Kansas Forest Service’s Wildfire Suppression  
Cost Share Guidelines for Ag Aviators

Background
Single engine air tankers can provide a rapid, cost-effective response when used in the early phases of initial attack. Kansas’ ag aviation pilots have agreed to provide aerial suppression services upon request. Aviation is a great tool, but also comes with significant cost, and it introduces new complexities and hazards to a firefighting operation. To safely and effectively use this resource, the following guidelines are established.

Scope
These guidelines address aviation requests co-funded by the Kansas Forest Service. Individual fire departments or counties may make their own arrangements directly with pilots, but KFS will not be obligated to provide cost share assistance or be responsible for consequences of such use. KFS’ support will be during the Initial Attack phase of an emerging incident. If an incident warrants a local or state disaster declaration, then resource needs are to be routed to the Kansas Division of Emergency Management.

Procedure
1. KFS will maintain contact with the state organization for ag pilots and will maintain a list of those pilots willing and able to offer their aircraft for emergency fire suppression response and who have attended fire training, along with their locations, and their charges. Pilots’ response will be on an as-available basis, and there is no contractual obligation for them to respond.

2. If a fire department has a wildfire that requires aviation and the department wants cost share assistance, they must call the KFS Fire Duty Officer (FDO) at 785-532-3321 to place a request. The FDO will request all of the following information to evaluate the response:
   a. Location of the fire, including lat/long or detailed enough description to determine lat/long
   b. Name and callback number of the requesting party and ICS position on the fire or local office held (i.e. fire chief, emergency manager)
   c. Current and expected fire behavior
   d. Current weather conditions
   e. Values at risk – life, structures, infrastructure, or realistic likelihood for a fire to become an extended attack fire
   f. Confirm the Incident Command System (ICS) structure and ground contact (see item #6 below)
   g. The authority having responsibility for costs incurred, and their mailing address

3. If the request is approved, the FDO will look up local weather conditions to ensure that the flight is within parameters. The pilot always has the final right and authority to turn down a flight for safety or any other reason.

4. Once the flight is approved, the FDO provides contact information for the nearest known participating ag pilot to the requesting fire department to call and make final arrangements. If a pilot is able to respond, information on the pilot, the aircraft call sign, and ETA are to be recorded and subsequently relayed to KFS’ FDO.
5. KFS will reimburse 50% of the cost for the first operational period, not to exceed $5000 per incident, as funding is available. The requesting fire department will be responsible for paying the initial invoice, then may submit to KFS for reimbursement. Use beyond the first operational period of initial attack, or once a disaster declaration is made, will require specific negotiation between the pilot and the requesting fire department, and will not be KFS' responsibility.

6. The requesting fire department will have to have the Incident Command System in place, including a designated ground contact with an aircraft radio on 123.45 VHF AM aviation frequency, OR other mutually agreed-upon means of air-to-ground radio communications.

7. The requesting fire department will also need to identify how/where the aircraft will be refilled. Most commonly this will be at an airport, with fire personnel assigned to an engine, tender, or hydrant for refill. Aircraft will hold 400 – 600 gallons, depending on the model. Departments wishing to utilize this resource are encouraged to preplan refill procedures and needed connections with pilots they are likely to work with.

8. Upon arrival over the fire, the pilot will make radio contact with the ground contact for specific directions.

9. Aircraft will ONLY drop when one of the following conditions is met:
   a. Ground contact can confirm that the line has been cleared of people and vehicles that may be struck by the drop – personnel may re-enter the area immediately following the drop
   b. Ground contact can confirm that the aircraft is assigned to an unstaffed portion of the fire in which no personnel are working
   c. Pilot can visually see the entirety of the drop area prior to the drop, and is certain that there are no people in the drop zone

10. Aircraft will not drop on people, buildings, or vehicles unless there is an imminent life-threat that can be mitigated and that outweighs the risk of injury or damage.

11. After any drop, the ground contact should provide useful but tactful feedback as to accuracy and effectiveness of the drop. If adjustments need to be made, relay that to the pilot so they can adjust accordingly on subsequent drops.

12. Once the fire progression is stopped, the aircraft should be released. Risk and cost do not justify use of air tankers for mop-up.

13. As per guidelines in the Kansas Aviation Plan, no more than two aircraft will be assigned to any one fire without an aerial supervision module (air attack, HELCO or similar) in place. See the Aviation Plan for details.