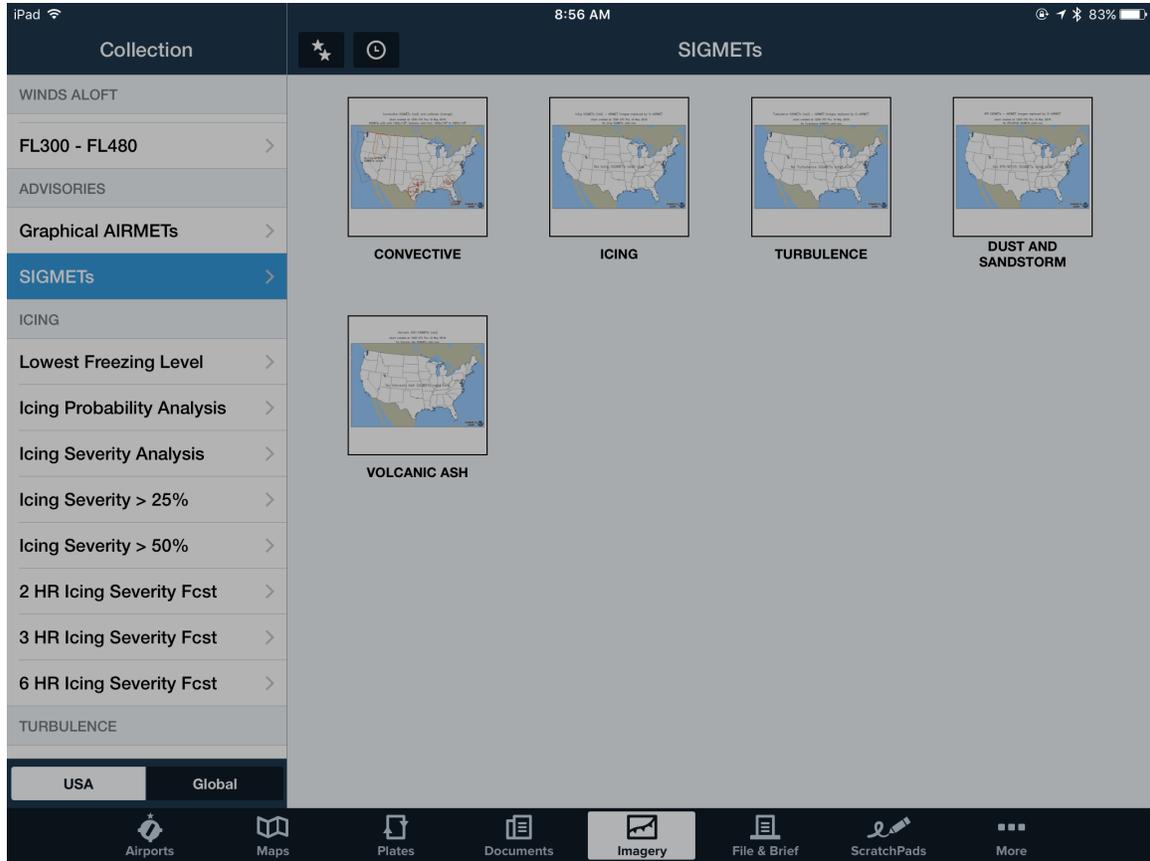


If you use MOS, be careful. It is extrapolated forecast data. It may not represent the current weather, but it can be used to expand your mental picture of the area forecast. Be sure to read the limitations (such as cloud layers) and cautions in the FF owner's manual.

Likewise, the Forecast Discussion is an extraction of one of my favorite features on aviationweather.gov – the Area Forecast Discussion. It is an actual *thought process* from the forecaster who is making the weather predictions for his or her area of responsibility.

Get the Big Picture (part 1): Once you have looked at your destination and departure airports, it's time to develop the big picture of what's going on. Here is where the Imagery tab is helpful. Here you will find familiar products such as Prog Charts, Winds Aloft, AIRMETS, SIGMETS, PIREPs, etc. One thing you will note absent is the FA or Area Forecast. More on Area Forecast products later. Below is an example of a SIGMET menu on the Imagery tab.

