United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 13, 2014

The Honorable Deborah Lee James
Secretary of the U.S. Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary James,

I write to request assistance in expediting the necessary upgrades to the C-130H aircraft for transfer to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to support wildland fire operations.

We are in an era of modern mega-fires and my state has repeatedly broken records in recent years for the largest and most devastating fires in Colorado's history. Projections for future fire seasons and the volume of hazardous fuels on the landscape make me extremely concerned. Air tankers cannot fight fire alone, but they are critical firefighting resources that can give firefighters time and prevent small blazes from becoming catastrophic wildfires.

As part of a multi-pronged effort to bolster our airpower for fighting fires, I was proud to join with my colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee to authorize the transfer of excess aircraft from the Department of Defense to the Forest Service for firefighting purposes. In December 2013, the National Defense Authorization Act authorized the transfer of seven C-130H aircraft from the U.S. Coast Guard to the USFS after a series of upgrades are completed on those airframes. While I appreciate that these upgrades will take tremendous effort for the Air Force, their expeditious completion is essential for the safety of my state and others, and I ask that these upgrades be made a top priority.

I am requesting a report that describes the expected timeline for the completion of the upgrades to these C-130H aircraft and identification of possible issues that could delay this timeline.

I will continue to fight to ensure that our country has modern, safe, and effective wildfire suppression technology to assure the safety of our communities, firefighters, and natural resources.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Mark Udall
U.S. Senate

c.c.   Tom Tidwell
         Chief, U.S. Forest Service