



November 26, 2025

Governor Jim Pillen and
Brandon Metzler, Clerk of the Legislature
State Capitol
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Governor Pillen and Mr. Metzler,

Nebraska Revised Statute 81-827 requires the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to contract all costs to maintain one single-engine air tanker (SEAT) in Nebraska available to provide aerial suppression flights in fighting wildfires. NEMA is also required to report annually, no later than December 1st, to the Governor and the Clerk of the Legislature regarding deployment of the SEAT.

The 2025 fire deployment for Tanker 854 was the twelfth year of the program. Process and procedures have resulted in an average response time of 15 minutes from request to wheels up. This year, there were no reported delays in response and no denials for deployments of the Nebraska SEAT.

Nebraska works in coordination with surrounding states to allow deployment of the Nebraska funded SEAT to locations outside of the state if fires within the State of Nebraska receive priority for deployment of the Nebraska SEAT over requests to support fires elsewhere. The Nebraska SEAT deployed to four fires in South Dakota during 2025. Nebraska SEAT costs associated with those fires will be reimbursed by the requesting agencies. The Nebraska SEAT deployed to a federal wildlife management area in Garden County at the request of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, who will reimburse the costs associated with that fire. The Great Plains Interagency Dispatch Center (GPC) manages the deployment of all SEAT aircraft in the region.

The most recent contract/activation period for the Nebraska SEAT occurred August 8 through October 6 (60 operational days). A list of Nebraska flights flown in 2025 (Table 1) as well as a report of costs associated with the SEAT program for 2025 (Table 2) are attached.

Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Ervin L. Portis
Assistant Director

Attachments

TABLE 1: AERIAL SUPPRESSION FLIGHTS

2025 was the twelfth year of the program under which the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) contracts a Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) for Nebraska. Policies and procedures have resulted in an average response time of 15 minutes from request to “wheels up”. The most recent contract/activation period for the Nebraska SEAT occurred August 8 through October 6 (60 operational days).

Nebraska works in coordination with surrounding states to allow deployment of the Nebraska SEAT to contiguous states, with the agreement that wildfire response within Nebraska will take precedence over out-of-state fire assignments. The Nebraska SEAT deployed to four fires in South Dakota during 2025. Nebraska SEAT costs associated with out-of-state fires or fires within Nebraska where a federal agency requested the SEAT for wildfires on federal land will be reimbursed by the requesting agencies. The Nebraska SEAT deployed to a federal wildlife management area in Garden County at the request of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, who will reimburse the costs associated with that fire. The Great Plains Interagency Dispatch Center (GPC) manages the deployment of all SEAT aircraft in the region.

| Date | Fire Name | Location | Acres | Sorties | Gallons | Flight Time |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|
| 8/11/2025 | Buck Fire | 7 miles W of Hot Springs, SD | 60 | 5 | 2,503 | 4.59 |
| 8/12/2025 | Coulter Fire | 8 miles SSW of Bayard | 45 | 3 | 1,855 | 4.30 |
| 8/14/2025 | Cold Springs Fire | 2 miles SE of Pringle, SD | 0.50 | 5 | 2,997 | 3.80 |
| 8/15/2025 | Theater Ridge Fire | 5 miles SE of Pringle, SD | 0.62 | 1 | 625 | 0.62 |
| 8/18/2025 | Krotz Fire | 4 miles SW of Whiteclay | 25 | 1 | 605 | 0.68 |
| 8/27/2025 | Pass Creek Fire | 1 mile SE of Allen, SD | 143 | 2 | 1,250 | 2.60 |
| 9/10/2025 | Boyd Fire | 20 miles south of Lakeside | 48 | 1 | 582 | 1.43 |
| 9/14/2025 | WNEA Exercise | Training Exercise - Gering | (n/a) | 3 | (n/a) | 2.00 |
| 9/15/2025 | Sunny Brook Fire | 19 miles E of Valentine | 20 | 2 | 1,409 | 3.23 |
| TOTAL FIRES: 8 (+1 exercise) | | | 342.12 | 24 | 11,826 | 23.25 |

TABLE 1.A: NON-NEBRASKA CONTRACT SEAT AERIAL SUPPRESSION FLIGHTS

When the Nebraska-contracted SEAT is not activated or when it is unavailable due to distance or maintenance, Incident Commanders have the authorization to mobilize SEATs that may be available in contiguous states, on contract by other states or federal entities. The advantages of mobilizing SEATs include the specialization of the aircraft and pilot, and their capability to spray fire retardant-which can both extinguish fire and create a defensive perimeter against fire.

Denial of SEAT Request: On July 15, 2025, the NEMA Watch Officer received a call from the Chadron Volunteer Fire Department Chief, requesting a SEAT that was based out of Rapid City, South Dakota for the Polar Bear Fire east of Crawford. The Fire Chief reported that the fire was 2-3 acres in size in open prairie, with no structures/infrastructure threatened. Weather conditions at Crawford at that time are recorded as 83°, north winds of 16 MPH, and 46% relative humidity. Based on the information provided by the Fire Chief and available weather information, the request for an out-of-state SEAT was denied and the Fire Chief was encouraged to contact one of several in-state private aerial applicators for availability and mobilization.