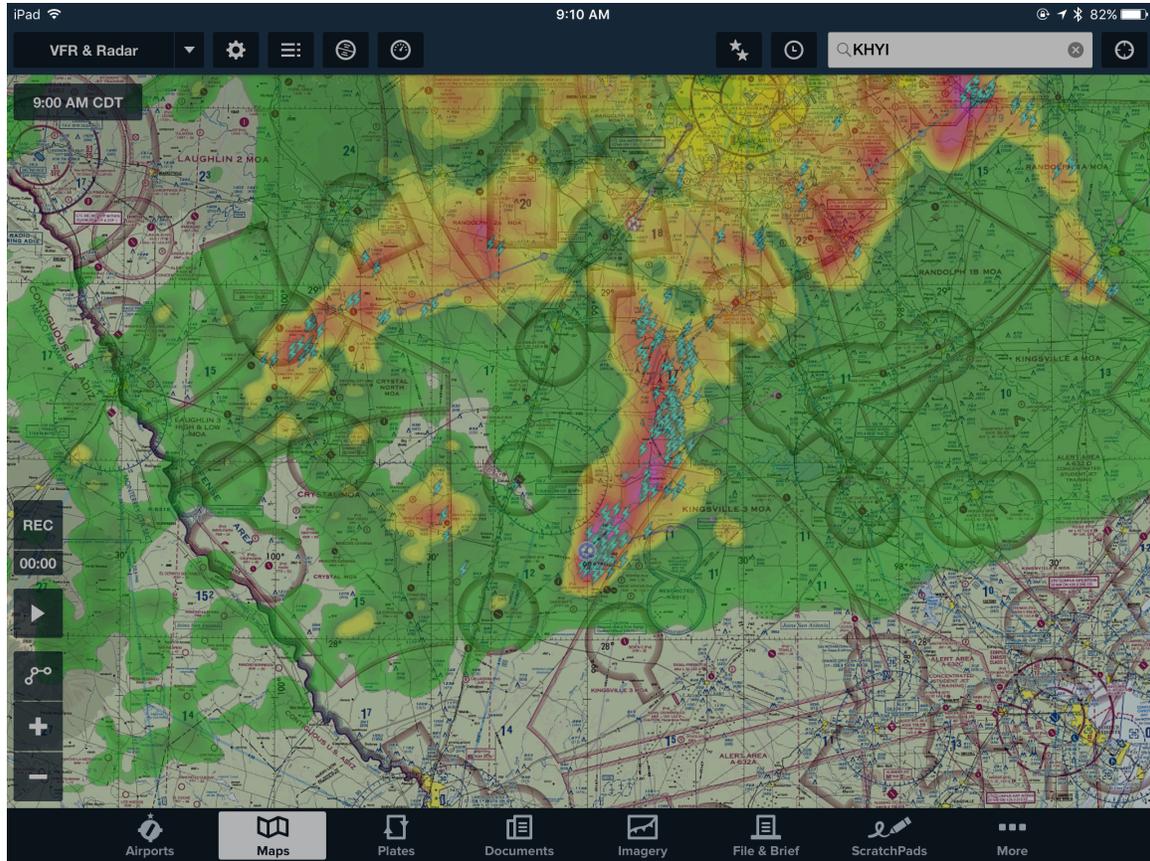
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Get the Big Picture (part 2): After you have looked at all of the weather products on the Imagery tab to obtain an idea of current and forecast weather, let's use the Maps and its Overlay features to see how the current weather conditions are shaping up.

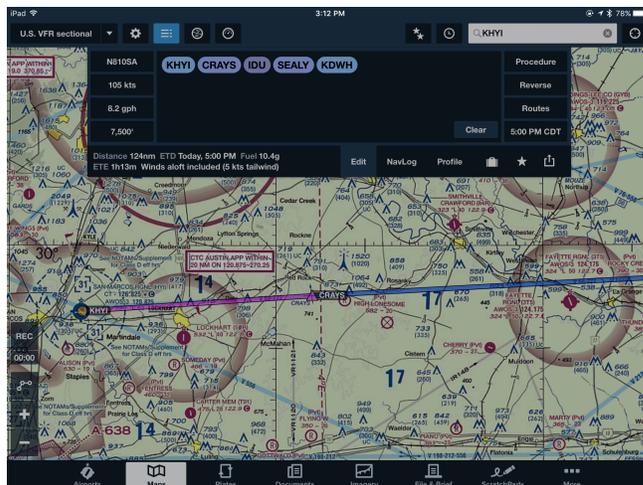
Here I've selected a San Antonio Sectional along with a radar overlay. Pretty impressive isn't it?

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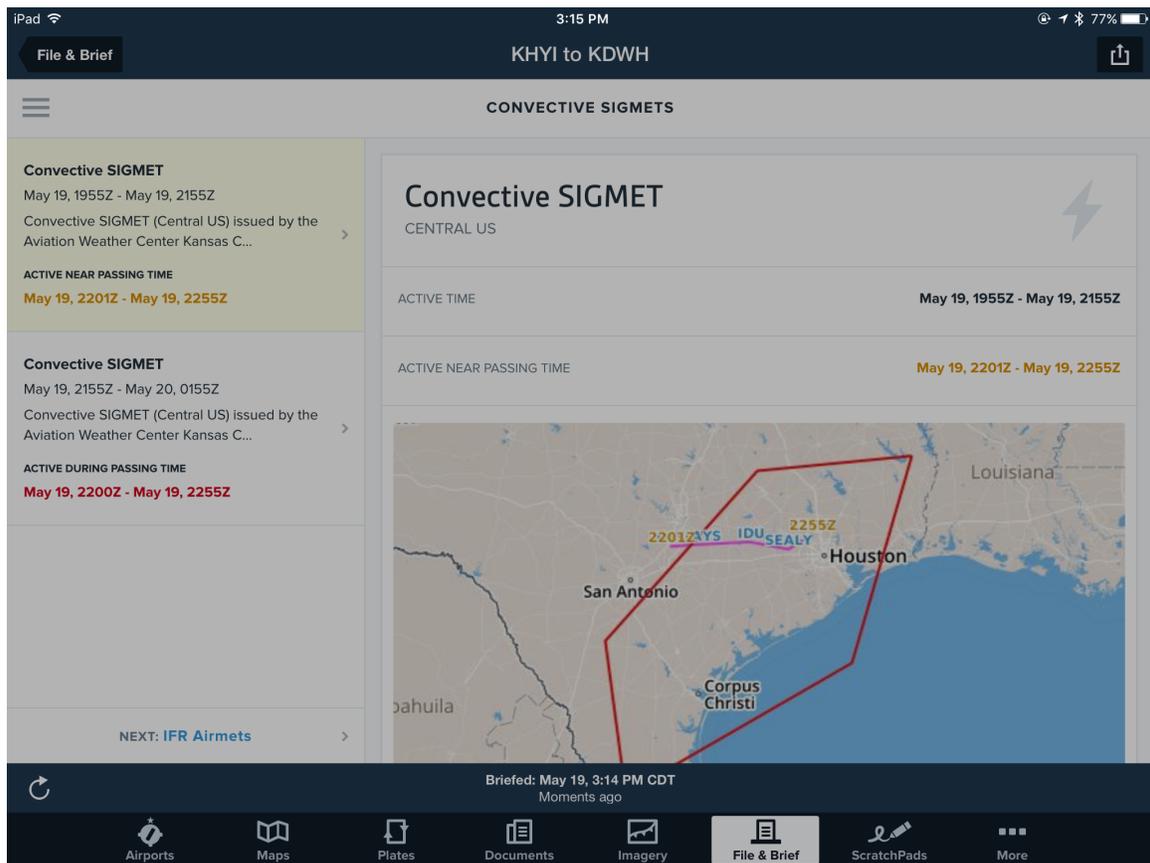
Build Your Route and Get Briefing: After you build your route and are happy with it, select the File and Brief tab. Here you either file your flight plan or, with or without filing it, download a WX briefing. Here I've created a flight plan from KHYI to KDWH using CRAYS, IDU and SEALY as the checkpoints. The next three figures show this feature.

In the first figure the flight plan has been selected and once the File and Brief tab is selected it will be prepared for either filing, obtaining a weather briefing, or both.



