



CAP Support to Wildland Firefighting



The Civil Air Patrol (CAP), the official auxiliary of the United States Air Force, has a long history of supporting wildland firefighting efforts. As far back as WWII, CAP crews flew sorties in the Pacific Northwest patrolling for fires in the backcountry, include those that may have been ignited by incendiary balloons launched by the Japanese military. In many areas around the US, CAP crews are flying during fire season patrolling as fire lookouts, providing remote imagery within fire damaged areas and providing other services.

The range of CAP services available include the following capabilities:

- Patrolling backcountry areas to locate and report fires.
- Remote 2d and 3d imagery to identify damaged critical infrastructure.
- Realtime video of areas of interest.
- Airborne manual and automatic (repeater) communications relays.
- Transportation of critical personnel and equipment such as communications gear.
- IMT staff augmentation



CAP operates the largest fleet of Cessna aircraft in the world with the bulk of these aircraft being C-182 fixed wing. CAP aircraft can operate out of any established airfield being able to utilize many airports that cannot serviced by commercial scheduled flights. CAP aircraft are all equipped with Technisonic VHF radios pre-programmed with the NIFOG interoperability channels and which can be temporarily reprogrammed to meet incident specific channel requirements. CAP aircraft are capable of operating in IFR conditions but are subject to the limitations of light general aviation aircraft.

Most CAP aircraft are equipped with a external VHF antenna and a 12 VDC power port to support the airborne operation of a tactical repeater which includes those available from NFIC and other caches around the country. Coverage can be as much as a fifty mile radius depending on the terrain.



CAP Support to Wildland Firefighting

Many CAP overhead personnel have completed FEMA position specific training and some may also have been issued red-cards although this is not that common. These highly experienced personnel can be asked to provide augmentation for incident management teams that need some additional assistance. Some members may also be available to shadow positions to further their training.

Costs for using CAP are limited to hourly costs for the aircraft which are set by the USAF and include actual fuel/oil costs as well as an hourly maintenance cost. If crews are required to remain over night from their home stations, they must be provided with lodging and meals or GSA rates for lodging and per diem.



There are no other personnel costs. These costs can be billed to the incident.

CAP is an all volunteer force and, as such, our ability to respond to requests can vary depending on the availability of our personnel. In addition, not all wings (states) have the same capabilities so response times for some specific capability may be as much as several days in order to bring that resource to the incident.



The integration of CAP air operations in a wildland fire requires very close coordination between CAP and the incident's Air Branch Director (AOBD). For a single incident, it is often best to incorporate CAP air operations as a group in the Air Branch in order to insure close control by the incident AOBD. In this case, as an assisting agency, CAP would provide a CAP air group leader and a IC qualified agency representative (AR) to the incident.

As is common emergency management, it is best to plan out assistance before the need as it is not good to meet folks in the middle of the night and the middle of a fire. It is recommended that local wildland firefighting officials reach out to their state's CAP wing and start the planning process to determine the local capabilities available in their state as well as the CAP mutual aid resources that can be committed to incidents in their state. Logistical planning is also important such as to insure that the proper power and antenna cables are available for local tactical repeaters that may be used for airborne radio relay so that they are available when needed.



Oregon Wing CAP

Contact: Lt Col David Rudawitz,
Director of Emergency Services
David.Rudawitz@orwg.cap.gov
<http://orwg.cap.gov>

