

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 2, 2018

Chief Vicki Christiansen  
U.S. Forest Service  
1400 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Chief Christiansen,

We are writing to ask you to consider the development of a fire supplemental appropriation, a specific budget line item going forward for all fire aviation expenditures, and to provide FY 2019 funding for much needed air tanker procurement to fight unprecedentedly large fires.

The U.S. Forest Service uses retardant-dropping large air tankers and large water-scoopers as one of its most effective immediate responses to limit the expansion of wildfires into uncontrollable mega-fires. U.S. interagency government studies on firefighting strategy show a requirement for 18-28 modern large air tankers available to deploy as initial attack assets on wildfire ignitions. Such a program was the primary recommendation supported in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service *Large Airtanker Modernization Strategy* released February 2012.

We need a modern, highly capable large air tanker and water-scooper fleet. The available aircraft flying this mission today continue to be retired ex-military/ex-civil aircraft, repurposed for air tanker operations and flown by small private contract firms. Age and diminishing structural service life drive safety concerns and limit the number of aircraft available for deployment.

It hardly seems necessary to highlight the impact of the massive wildfire disasters experienced by the west this year and last year and the year before, but we want to stress the importance of building the capacity to more effectively respond, in a cost-effective manner, to these devastating natural disasters. The intensity and duration of the past successive fire seasons confirm the reality that the wildfire suppression workload has grown in severity and complexity due to hotter, longer burning seasons and the expanding wildland-urban interface. These factors will only worsen future wildfire disasters so it is time that Congress and the executive branch proactively upgrade firefighting assets in order to protect the lives and property in communities facing these massive wildfires.

As we look to addressing disaster recovery in the states devastated by massive flooding from Hurricane Florence and Hurricane Michael, we also need a fire supplemental appropriation to take action to invest in modern firefighting assets. Therefore, an initial squadron of modern large air tankers and water-scoopers is necessary to control the spread of wildfire ignitions before they escape and expand into massive mega-fires.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

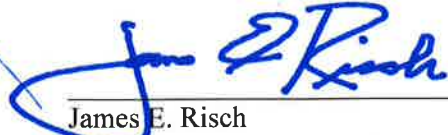
Sincerely,

  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

  
Mike Crapo  
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



James E. Risch  
United States Senator



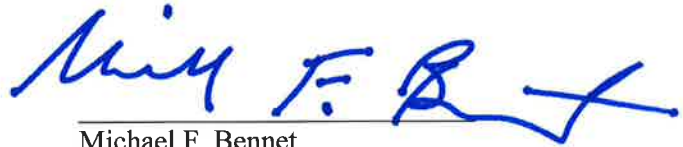
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Johnny Isakson  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Cory Gardner  
United States Senator

CC: James Hubbard, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment