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U.S. FOREST SERVICE AWARDS NEXT GENERATION 2.0 AIRTANKER CONTRACTS

The U.S. Forest Service has awarded Exclusive Use contracts to three companies to provide seven more Next Generation Airtankers for wildfire suppression beginning this year.

The new Exclusive Use contracts for Next Generation Airtankers will go to:

- Aero-Flite, Inc., Spokane, Washington – 2 Avro RJ85s
- Neptune Aviation Services, Inc., Missoula, Montana – 4 BAe-146s
- 10 Tanker Air Carrier, LLC, Albuquerque, New Mexico – 1 DC-10

This will bring the total number of Next Generation Airtankers currently under Exclusive Use contract with the Forest Service to 14.

“The Forest Service has made significant progress in modernizing the Large Airtanker fleet, which we believe is critical to protect lives, property, and valuable natural and cultural resources from wildfires that are becoming bigger, more dangerous, and more costly,” said Tom Harbour, Director of Fire and Aviation Management for the Forest Service. “These new contracts are another important step towards achieving our goal of bringing a total of 18 to 28 modern Large Airtankers into service.”

Companies were selected to receive Exclusive Use contracts for Next Generation Airtankers because their proposals were determined to offer the “best value” to the government based on a technical evaluation of their airtanker concept, safety, organizational experience, and past performance, combined with pricing. The contracts are for a base period of five years with five one-year options (a total of 10 years if all contract options are exercised). The contract solicitation required companies to be audited prior to being awarded a contract to ensure that their aircraft met Interagency Airtanker Board, Federal Aviation Administration, and contract

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requirements so that they could begin flying wildfire suppression missions this year.

This year, at the height of western wildfire season, the Forest Service had 34 airtankers available to fly wildfire suppression missions on federal, state, and private lands nationwide. This includes Next Generation Airtankers available through Exclusive Use contracts awarded in 2013 and Call When Needed contracts awarded in 2015; one U.S. Forest Service HC-130H the agency is receiving as a result of the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act; Legacy airtankers available through Exclusive Use contracts; military C-130s equipped with Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems (MAFFS); and CV580s available through agreements with the state of Alaska and Canada.

Next Generation Airtankers fly faster and carry more fire retardant than Legacy Airtankers in the existing fleet. All of the Next Generation Airtankers that the Forest Service has issued a notice of intent to award contracts for are turbine powered; can carry at least 3,000 gallons of fire retardant; and have a cruise speed of at least 300 knots when fully loaded. The companies that are providing them are required to comply with stringent safety requirements in their contracts.

So far, in 2015, approximately 49,000 wildfires have burned more than nine million acres of federal, state, and private land nationwide. That is approximately 83% of the ten-year average of about 58,000 wildfires and approximately 145% of the ten-year average of about 6 million acres burned by this time each year. Significant fire potential is predicted to be above normal in southern California throughout the fall.

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