



Governor Bill Richardson Applauds Quick Approval Of Federal Emergency Fire Assistance

Governor Repeats Plea For Administration To Immediately Allow Heavy Air Tankers Back In Operation

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SANTA FE- Governor Bill Richardson today announced New Mexico's request for a federal Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) for the Peppin Fire in the Capitan Mountains has been approved, and he applauded the quick response to the state's fire emergency. The FMAG provides reimbursement to the state and local communities, for the costs of firefighting and associated emergency measures, at a 75% federal/25% local matching rate.

"This prompt action, combined with the executive orders I signed yesterday, means firefighters and local officials have every resource currently available to protect lives and property from this dangerous wildfire," said Governor Richardson.

The Governor also credited U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman for helping secure the approval of the FMAG funding.

Yesterday Governor Richardson surveyed the Peppin Fire, located near the village of Capitan in the Lincoln National Forest, from the air, and met with officials to discuss the progress of firefighting efforts. He signed two executive orders- the first authorized the use of two Blackhawk helicopters from the New Mexico National Guard to drop water on the fire, and made available \$750,000 in emergency state funding; the second declared a state of emergency in Lincoln County where the fire is located.

Governor Richardson again called for the federal government to rescind the order grounding all of the heavy air tankers used to drop fire retardant on wildfires. The Peppin Fire, now estimated to have consumed more than 9,000 acres, is located in remote

terrain, making it nearly impossible use firefighters on the ground. Early reports indicate that one residence may have been destroyed by the fire.

“I was shocked to be told this fire could have been held to a single acre if the heavy air tankers had been available at the beginning,” the Governor said. “The administration has pulled the safety net out from under states and local communities threatened by wildfire. It is hard to believe the President would allow this decision to stand without offering an effective alternative.”

In place of the heavy air tankers, firefighters are using SEAT (single engine air tanker) planes, which are basically modified crop dusters, and helicopters.

Governor Richardson also flew over and viewed the Lookout Fire, located in the Cibola National Forest near Corona, New Mexico. Firefighters have greatly reduced the potential threat from this fire.

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