

Southeast Arizona

Wildfire Avoidance



Southeast Arizona

Fire fighting aircraft operate over wildfires throughout the United States to protect public lands, natural resources, and private property. In southeast Arizona, federal agencies which use aircraft for fire fighting include:

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Bureau of Land Management

National Park Service

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

U.S. Forest Service



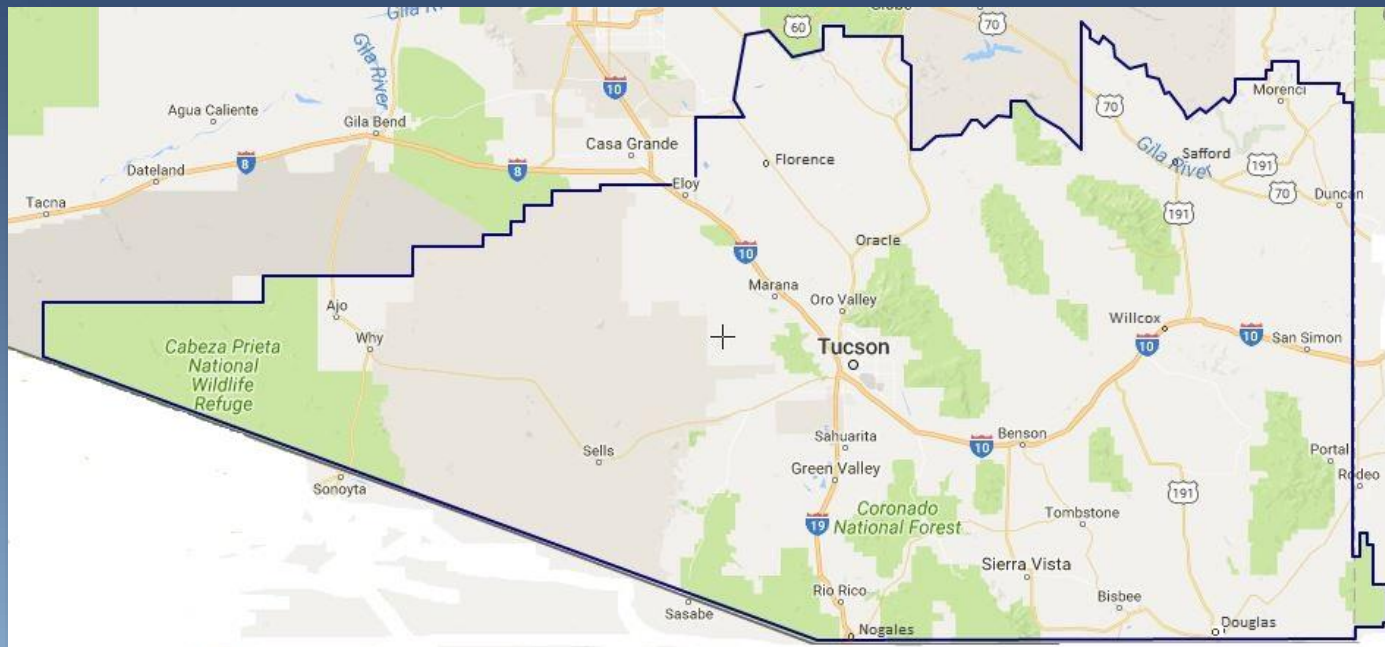
Southeast Arizona Zone

The western United States is divided into wildfire suppression zones.

Each zone has its own fire fighting resources made up of fire fighters and equipment from the federal agencies

within the zone. The Southeast Arizona Zone extends from roughly south of the Gila River to the U.S. – Mexico border, and from east of Yuma to the Arizona – New Mexico border. The Tucson Interagency Dispatch Center

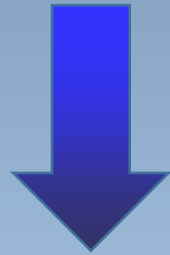
Coordinates wildfire suppression activities within the Southeast Zone.



