



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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By Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead

**Alaska National Guard**

### **Alaska Army National Guard Black Hawk crews help fight Alaska Fires**

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** — Alaska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and aircrews from the 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment continue to conduct water bucket drops in support of wildfire suppression efforts in Alaska this week.

“We’ve flown more than 36 hours, dropped 365 buckets and dispensed 254,500 gallons of water since Sunday,” said Lt. Col. Robert Kurtz, the Alaska Army National Guard state aviation officer.

1-207th AVN accepted their first mission to support wildfire suppression efforts on June 14 around 5 p.m., and they were in the air within two hours, headed toward Willow’s Sockeye Fire.

The helicopters and aircrew were transferred from the Sockeye effort June 17 and asked to perform operations on the Kenai Peninsula after several spot fires began due to lightning strikes the prior evening.

Due to the location and terrain, the Black Hawks were able to reach areas that ground crews could not access, and the goal was to begin suppressing the fire as quickly as possible to prevent it from spreading.

“We were ‘initial attack’ for the Stetson Creek Fire,” said Kurtz. “Our aircrews had to determine where to drop water, and we were solely responsible out there during the initial effort.”

The Stetson Creek Fire is located about 1.5 miles south of the Sterling Highway between Russian River and Cooper Creek, according to the Incident Information System website.

The Black Hawks and crews flew 16 flight hours on Wednesday, in steep, mountainous terrain, with the fire encroaching on valuable, but dangerous power lines. They continued the effort Thursday in the same area, where the fire had grown to 400 acres.

“We were released early yesterday by incident command, awaiting a re-mission while they reassess the appropriate assets require for all current fires,” said Kurtz.

Crews will be on stand-by through the weekend and into next week, and will provide support as needed.

“We anticipate being tasked for Card Street or Stetson, but could be asked to go anywhere in the state,” said Kurtz. “We will respond as necessary to help however we can,” he said.

Two pilots and one crew chief operate each helicopter. The 1-207th currently has 11 qualified crews who must be swapped out every three to four days.

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**Cutline for attached photo**

(See below for links to additional full-res photos)

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A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the Alaska Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment, assists local responders as they attempt to contain the Stetson Creek Fire near Cooper Landing, Alaska, June 17. Two AKARNG Black Hawk helicopters flew 200 bucket missions total, dumping more than 144,000 gallons of water on the 300-acre Stetson Creek Fire on the Kenai Peninsula. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Balinda O'Neal)

Descriptions of each photo can be found by double-clicking the photo in Flickr, or they appear with the image in DVIDS.

**For event Flickr album of full-resolution, free downloadable images, please visit:**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/sets/72157654670624975>

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<http://dvidshub.net/r/xyuk4l>

**For b-roll video, please visit:**

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/410509/alaska-army-national-guard-black-hawk-crews-help-fight-alaska-fires#.VYN2kk3JCpo>