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Mr. Bill Gabbert
Editor-in-Chief
Wildfire Today

Dear Bill:

In CNN's July 6th broadcast on air tankers not being used by the Forest Service, there was a reference to Aero Union's fleet of P-3s. We would like to share with your readers some information on their status.

The Aero Union Corporation fields seven of the most qualified air tankers in the country and these air tankers have sat idle at McClellan Park in Sacramento, California since July 30, 2011, when the Forest Service cancelled our contract citing non-compliance with a long term structural integrity program known as the Continued Airworthiness Program or "CAP". Aero Union's P3 fleet represented the youngest, most powerful, most reliable, and most capable air tankers in the USFS fleet at the time of contract cancellation.

There has never been any question about the safety of the Aero Union fleet of P-3s:

- Our fleet of air tankers had current and valid airworthiness certificates from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

- In April 2011, after an intensive review conducted by the FAA, Aero Union's aircraft were deemed airworthy and permitted to continue operations. The Company's FAA Designated Engineering Representative (DER) had also assured the Company and the FAA as to the aircraft's structural integrity.

- The Forest Service had inspected the fleet within six weeks of the termination date and deemed Aero Union's aircraft safe to fly and no intervening event occurred to change the status of the aircraft during the next six weeks.

- These air tankers, with an availability rate of over 95% in service had been, and still are, maintained to US Navy standards. The fleet was in process of meeting all requirements of the CAP and 86% of the required inspections had been completed at the time of contract cancelation.

Congressman Dan Lungren, (R-3rd-CA) after extensive investigation on the matter by his staff, convened a meeting on October 11, 2011 between the Forest Service and Aero Union that was attended by representatives of 19 members of the House and the Senate primarily from states exposed to wildfires. The primary purpose of the meeting was to allow Aero Union's outside aviation experts to educate the Congress and the Forest Service on the safety of the Aero Union fleet.

In attendance were representatives of Avenger Aircraft Services (Avenger), IMP Aerospace (IMP) and our FAA DER. Avenger is the aerospace engineering firm that designed and implemented the CAPs for the Forest Service and its contractors. IMP is a Lockheed Authorized P-3 Service Center (one of four in the world) and provides depot level engineering and maintenance support to the United States Navy and other military operators for the P-3. IMP was implementing Aero Union's CAP at the time of contract termination. Our FAA DER monitors and approves all aircraft structural repairs and presents all such information to the FAA. All three firms supported the Company's position that the fleet was airworthy and should be permitted to fly.

Of course it is perfectly natural for both the Forest Service and Aero Union to defend their respective positions. However, lives and property should not be at risk because a federal agency and a contractor disagree on a contract matter. There are many ways to address a contract dispute under the federal acquisition regulations without depriving the nation of 40% of its air tanker capacity. If these air tankers are safe they should be back in service as soon as practically possible.

Aero Union's P-3 fleet is a unique and valuable national asset that should be in service protecting American lives and property from the ravages of wildfires. Aero Union had enjoyed a fifty-year history of service with the Forest Service and deeply regrets that its relationship with the Forest Service failed in 2011.

There are many dedicated professionals in the Forest Service and the men and women fighting fires on the line are to be commended for the risks they take to protect the public. We very much want to work with the Forest Service to allow us to do our share for the public good and to assist these dedicated individuals.

Aero Union respects the Forest Service and the aim of its structural integrity program and believe that we were on track to meet all requirements before the 2012 fire season were it not for the contract cancelation. What is relevant today is that there exists an emergency in the fire states and a portion of the fleet could be returned to service possibly in as little as four to six weeks if the Forest Service and Aero Union were to work in cooperation with each other.

The Forest Service has recently indicated a willingness to consider the P-3 under its legacy contract for 2013. We appreciate this consideration. Our goal is to maximize the

nation's fire fighting assets today and any advice and assistance that you and your readers can offer to contribute to the success of this effort would be welcomed.

We close this letter with a few photographs of our fleet, both in action last year and sitting idle today. We hope that our appeal will inspire the public to ask the Forest Service to reconsider its position if the public believes that the basis for our appeal - that our air tankers are safe - rings true.

Very truly yours,

Jerry Edwards
Co-Director of Maintenance

Mike Prunty
Co-Director of Maintenance

Leigh Ann Ackermann
Director of Operations

Thomas F. Dooney
Chief Financial Officer