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### **U.S. FOREST SERVICE MOBILIZES MORE AIR TANKERS, MAFFS TO ASSIST WITH WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION EFFORTS**

The U.S. Forest Service is taking actions to continue to maintain adequate air tanker capability by mobilizing four Department of Defense (DoD) C-130s equipped with Modular Airborne Firefighting Systems (MAFFS) to assist with wildfire suppression efforts in Colorado and elsewhere in the Rocky Mountain and Southwest regions.

Two of the MAFFS will be provided by the 302<sup>nd</sup> Airlift Wing, Air Force Reserve, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado and two of the MAFFS will be provided by the 153<sup>rd</sup> Airlift Wing, Wyoming Air National Guard, Cheyenne. They will be based at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado and are expected to be available to fly wildfire suppression missions by no later than Tuesday, June 26<sup>th</sup>.

“We are mobilizing MAFFS to ensure that we continue to have adequate air tanker capability as we experience very challenging wildfire conditions in Colorado and elsewhere in the Rocky Mountain and Southwest regions,” said Tom Tidwell, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. “Maintaining adequate aerial firefighting capability, with now 21 large air tankers and over 300 helicopters is critical to provide support to, and enhance the safety of, the firefighters on the ground who are working so hard to suppress these wildfires.”

MAFFS are portable fire retardant delivery systems that can be inserted into military C-130 aircraft to convert them into large airtankers when needed. Military C-130s equipped with MAFFS can drop up to 3,000 gallons of fire retardant on wildfires. They can discharge their entire load in under five seconds or make variable drops.

Airtankers are used in wildfire suppression to deliver fire retardant to reduce the intensity and slow the growth of wildfires so that firefighters on the ground can construct containment lines safely, which is how wildfires are suppressed. Fire retardant is not typically used to suppress wildfires directly. Professional fire managers decide whether to use airtankers to deliver fire retardant, and where to use them, based on the objectives they have established to manage wildfires and the strategies they are using to achieve them. Airtankers are not requested for all wildfires.

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The MAFFS program is a 40 year long joint effort between the U.S. Forest Service and Department of Defense (DoD). The U.S. Forest Service owns the MAFFS equipment and supplies the retardant, while the DoD provides the C-130 aircraft, pilots, and maintenance and support personnel to fly the missions.

The role of MAFFS, as outlined in an agreement between the DoD and the U.S. Forest Service, is to provide a “surge” capability that can be used to boost wildfire suppression efforts when commercial airtankers are fully committed or not readily available. With the MAFFS mobilizations, the U.S. Forest Service will have 16 large airtankers and one very large airtanker available for wildfire suppression and will have the capability to mobilize an additional 9 large airtankers.

The U.S. Forest Service has a total of eight MAFFS systems ready for operational use, plus one spare. Military installations in Wyoming, North Carolina, California, and Colorado provide C-130s to fly MAFFS missions. Specifically, the 153<sup>rd</sup> Airlift Wing, Wyoming Air National Guard, Cheyenne; the 145<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, North Carolina Air National Guard, Charlotte; the 146<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, California Air National Guard, Port Hueneme; and the 302<sup>nd</sup> Airlift Wing, Air Force Reserve, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado.

In 2011, MAFFS were activated several times to support fires in Mexico, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. This is the first time MAFFS have been activated in 2012. From 2002 to 2011, military C-130s with MAFFS systems dropped a total of approximately 7.7 million gallons of retardant on wildfires.

Each year, an average of more than 75,000 wildfires burn an average of about 7 million acres of land in the United States.

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