

NEWS RELEASE

US Forest Service -- Northern Region



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Airtanker Base at Kalispell Decommissioned

Missoula, Montana. The Forest Service, in coordination with federal, state and local fire management partners, is decommissioning the aging airtanker facility at Glacier International Airport this spring. The facility, also called the Kalispell airtanker base, was a national interagency base also used by the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana DNRC.

The airtanker base facility's lease expired on January 31, 2009. Considering the level of deterioration and the improvements required to keep it functioning efficiently, and the increased private air traffic at Glacier International Airport creating more risk for airtanker and civilian aircraft, fire managers from the cooperating agencies decided not to continue operations at the base.

Fire managers chose to invest in alternative bases in the region for greater benefit to the overall capacity of the aerial firefighting effort. The existing airtanker bases in Missoula, Helena, and Couer d'Alene will continue to provide large airtanker and helicopter support to ground firefighters as requested. If needed, a portable base can be established at another suitable airport in the area. Current agreements also allow aircraft from Canada to cross the border in support of initial attack efforts.

"We think the best use of the available aviation management funding is to upgrade other facilities in the area," said Northern Regional Fire and Aviation Director Patty Koppenol. "Since airtankers have no 'home' base, this won't change our capability to provide air support for the ground firefighters as they request it." Airtankers and helicopters move around the country based on current and predicted fire activity to support fire management efforts on the ground.

The base was operated by the Forest Service. Plans are being developed to remove the outdated equipment and rehabilitate and repair the site.

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