

# Minden firm awarded contract by USFS for air tanker

By Bill Gabbert, Wildfire Today

Following the president's signing June 13 of the bill that waived the 30-day notification period for informing Congress about new air tanker contracts, the U.S. Forest Service announced it has awarded new exclusive use contracts for seven additional air tankers.

Four companies will provide three next generation air tankers in 2012 and four in 2013:



Tanker 40, a BAe-146, during tests. Photo/Tronos

Minden Air Corporation will provide one BAe-146 in 2012 and 1 BAe-146 in 2013;

Neptune Aviation Services, Inc. will provide one BAe-146s in 2012;

Aero Air, LLC will provide two MD87s in 2013; and

Aero Flite, Inc. of Kingman, Arizona will provide one Avro RJ85 in 2013.

The AVR0 RJ85 is a variant of the 3,000-gallon BAe-146 with more efficient jet engines, produced between 1993 and 2002.

The MD-87 is a variant of the MD-80, a twin-engine jet, and as an airliner carried 114 to 139 passengers. It was produced from 1987 to 1992 and cruises at about 500 mph, similar to the BAe-146. There are estimates that the MD-87 will carry 4,000 gallons of retardant, but that is not confirmed.

Neptune and Minden previously held the only exclusive use contracts this year for large air tankers. Neptune now has seven P2Vs and one BAe-146 under contract, and Minden has two P2Vs, however one of Minden's P2V's was damaged June 3 when the the landing gear failed to fully extend while landing. On the same day, two pilots were killed when one of Neptune's P2Vs crashed in Utah. Neptune's Tanker 40, the only BAe-146 presently working as an air tanker, began service in the fall of 2011 and is still under interim approval from the Interagency Air Tanker Board.

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