

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2023

Randy Moore
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
201 14th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Chief Moore,

We write to ask that you establish a night flying aerial firefighting program in the Northern California Geographic Area Coordination Center (NorthOps). Aircraft serve many critical roles for firefighting agencies, from dropping water and fire retardant to deploying personnel in remote areas. A night flying unit has been in place in Southern California for more than 10 years, and it has an excellent record of safety and firefighting effectiveness. Establishing a similar program in NorthOps would help firefighting in some of California's most vulnerable forests.

Of the 10 largest wildfires in California history, seven were in the NorthOps jurisdiction, and five of those occurred in the last five years. The Mosquito Fire, California's largest fire of 2022, burned more than 76,000 acres in a critical watershed and destroyed 44 homes in Placer and El Dorado Counties. Unfortunately, that fire ignited in the evening, but if night flying resources were available, they may have been able to prevent this fire from growing out of control.

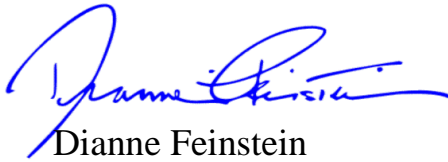
Although the night flying team in Southern California can service some NorthOps areas, they are unable to operate in the most northerly parts of the state. The Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission (Commission) recently released its Aerial Equipment Strategy Report, which suggested that federal agencies should revisit the existing "Total Mobility" strategy for resource deployments and consider additional local resources. Establishing a NorthOps-based night flying team would improve firefighting response in Northern California and test the Commission's recommendation.

We and the Commission both recognize that standing up additional night flying units will require more federal resources. In fact, Congress has already acted on some of the Commission's recommendations by removing the cap on excess aircraft that may be transferred from the Department of Defense to land

management agencies and states in last year's *National Defense Authorization Act*. We stand ready to support the U.S. Forest Service as additional needs are identified.

Climate change has made California's wildfires bigger, hotter, and more deadly. Expanding the proven U.S. Forest Service night flying aviation unit into NorthOps would greatly aid the state's efforts to prevent wildfires from growing into catastrophic threats. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator