

(Wyo.)- Tidwell: Next Generation Large Air Tankers On Way

By: Jeremy Anderson Posted at: 02/22/2013 03:55 PM

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) - U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell says he expects to award contracts soon to add several large, jet-powered air tankers to the nation's fleet of firefighting planes.

Contracts for a new generation of air tankers were on track to be awarded last year. Protests filed by companies that didn't win contracts have drawn out that process.

Tidwell said Friday he expects the Forest Service will award the contracts in about two months. The addition of as many as seven large, jet-powered air tankers would significantly boost the Forest Service's firefighting capability.

Right now, the nation's fleet of large air tankers numbers about 11 planes. Nine of those planes are more than 50 years old.

Large tankers play a vital role in containing small wildfires before they become big ones.