



Find stories and video

Search

[Log in](#) [Contact us](#)



[Spokane Valley Sheriff's Deputy saves newborn](#)



[FEMA funds authorized for Carlton Complex ...](#)



[TRAFFIC ALERT: Vantage Bridge on I-90 closed](#)



[Burglar raids South Hill home with couple ...](#)

"Fire Boss" starts its 60 day contract in Deer Park | Environment

Title (Max 100 Characters)

"Fire Boss" starts its 60 day contract in Deer Park

Submitted by [Nicole Hensley \(/profile/44141/nicole-hensley\)](#), Web Producer
Wednesday, July 11th, 2012, 3:50pm



6

6

[Tweet](#)

[Tweet](#)

[Print \(#\)](#)

[E-mail \(#\)](#)

Topics: [Environment \(/news/environment\)](#), [News \(/news/news\)](#), [Weather \(/news/weather\)](#)



The pilot of Deer Park's Fire Boss, Eric Johnson, stands by his plane along with Sid Hoots, one of the staff at Deer Park Municipal Airport. (Photo Courtesy: Nicole Hensley, KXLY)

The pilot of Deer Park's Fire Boss, Eric Johnson, stands by his plane along with Sid Hoots, one of the staff at Deer Park Municipal Airport. (Photo Courtesy: Nicole Hensley, KXLY)

The tarmac at Deer Park Municipal Airport isn't as hot as the exhaust fuming from their Fire Boss tanker as it comes in for an afternoon landing. The pilot, Eric Johnson, wipes the sweat from his brow and he climbs out of the plane. He just returned from the Colville area to drop about 800 gallons of water from Lake Roosevelt on a small wildfire.

Tuesday was the first day of the plane's 60-day contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Washington Department of Natural Resources. The aircraft will be stationed at the airport to respond to local wildfires as its pilot stands by inside the airport's office.

There are only three out of 57 total Fire Bosses in the United States to fight wildfires. There's one in Coeur d'Alene waiting for a contractor and one being used near Boise. The majority of them are based in Europe with Spain, Italy and Croatia leading the pack. The planes are Air Tractor 802s with amphibious floats manufactured out of Minnesota. They can scoop water from nearby rivers and lakes to help ground crews put out fires, raging in the wilderness.

Johnson has been a pilot since 1971 and fighting fires from the air for 22 years. Being stationed out of Deer Park is an easy commute since he only lives 20 miles away. He says the best part of his job is the satisfaction that he's helping.

"I'm just flying the planes and dropping it where the guys really fighting the fires, need it. We try to knock them down so it's safer for the guys on the ground. They're the ones that put out the fire," Johnson said. "If I see the ground guys down the street and they say 'great job on such-and-such fire', I feel really good."

The aircraft is possible because of joint funding with DNR and BIA. The contracted price of \$244,000 pays for the aircraft's 60 day availability, but when the plane needs to be used to fight fires, an additional \$3,988 is paid per hour to provide for crews and fuel. That hourly use charge is paid for by whoever requests the use of the plane.

The Fire Boss doesn't fight alone. Just after Johnson returned from his Colville drop, a helitack crew of firefighters based out of Ellensburg stopped at the airport to refuel. The firefighter squad leader, Garrett Grant, said they were just fighting the small Colville fire as well, but were previously working on the 800 acre Navarre Fire near Chelan.

"Last night we popped a fire out near Potato Creek," Grant said. "We had a storm track through Ellensburg and go north. We've been moving our rotors around the state to cover it."

Grant added that the four-man crew dropped about 15 buckets on top of the fire southwest of Colville that afternoon to support the ground troops. The fire was likely started by lightning strikes that swept through the area. DNR officials say there were 6,208 strikes in a 24-hour period on July 9.

After the helitack crew's Deer Park fuel stop, Grant said they would head back to Colville to stage at the airport.

Both aircraft use water drops to fight fires, but the Fire Boss holds more volume. That requires longer and fewer trips. Johnson's dispatch took him a hour and a half to complete, but he only accomplished four water loads on the fire. It took him 30 minutes to go to and from Lake Roosevelt and scoop up water. The aircraft's cockpit sits behind the hopper and Johnson has a small window in front of his knees that allows him to see the water.

"If there's a goldfish in there, I can see him swim by," Johnson said explaining in addition that he's actually never seen a fish inside the hopper.

