

# NEWS RELEASE

## USDA Forest Service -- Northern Region



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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **More Aerial Fire Fighting Resources Available as Fire Season Starts**

Missoula, Montana, June 10, 2004 – “The Northern Rockies Coordinating Group (NRCG) has taken action to secure supplemental aviation resources for this summer’s fire season in the Northern Rockies,” said Rodd Richardson, NRCG member and Director of Fire, Aviation and Air for the Forest Service Northern Region. “Some of these aircraft are part of a national network of resources that are moved around the country to bolster capability in areas experiencing severe fire seasons,” he added. The resources include an additional 14 helicopters that can carry personnel, drop water and retardant, 9 additional SEATs (single engine airtankers), and 2 CL-215 “water scooping” aircraft in Northern Idaho and Montana over the 2003 resources. That means there will be a total of 33 helicopters, 14 SEATs and 2 water scoopers positioned across Northern Idaho and Montana.

These actions were taken in part to ensure all agencies had supplemental firefighting resources in the wake of national contract cancellations for large airtankers. The Northern Rockies would normally host 6 large airtankers used as part of the national pool of resources, according to Richardson. A May report from the National Transportation Safety Board raised concerns about the air worthiness of the aging, large airtanker fleet, and last week the Federal Aviation Administration, Forest Service and Department of Interior provided a format for airtanker companies to display their maintenance and use records. Decisions will come from the national offices of cooperating agencies.

The drought continues for a sixth year through much of the northern Rockies with early hot and dry conditions across eastern Montana and into North Dakota. Although recent showers have delayed drying in the western part of the region, the east has already experienced two large fires and is bracing for an above normal fire season. Fire behavior prediction specialists at the Northern Rockies Coordination Center predict that fire danger should elevate to above normal for much of our area in July and August and caution that the potential for a severe fire season exists over much of the area.

Additional information on the air tanker and aerial resources can be found at:  
[http://www.nifc.gov/nr\\_airtanker-contracts.html](http://www.nifc.gov/nr_airtanker-contracts.html)

Additional fire season severity prediction information can be found at:

[http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcc/predictiveservices/outlooks/seasonal\\_assment.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcc/predictiveservices/outlooks/seasonal_assment.pdf)

This resource includes fire season narrative, full color maps displaying drought and tree mortality from insects and disease, and charts displaying relative fire hazard in local areas in contrast to 2000 and the “normal” fire season.

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