

**BLUE RIBBON PANEL
ON
FEDERAL AERIAL FIREFIGHTING**

May 05, 2004

Memorandum to:

Dale Bosworth, Chief
USDA Forest Service

and

Kathleen Clarke, Director
Bureau of Land Management

Dear Chief Bosworth and Director Clarke:

The purpose of this memorandum is to express our support for the decision to stand down the aging air tanker fleet following the issuance of the NTSB Safety Recommendation Letter of April 24, 2004. Although this decision will undoubtedly impair your immediate operational capabilities, we believe you should accept the thrust of the recommendations of the NTSB, which we believe would be in the best interest of public and employee safety. We have looked carefully at the Recommendation Letter and find that in most respects it closely parallels our report of December 2002. In fact, the NTSB report and Recommendation Letter validate many of our Blue Ribbon Panel's findings.

The Blue Ribbon Panel still holds to the position that the FAA should shoulder more responsibility for the safety and airworthiness determinations of these public use aircraft in the future. However, the NTSB letter leaves no doubt that – at least for now – the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management are the operators of these aircraft and therefore responsible for their safety.

We also want to encourage you to undertake an immediate and aggressive effort to ensure that there is a safe and effective fleet of air tankers that builds upon the Blue Ribbon Panel Report findings and that operate with appropriate certification, inspection, maintenance and oversight. We know that this will be a difficult challenge and in that regard we stand ready to provide further support if needed. We both wish you well with this important effort.



JIM HALL

Blue-Ribbon Panel Co-Chair
Former Chairman, NTSB



JIM HULL
Blue Ribbon Panel Co-Chair
State Forester of Texas