Southeast Arizona Zone

Fire Fighting Aircraft

Wildland agencies operate multiple types of aircraft for fire fighting. A variety of fixed and rotor wing aircraft fly to and from fires to drop fire suppressants, conduct aerial reconnaissance, and transport fire fighting personnel and cargo. Types of fire aircraft include:



VLAT–Very Large Airtanker



McDonnell Douglas DC-10
Photo © Conor Ball

Airtankers drop fire suppressants such as water, foam, and retardant to limit a fire's spread.

LAT-Large Airtanker



SEAT-Single Engine Airtanker



Leadplane



Beechcraft C90

© Paul Filmer – skippyscape photography

Leadplanes guide airtankers through low level drops of fire suppressants.

Smokejumper

Smokejumper aircraft transport fire personnel (Smokejumpers) and cargo to remote wildfires via parachute delivery.



Aerial Coordination Aircraft

Referred to as 'Air Attack', a variety of light twin engine aircraft are used to manage airspace over a wildfire and coordinate use of fire aircraft with fire fighters on the ground. Air Attack consists of an aircraft, pilot, and an aerial attack supervisor.



Watch Air Attack at work over a fire

Rotorcraft



A variety of heavy, medium, and light helicopters drop water, deliver cargo, and transport personnel.



Military and Law Enforcement-Rescue Aircraft



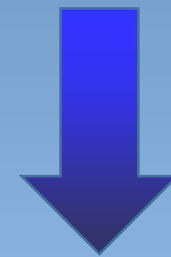
The Air National Guard and Arizona Department of Public Safety support wildland agencies with aircraft for fire fighting.



Aerial Fire Fighting Environment



The flight environment at a wildfire is dynamic. Atmospheric conditions, aircraft activities and airspace requirements contribute to the complexity of fighting a fire from the air.



Weather

Fires may develop convective columns similar to thunderstorms that shoot upwards several thousand feet. Updrafts and downdrafts from the columns can produce extreme turbulence and strong winds in and around a fire. Smoke from wildfires can cause visibility to drop to near zero.



