

Dave Cochran, President
Rich Harvey, 1st Vice President
Jayson Andrus, 2nd Vice President
James Johnston, Secretary/Treasurer



Western Rep, Sean Slamon
Eastern Rep, Matt Petersen
Southern Rep, Kelly Blackmon
Past President, Mike Brown

July 7, 2025

Tom Schultz, Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Subject: Delayed Air Attack Availability and Impacts to Rural Fire Operations in the Great Basin

Dear Chief,

On behalf of the Nevada Fire Chiefs Association, we are writing to express urgent concern over the ongoing delay in onboarding and availability of Air Attack platforms within the Great Basin. The failure to timely implement replacement contracts and aircraft following the grounding of the Aero Commander fleet, coupled with a blanket safety rollout, has placed our rural communities and firefighters at increased risk during the heart of the western fire season.

As of July 1, more than 50% of the Great Basin's normal Air Attack platforms remain off-contract, well beyond the typical May 18th (5/18) start date for full staffing. These delays have left critical coordination gaps across Nevada and surrounding states, where wildfires frequently escalate in difficult terrain and limited access conditions. In our region, timely aerial supervision is not a luxury, it is an operational necessity for initial attack, coordinated suppression, and firefighter safety.

The sweeping implementation of Aero Commander safety protocols, while well-intentioned, was not regionally phased or adapted to fire season readiness. A one-size-fits-all strategy has crippled aerial coordination during the exact window when the western states depend most on fast and flexible air supervision. This approach has created a preventable strain on rural incident command teams, who now face complex fires with reduced air support and diminished overhead capacity.

The Nevada Fire Chiefs urges the U.S. Forest Service to immediately prioritize:

- The re-contracting and fielding of Air Attack resources in the Great Basin and similarly underserved regions.
- A phased, regionally informed implementation approach to future aviation safety rollouts that prevents this level of disruption.
- Expanded coordination with state and local agencies to ensure temporary coverage strategies are developed in advance of known seasonal needs.

Nevada Fire Chiefs Association
Mailing Address: 3827 S. Carson Street, #197 Carson City, Nevada 89701
(775) 720-9874 kelli@nvfirechf.org
www.nvfirechf.org

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Fire knows no policy boundaries. We need reliable, regionally appropriate solutions, not further delays. We are ready to work alongside the Forest Service to ensure safety and operational effectiveness can coexist without undermining the resources our communities depend on.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dave Cochran".

President
Nevada Fire Chiefs Association

cc:
USFS Region 4 Fire and Aviation
Nevada Division of Forestry
Great Basin Coordination Center
Bureau of Land Management – Nevada
National Association of State Foresters
Western Fire Chiefs' Association