

NIFC News

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FIREFIGHTING AGENCIES TO INCREASE AERIAL RESOURCES FOR WILDLAND FIRE OPERATIONS

Boise, Idaho--U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service and U.S. Department of the Interior agencies will acquire more than 100 additional aircraft to aid in this year's wildland fire season.

"We are committed to using available resources to stop fires before they become unmanageable," said Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth. "These additional aircraft will enable fire managers to fully maintain their ability to stop nearly 99 percent of all fires on initial attack and continue to protect communities."

Federal agencies will contract with private companies for up to 36 single engine airtankers (SEATS), 26 Type 1 (heavy) helicopters, 45 Type II (medium) helicopters and two CL 215 airtankers. In addition, eight U.S. military C-130 aircraft equipped with the Modular Airborne Firefighting System are available. The additional aviation assets will cost approximately \$66 million.

"The new contracts and additional aircrafts will ensure that we maintain a high degree of aerial support and effectiveness," Bureau of Land Management Director Kathleen Clarke said. "We are working to ensure that are our firefighters are safe and have the resources they need to defend communities against wildfires."

These newly contracted planes and military planes will be part of the existing fleet of more than 700 firefighting aircraft that drop fire suppressants.

Federal and state firefighting partners developed the plan based on an evaluation of existing resources, fire danger, efficiency and cost effectiveness as well as a recent investigative report issued by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). When NTSB found that the agencies could not ensure the continuing airworthiness of 33 large fixed-wing airtankers, federal agencies last month terminated contracts for the tankers due to concerns for the safety of their crews and the public. The airtankers were used in wildland firefighting primarily for initial attack and support.

Wildland fires are managed and suppressed on the ground. Aerial resources are one of the many tools that assist firefighters in meeting their goal of successfully suppressing nearly 99 percent of all fires on initial attack. Fire managers have gradually increased the use of smaller planes and helicopters in firefighting support because of their maneuverability compared to the larger airtankers.

Thousands of wildland fires each year are suppressed on initial attack without the benefit of air support since not every ignition needs aerial support.

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