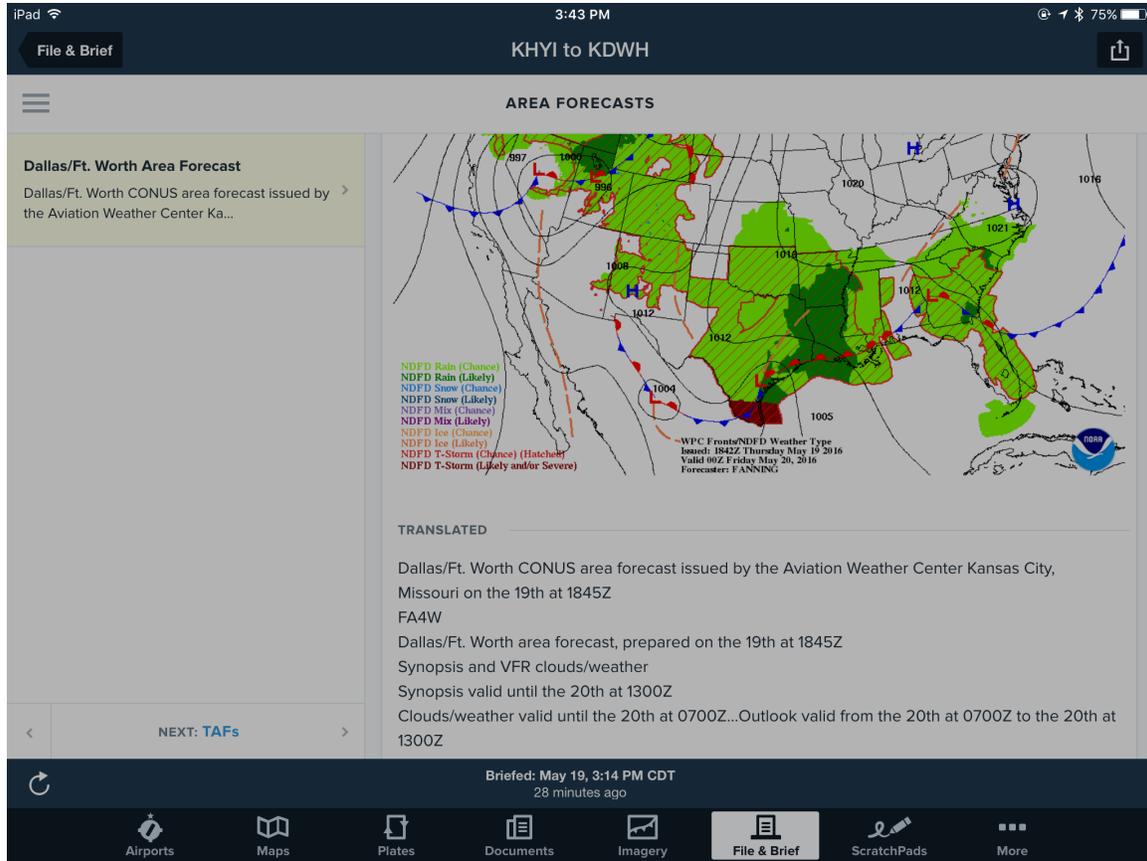
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The next figure shows the start of the weather briefing. Note that it defaults to convective SIGMETs. It also shows the flight plan route on a map, and in this case, the convective SIGMET is active during the planned flight time, it highlights it in red. The other weather information you can scroll through are: IFR AIRMETS, Center Weather Advisories, Synopsis, METARs, PIREPs, Area Forecasts, TAFs, Winds Aloft, Departure NOTAMs, Destination NOTAMs, Enroute Navigation NOTAMs, Enroute Communication NOTAMs, SVC NOTAMs, Obstruction NOTAMs, Airspace NOTAMs, Enroute Special Use Airspace, Enroute Rwy/Twy/Apron/AD/FDC NOTAMs, Military NOTAMs, General FDC NOTAMs, International NOTAMs, Uncategorized NOTAMs, and SPC Convective Outlook.



The next figure shows one of the myriad of products available under the weather briefing tabs, an Area Forecast. It contains both a graphical representation as well as a textual representation.

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Once a weather briefing is created, it is available for recovery at a later time, even in the airplane. Also, be sure to use the Pack function to gather all of the applicable maps and data before you go out to the airplane. Read the users manual for more information on the Pack function.

Limitations: As previously mentioned, the Area Forecast product is not directly enabled in FF until you recover an actual briefing.

In 2016 the FAA will discontinue the textual FA and replace it with a graphical series of FA products. I suspect that once that happens these products will be included in FF for previewing before you recover a briefing. Experimental versions of the graphical FA products can be seen on aviationweather.gov.

Today an FA can also be seen through FF after you file a flight plan and pull down a weather briefing from either DUATS or the Lockheed FSS website.

Another limitation is the retrieval of inflight weather. Unless you have an iPad that can reliably access the Internet or have something like a STRATUS your access to WX updates is excluded once you are in the air. Since Flight Watch has been integrated into the FSS, you need to contact FSS on an access frequency to get enroute weather.

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Summary: How you access the preliminary weather information in the three tabs (Airports, Imagery, Maps) before you create a route and download a weather briefing is a matter of user preference. However, ForeFlight is a valuable and easy to use interface to augment official FAA weather resources such as FSS, DUATS and aviationweather.gov.

Thanks to Sam Atcheson of ForeFlight for his review of this draft and recommendations.