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City Assists with Oak Ridge Fire Efforts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gallup Municipal Airport is serving as a staging point for air crews battling the Oak Ridge Fire on the Navajo Nation. Contractors and U.S. Forest Service crews are using the airport to refuel and rest between bouts combatting the over 10,000-acre wildfire.

Since the fire began on Saturday, June 28, there have been specialized helicopters flying over Gallup to reload water and refuel. Aircraft include Sikorsky Skycrane, Blackhawk and Chinook helicopters, many equipped with large 22,000-gallon capacity water containers. Crews have been utilizing various source for water, including lakes throughout the region after securing the necessary permits.

"The City is proud to help support these important efforts to suppress the Oak Ridge Fire," Frank Chiapetti, City Manager, said. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the Navajo Nation, and the crews and firefighters tasked with the dangerous work of fighting the wildfire."

Andrea Welsch, of the U.S. Forest Service, thanked Gallup for its hospitality while the fire suppression efforts continue.

"Using aircraft is one of the largest ways to fight the fire," she explained. "Air support is what gives us a shot at getting a hold of things. We fly in a pattern and work the fire together, prioritizing structures and energy infrastructure."

She explained how the U.S. Forest Service works alongside contracted air support, such as Oregon-based Helicopter Transport Services, to fight the fire. Crews from around the country have traveled to Gallup and come equipped with the supplies and equipment they need, including large semis hauling fuel for the helicopters.

Normal operations continue at the Airport, with City staff tasked with controlling air traffic and coordinating with the fire crews. The City is prepared to continue assisting with the efforts for as long as needed.

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PHOTO CAPTIONS

City of Gallup Photo

From left, Aaron Leslie, Assistant Street & Airport Superintendent, is shown alongside Tom Ericksen, James Taylor, Andrea Welsch, Masen Terry and Ryan Johnson. A Sikorsky Skycrane used to fight to Oak Ridge Fire is shown in the background.

City of Gallup Photo

The Gallatin Rappellers of the U.S. Forest Service are shown. They are, from left, Luke Sheffer, August Schield, Will Teichmiller, Max Pfau, Eric Martinson, Danny Graves and James Baumer. The crew rappels from helicopters to fight wildfires and they are currently working out of Gallup to fight the Oak Ridge Fire.