

Water Scoopers Help Firefighters

Pioneer Fire crews are getting help from two Bombardier CL-415s commonly known as water scoopers. These newer model turbine water scoopers are currently based in McCall, Idaho, only minutes from the fire's western perimeter. Both have been flying daily missions since August 10.



Pioneer Fire aerial operations and the “water scooper”. (Photo by Kari Greer)

Scoopers of this type are recent additions to aerial firefighting in the United States, and only the third year as part of the U.S. Forest Service’s amphibious water scooper program. They are more commonly used across Canada where 25 are in operation compared to four in the U.S.

The scoopers are purpose-built aerial firefighting aircraft, holding up to 1,600 gallons of water for operations of up to four hours. It takes 12 seconds to fill one scooper to capacity, scooping in flight as it skims the water’s surface. The aircraft can scoop from sources that are only 6.5 feet deep and 300 feet wide. It can also easily scoop around river bends and navigate visible obstacles in the water.

Scoopers are capable of dropping water on wildfires from a height of about 100 to 150 feet above ground level.

Typically flying in pairs, they will drop water on the active flanks and head of a fire, knock down slop-overs and spot fires, and cool down hot spots on the fireline. Water scooper tactics play an important role in wildfire suppression by dropping water directly on burning fuel, often with short turnaround times due to proximity to water sources.



Scooping from a lake. (Photo by Craig Stevenson)

Each scooper has been working at maximum performance for their assignment, scooping on the go, from nearby Cascade Lake and Deadwood Lake, helping helicopters, retardant-dropping tankers and ground operations combat the Pioneer Fire.