

VHA Research 071625

Vail Daily: Tuesday, July 15, 2025

Colorado Reps. Neguse and Crank Urge Air Force to bolster its fleet of firefighting planes

Robert Tann

rtann@vaildaily.com

Two federal lawmakers from Colorado are calling on the U.S. Air Force to upgrade its fleet of firefighting planes.

In a July letter to Air Force Secretary Troy E. Meink, Reps. Joe Neguse and Jeff Crank requested eight upgraded C-130J planes for the 302nd Airlift Wing at the Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado Springs.

C-130Js are equipped with a firefighting unit that can help rapidly deploy thousands of gallons of water and fire retardant, making the aircraft a crucial tool for containing the spread of wildfires over long distances.

In their letter, Neguse and Crank say the airlift wing based in Colorado Springs is currently on track to be "the only remaining Department of Defense aerial firefighting wing still equipped with older C-130Hs; a predecessor to the C-130J.

Neguse and Crank said it is "imperative" for the Air Force to maintain an updated fleet at the Colorado Springs base, adding that it is "among our biggest assets to aerial firefighting and national security.

"Colorado, and states across the West, have experienced devastating wildfires in recent years and continue to face increased drought conditions and wildfire risk;" the letter states. "It is in our nation's best interest to ensure our communities are well-equipped to respond when disaster strikes. Without adequate tools, including the C-130Js, our country is at a disadvantage to manage these wildfires threatening the safety of our communities."

Neguse, a Democrat, represents Colorado's 2nd Congressional District, which includes parts of the Front Range and the central and northern mountains. Crank, a Republican, represents the 5th Congressional District, which encompasses Colorado Springs.

Last month, Neguse announced he was reintroducing a legislative package aimed at shoring up the nation's wildfire mitigation strategies by improving federal, state, and local partnerships.

The Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act, Wildfire Coordination Act and Wildfire Risk Evaluation Act were previously introduced last year, but never advanced out of the House.

The bills aim to identify gaps in federal programs that inhibit wildfire mitigation across jurisdictions, coordinate wildfire research between federal, state, local, tribal, and non-federal groups, and mandate a recurring review of the wildfire landscape across the U.S.

Neguse, in an interview last month discussing the legislative package, said the "long-term strategies that these bills contemplate are five to 10 years out, and we have to take every opportunity we can to do that work:" "We just don't have the time to ignore some of the structural improvements that must be made;" he said.

Western Colorado is currently experiencing several wildfires caused by a July 10 lightning storm that have burned more than 7,000 acres combined. Three counties -Montrose, Delta, and Mesa -are currently under a disaster declaration announced by Gov. Jared Polis on Sunday as a result of the fires.

The largest is the South Rim Fire inside Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, which has burned more than 3,600 acres as of Monday, according to the most recent information on Inci Web, an interagency risk incident webpage run by the U.S. Forest Service. The fire prompted evacuations last Thursday, and the park remains closed.

In Arizona, the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park closed last week and will remain shuttered for the rest of the season due to an ongoing wildfire, which has burned more than 5,700 acres, according to the most recent update.