

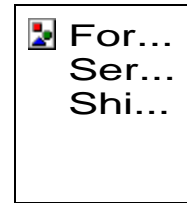
# News Release

USDA Forest Service

Washington, D.C.

FS-0234

Contact: Joe Walsh, 202-205-1134



## Forest Service Chief Names Blue Ribbon Panel on Aviation

**WASHINGTON, August 2, 2002** – Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth announced today that Texas State Forester Jim Hull and former National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Chairman Jim Hall have agreed to co-lead a Blue Ribbon Commission to look into all aspects of the aviation program. The Department of Interior also contracts for aviation resources and will co-sponsor the commission.

Coming on the heels of three fatal crashes -- two commercial airtankers and a helicopter contractor -- Bosworth called for a thorough review of safety management and the roles and responsibilities in the oversight of contractor operations. He also tasked the commission to identify other key factors impacting the safety and effectiveness of the overall aviation firefighting effort. The commission will interview and consult with interagency and state cooperators, as well as aviation industry representatives.

“Safety remains our bottom line in any decision process. In addition, we must also look into issues of sustainability and effectiveness in our air operations,” Bosworth said.

Kathleen Clarke, director of the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Land Management, also endorses the review. “This study is critical to ensure the safety of our firefighters and the public,” Clarke said.

Hall served as chairman of the NTSB from 1994 to 2001, and also served on the White House Commission on Aviation Safety and Security. During his tenure as chairman, the NTSB investigated several public aircraft mishaps that occurred during wildland firefighting.

“This comprehensive review of the interagency aviation program will provide us valuable information to build additional safety measures into our program,” said Tony Kern, national aviation officer for the Forest Service.

Bosworth asked the fact-finding panel to report back within 90 days so the fall strategy sessions can act on the findings prior to the 2003 fire season.

#