

Aviation Program West Desert District

The BLM West Desert District (WDD) aviation program provides safe and efficient aviation services to meet land management objectives. Mission requirements include support of wildland fire and prescribed fire operations, disaster response, animal census, wild horse and burro census and gathering, habitat management, range and cadastral survey, law enforcement and search and rescue. Types of aircraft include helicopters, single engine air tankers (SEATS), multi-engine air tankers, air tactical fixed-wing, and smokejumper aircraft. The philosophy of the WDD aviation program is to utilize current technology, sound aviation management practices and highly trained/motivated personnel to reduce risk, loss, waste and expenditures.

To accomplish the fire program's mission, the BLM will utilize a variety of aircraft including helicopters that deliver firefighters, water, and cargo to a fire. In addition, a variety of fixed-wing aircraft are used to deliver fire retardants and water-enhanced gels to on-going fires. Smokejumper aircraft are used to deliver specially trained firefighters to remote locations. Small fixed-wing aircraft are used for air tactical missions to provide aerial supervision of multiple aircraft over an incident and support to the ground firefighting resources for enhanced suppression efficiencies and safety. The West Desert District manages two exclusive-use aviation contracts. The base location for the type-3 (Astar B-3) helicopter contract is at the Tooele Valley Airport north of Tooele.



In addition, a light fixed-wing air tactical contract is administered at the Salt Lake International airport. The twin-engine turbine Aero Commander is configured to effectively communicate and coordinate with other aircraft and ground resources. This aircraft is staffed with a two-person crew consisting of an experienced pilot and Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS). Together, this two-person crew ("Air Attack") will manage the airspace over a wildfire and provide ground personnel with essential information about the fire behavior, access, suppression strategy/tactics and safety concerns.

In addition to the exclusive-use contracted aircraft, a multitude of call-when-needed aircraft are hired each year to help support the fire suppression efforts as the severity of the fire season escalates. Single Engine Air Tankers (S.E.A.T.s) are one of these aircraft types that have proven extremely effective for quick initial attack capabilities. SEATs will deliver up to 800 gallons of retardant, gel, or water. SEATs are highly mobile and can be set up at remote bases and local airstrips, decreasing turnaround time between drops. SEATs are capable of reducing a fire's intensity to enable ground resources to safely access and engage the fire. In northern Utah, these SEATs are typically based at Tooele Valley Airport where a fixed tank reload base has been established.

