

News Release

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Two MAFFS-equipped C-130 aircraft activated to assist with wildfires

First use of aircraft with Modular Airborne Firefighting Systems (MAFFS) since 2018

Boise, Idaho, July 22, 2020 – The USDA Forest Service has activated two military C-130 aircraft equipped with Modular Airborne Firefighting Systems (MAFFS) to assist with increased fire activity in several western states.

The aircraft, from the California Air National Guard’s 146th Airlift Wing, will join the USDA Forest Service and other agencies battling western wildfires. The aircraft will be operational beginning July 23 from McClellan Airbase in Sacramento.

“We’re experiencing elevated fire activity in several regions of the country,” said Kim Christensen, deputy assistant director for operations for the USDA Forest Service. “These aircraft will help boost our aerial firefighting capabilities for current and anticipated wildfire activity.”

Having military C-130s that can be converted into airtankers provides a critical “surge” capability that can be used to augment wildfire suppression efforts when the commercial airtankers are fully committed or not readily available. This is the first activation of MAFFS-equipped aircraft since July of 2018.

The aircraft are equipped with the U.S. Forest Service’s MAFFS, which can drop up to 3,000 gallons of fire retardant in less than 10 seconds across a quarter-mile line. The system slides into the back of the military aircraft, and retardant is released through a nozzle on the rear left side.

In addition to the 146th Airlift Wing, MAFFS aircraft are from the Air Force Reserve Command’s 302nd Airlift Wing, Peterson AFB, Colorado; the Air National Guard’s 153rd Airlift Wing, Cheyenne, Wyoming; and the 152nd Airlift Wing, Reno, Nevada. U.S. Transportation Command activates these aircraft through its Air Mobility Command in support of U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM). While the 146th Airlift Wing will provide the initial response, aircraft and crews are expected to change out on weekly intervals with the other Airlift Wings.

The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), located in Boise, Idaho, is the nation’s support center for wildland firefighting. Eight different agencies and organizations are part of NIFC including, the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, National Weather Service, U.S. Fire Administration, and the National Association of State Foresters.