Congested Airspace



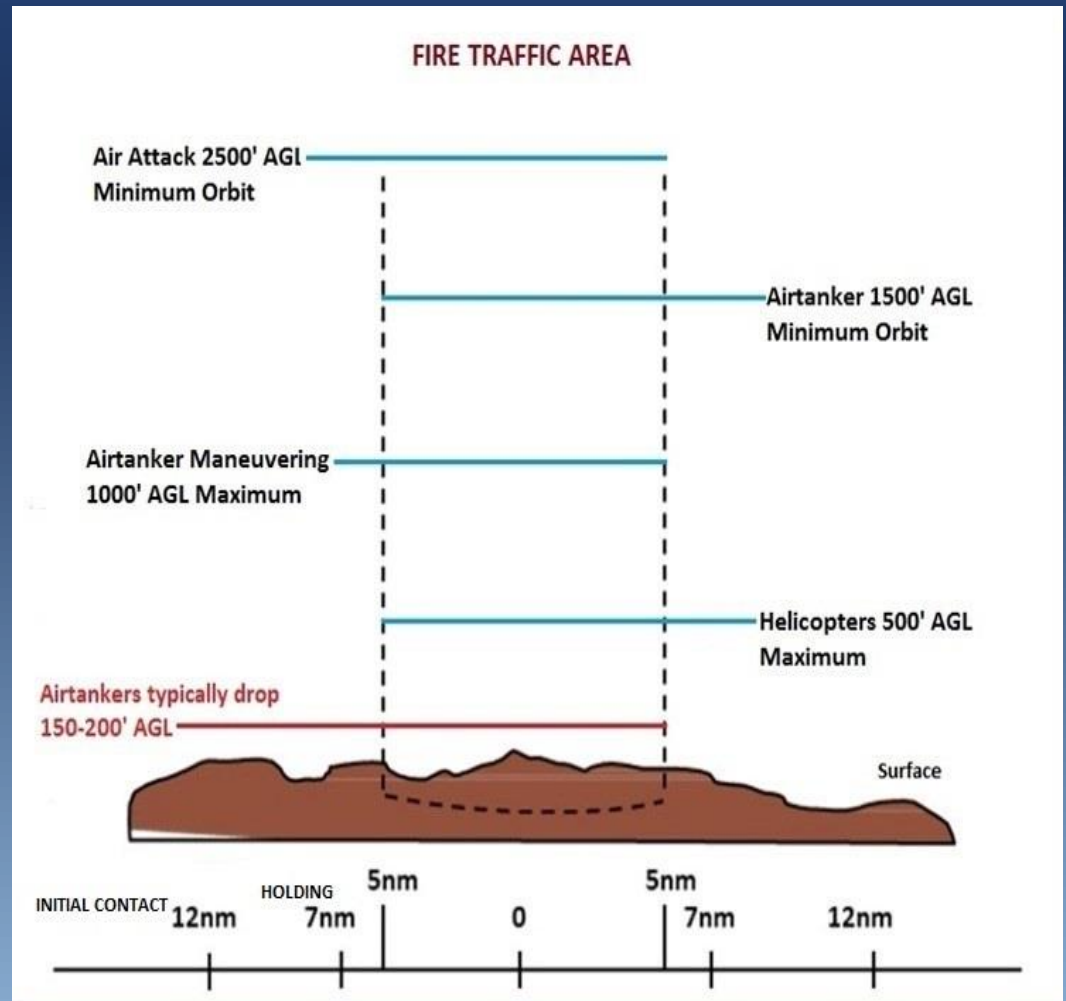
Eric Paul Zamora – The Fresno Bee

Air operations become complex when multiple fire fighting aircraft are active within a fire area.

Fire Traffic Area

The Fire Traffic Area (FTA) provides for separation of fire aircraft over a wildland fire. Although the FTA is designed for wildland firefighting operations, the structure and communications requirements are patterned after class D airspace. The FTA is unique to fire management agencies; it is not part of the National Airspace System and is used only when multiple fire fighting aircraft are operational over a fire.

FTA Diagram



Temporary Flight Restrictions

Temporary Flight Restrictions are requested for a wildfire when aviation operations involve multiple fire fighting aircraft. The restrictions provide a designated airspace to separate fire aircraft from civilian and military aviation. Fire TFRs generally extend 5 nautical miles from the center point of a fire and up to 3,000 feet above the highest terrain within the TFR.



Temporary Flight Restrictions may not exist over all wildfires when fire fighting aircraft are present.

Aerial Support Bases

Airtanker Bases

Airtanker bases support fire fighting operations by supplying airtankers with fire suppressants. Airtankers normally transit between a tanker base and wildfires at low altitudes.



USFS - Plumas NF photo

Helicopter Bases

Helicopter 'Helibases' are established close to a large wildfire to support wildfire operations and to speed the transport of personnel and supplies. Helicopters conduct low level flights between helibases and fires.



USFS - Custer Gallatin NF photo

Fire Retardant Drop



Video courtesy of FireGroundPhotos.com

Watch an air tanker deliver fire retardant

Wildfire Aviation Operations

Fire pilots operate aircraft from a few hundred to a few thousand feet above ground level. They have to coordinate their actions with ground personnel, watch out for terrain, monitor fire activity, and remain aware of other aircraft. You can help our wildland aviation operations by watching for fire fighting aircraft and by maintaining safe distances from wildfires.

To report a fire in southeast Arizona contact Prescott Flight Service or the Tucson Interagency Dispatch Center (800-549-0661 24 hrs.) For information on where to report fires outside southeast Arizona visit the Southwest Area Coordination Center website, <http://gacc.nifc.gov/swcc>



"Only you can prevent Aviation Mishaps"



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