These SEATs are reimbursed out of the Governor’s Emergency Fund at the rate contracted with their sponsoring agency. SEATs not under State-of-Nebraska contract assisted with three fires during 2025.

| Date | Fire Name | Location | Acres | SEAT Provider | |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|----------|
| 4/21/2025 | Plum Creek Fire | Immediately N of Johnstown | 7,075 | Bureau of Indian Affairs | |
| 6/19/2025 | Gator Fire | 8 miles SE of Crawford | 4.0 | SD Department of Public Safety | |
| 7/27/2025 | Jelly Fire | 10 miles SE of Crawford | 4.0 | SD Department of Public Safety | |
| TOTALS FIRES: 3 | | | 7,083 | TOTAL PROVIDERS: | 2 |

TABLE 1.B: PRIVATE AERIAL APPLICATORS

When the Nebraska-contracted SEAT is not activated or when it is unavailable due to distance or maintenance, Incident Managers are authorized to directly contact aerial applicators across the region that have entered into cooperative agreements with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and the Nebraska Forest Service to provide aerial application of water to suppress active wildfires. While water is more limited than retardant in its effectiveness against wildfires, these aerial applicators provide quick, essential aerial suppression throughout the year, when Nebraska has not activated a contracted SEAT.

These private aerial applicators are reimbursed out of the Governor's Emergency Fund at a rate established by the Nebraska Forest Service (ranging between \$1,980 and \$2,640 per flight hour), according to their load capacity. Private aerial applicators assisted with 10 fires during 2025.

| Date | Fire Name | Location | Acres | Provider | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------|
| 2/24/2025 | Eureka Fire | Custer County | 2,700 | AeroSEAT Inc. | |
| 2/24/2025 | Eureka Fire | Custer County | 2,700 | Aurora Cooperative | |
| 2/26/2025 | Eureka Fire | Custer County | 2,700 | Arrow Aviation, Inc. | |
| 2/27/2025 | (unnamed) | Lincoln County | 600 | Arrow Aviation, Inc. | |
| 3/10/2025 | 409 Fire | Wheeler County | 5,576 | Aurora Cooperative | |
| 3/10/2025 | Bartlett Fire | Wheeler County | 6,000 | Arrow Aviation, Inc. | |
| 3/10/2025 | Bartlett Fire | Wheeler County | 6,000 | Wilcox Aerial Applications | |
| 3/13/2025 | Piwo Fire | Sherman County | 700 | Aurora Cooperative | |
| 3/13/2025 | Piwo Fire | Sherman County | 700 | Wells Air Service | |
| 3/26/2025 | N. Maxwell Road Fire | Lincoln County | 6,000 | Wallace Aviation, Inc. | |
| 3/28/2025 | Dads Lake Fire | Cherry County | 23,000 | Hendricks Flying Service LLC | |
| 3/28/2025 | Dads Lake Fire | Cherry County | 23,000 | North Central Aviation | |
| 6/19/2025 | Dewey Lake Fire | Franklin County | 80 | Aurora Cooperative | |
| 11/4/2025 | Spurs Fire | Thomas, Cherry counties | 500 | Arrow Aviation, Inc. | |
| 11/13/2025 | (unnamed) | Hooker County | (no info) | Hendricks Flying Service LLC | |
| 11/13/2025 | (unnamed) | Hooker County | (no info) | Flying Rhino | |
| 11/14/2025 | (unnamed) | Hooker County | (no info) | Arrow Aviation, Inc. | |
| TOTALS FIRES: 10 | | | 45,156 | TOTAL PROVIDERS: | 10 |
| TOTAL COST INVOICED TO-DATE* | | | | \$107,995.80* | |

Note: As of November 24, 2025, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency has not received invoices for several private aerial applicator fire suppression flights during 2025. Flight time and associated costs are not yet available for those mobilizations.

TABLE 1.C: CIVIL AIR PATROL FIRE DETECTION/OBSERVATION FLIGHTS

Wildfires are often ignited by lightning during the evening and overnight. These fires can smolder in isolated and infrequently traveled areas overnight and into the morning and typically a smoke plume indicating wildfire is not observed until the following afternoon.

Through an agreement between the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and the Civil Air Patrol, local emergency managers can contact NEMA to coordinate and schedule a wildfire detection flight anywhere in the state, typically within just a few short hours. Civil Air Patrol will coordinate with local emergency management and local fire departments to bring one or two passengers from those fire departments to act as onboard observers during the flights, reporting any smoke plumes indicative of a wildfire to their respective fire departments for a coordinated response. Civil Air Patrol rates range from \$93 to \$120 per flight hour (plus fuel and maintenance expenses) and are reimbursed out of the Governor's Emergency Fund. Civil Air Patrol provided 15 observation/detection flights for fire management in 2025.

| Date | Location | Flight Time | Provider | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------|
| 3/1/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 2.00 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 3/17/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 1.90 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 4/29/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 2.20 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 4/29/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 1.80 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 5/1/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 2.80 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 5/10/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 1.80 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 5/10/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 1.20 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 5/10/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 1.20 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 8/5/2025 | Sheridan County | 2.10 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 8/14/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 1.20 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 8/15/2025 | Cherry County | 2.30 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 8/15/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 1.10 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 8/16/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 2.10 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 8/24/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 1.60 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| 9/10/2025 | Northwest & north central Nebraska | 7.50 | Civil Air Patrol | |
| TOTAL FLIGHT TIME | | 32.80 | TOTAL COST | \$5,524.55 |

TABLE 1.D: OTHER TACTICAL WILDFIRE AIRCRAFT FLIGHTS

In addition to the above, there are several types specialized firefighting aircraft that can be mobilized, both fixed wing and rotary wing, based on the needs and circumstances of an incident.

During 2025, Nebraska mobilized a Multi-Mission Aircraft (MMA) flight on two wildfires. These MMA flights are equipped with advanced sensors and communication systems to provide critical real-time intelligence, such as smoke-penetrating cameras and live data feeds, to aid in fire detection, mapping, and decision-making.

| Date | Fire Name | Location | Cost | Provider |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 2/26/2025 | Eureka Fire | Custer County | \$6,291.00 | State of Colorado |
| 4/23/2025 | Plum Creek Fire | Custer County | \$11,078.27 | State of Colorado |
| TOTALS COST | | | \$17,369.27 | |

TABLE 1.E: 2025 AVIATION COST SUMMARY*

Below is a summary of the costs incurred by the State of Nebraska, paid by the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, for aviation resources utilized in wildfire detection and response during 2025.

| Type of Aviation Resource | Mobilizations | Flight Hours* | 2025 Cost Total* |
|---|---------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Nebraska-Contracted SEAT | 9 | 23.25 | \$541,960.48 |
| Other SEAT Aircraft | 3 | (unavailable) | Invoices pending* |
| Private Aerial Applicators | 19 | 55.42* | \$107,995.80* |
| Civil Air Patrol Fire Detection/Observation | 15 | 32.80 | \$5,524.55 |
| Other Tactical Wildfire Aircraft | 2 | (unavailable) | \$17,369.27 |
| 2025 AVIATION COST (as of 11/1/2025) | | | \$672,850.10* |
| RETARDANT EXPENDED VALUE (11,826 gal. at \$3.84/gal.) | | | \$45,411.84 |
| TOTAL 2025 AERIAL FIRE RESOURCE COST* | | | \$718,261.94* |

***NOTE:** As of November 24, 2025, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency has not received invoices for SEATs deployed on Nebraska wildfires from other states and federal agencies, as well as invoices for several private aerial applicator fire suppression flights during 2025. Flight time and associated costs are not yet available for those mobilizations.

SEAT REPORT 2025

TABLE 2: SEAT COSTS

T-854

| | Standby (AV) | Flight Time (FT) | Ext Pilot (EP) | Ext Driver (ED) | Per Diem (PD) | Support Truck (SM) | Relief Crew Cost | Misc. | Mobilization / Demob |
|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| 8/8/2025 – 8/15/2025 | 8.0 | 13.31 | 3 | 3 | 16 | 80 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 8/16/2025 – 8/23/2025 | 8.0 | 0.68 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 80 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 8/24/2025 – 8/31/2025 | 8.0 | 2.60 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 80 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 9/1/2025 – 9/8/2025 | 8.0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 80 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 9/9/2025 – 9/16/2025 | 8.0 | 8.08 | 6 | 6 | 22 | 300 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 9/17/2025 – 9/24/2025 | 8.0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 80 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 9/25/2025 – 10/2/2025 | 8.0 | 0.75 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 80 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 10/3/2025 – 10/6/2025 | 4.0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Totals | 60.0 | 25.42 | 9 | 9 | 144 | 820 | 4 | 0 | 2 |
| Price/Rate | \$6,500.00 | \$3,854.00 | \$59.00 | \$34.00 | \$178.00 | \$2.64 | \$2,329.00 | 0 | \$8,021.00 |
| Total Cost | \$390,000.00 | \$97,968.68 | \$531.00 | \$306.00 | \$25,632.00 | \$2,164.80 | \$9,316.00 | | \$16,042.00 |

Total Contract Amount (2025) \$541,960.48

2024 Allotment Carryover \$0.00

| | |
|--|----------------|
| August 8, 2025 - Year-To-Date Expenses | \$541,960.48 |
| Paid through the GEF | (\$541,960.48) |
| Balance Remaining | \$0.00 |

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Additional Costs: | |
| USDA (Great Plains Interagency Dispatch Center) | \$15,500.00 |
| Carry-Over, as of 11/21/25 | \$0.00 |