"But it makes for a good story. I could have Fred the Goldfish. He could be my pet," Johnson added.

That is until he drops the 800 gallons of water on the wildfire below.



A helitack crew flies in for a fuel stop. The Ellensburg-based crew was up north fighting a small fire southwest of Colville. (Photo Courtesy: Nicole Hensley, KXLY)

A helitack crew flies in for a fuel stop. The Ellensburg-based crew was up north fighting a small fire southwest of Colville. (Photo Courtesy: Nicole Hensley, KXLY)

Topics: [Environment \(/news/environment\)](#), [News \(/news/news\)](#), [Weather \(/news/weather\)](#)



Top Spokane County Stories

Families



Environment



News



News



</news/families/135061-spokane-valley-sheriffs-deputy-saves-newborn>

[Spokane Valley Sheriff's Deputy saves newborn](/news/families/135061-spokane-valley-sheriffs-deputy-saves-newborn) (/news/families/135061-spokane-valley-sheriffs-deputy-saves-newborn)

</news/environment/135041-fema-funds-authorized-carlton-complex-fire>

[FEMA funds authorized for Carlton Complex ...](/news/environment/135041-fema-funds-authorized-carlton-complex-fire) (/news/environment/135041-fema-funds-authorized-carlton-complex-fire)


</news/news/134991-traffic-alert-vantage-bridge-i-90-closed>


[TRAFFIC ALERT: Vantage Bridge on I-90 closed](/news/news/134991-traffic-alert-vantage-bridge-i-90-closed) (/news/news/134991-traffic-alert-vantage-bridge-i-90-closed)


</news/news/134911-burglar-raids-south-hill-home-couple-sleeping-inside>

[Burglar raids South Hill home with couple ...](/news/news/134911-burglar-raids-south-hill-home-couple-sleeping-inside) (/news/news/134911-burglar-raids-south-hill-home-couple-sleeping-inside)

Spokane County Deals (/local-deals)

 [Free Insurance Quote.](/coupon/127121/) (/coupon/127121/) | </node/127121> [NW Insurance Inc.](/business-directory/insurance/127121/nw-insurance-inc) (/business-directory/insurance/127121/nw-insurance-inc)

 [20% Off Service](/coupon/63946/) (/coupon/63946/) | </node/63946> [Norco Heating & Air Conditioning](/business-directory/heating-air/63946/norco-heating-air-conditioning) (/business-directory/heating-air/63946/norco-heating-air-conditioning)

 [20% Off Service](/coupon/63946/3/) (/coupon/63946/3/) | </node/63946> [Norco Heating & Air Conditioning](/business-directory/heating-air/63946/norco-heating-air-conditioning) (/business-directory/heating-air/63946/norco-heating-air-conditioning)

[More Local Coupons](/local-deals) (/local-deals)

[All Spokane Coupons](http://coupons.kxly.com/) (http://coupons.kxly.com/)

[Add an Event](/events/edp?p=createevent) (/events/edp?p=createevent)

Upcoming Events near Spokane County

Moran Prairie Library Book

Six Ways to Get Fit on the

Clayton Pro West Rodeo

Club (/h/events?ct=d&evid=289178741)

Centennial Trail (/h/events?ct=d&evid=289204655)

(/h/events?ct=d&evid=289223127)

Jul 24, 2:00PM

Jul 23, 6:00PM

Jul 25, 7:30PM

[Moran Prairie Library](/h/events?ct=d&vid=204492824) (/h/events?ct=d&vid=204492824)

[Argonne Library](/h/events?ct=d&vid=204317401) (/h/events?ct=d&vid=204317401)

[Clayton Community Fair](/h/events?ct=d&vid=204768581) (/h/events?ct=d&vid=204768581)

[SEE MORE LOCAL EVENTS](/H/EVENTS) (/H/EVENTS)

Most popular stories from nearby communities

[Downtown Spokane News](http://downtownspokane.kxly.com) (http://downtownspokane.kxly.com)

- [Spokane Police searching for suspect in Sunset Grocery robbery](http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/crime/135071-spokane-police-searching-suspect-sunset-grocery-robbery) (http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/crime/135071-spokane-police-searching-suspect-sunset-grocery-robbery)
- [Spokane Valley Sheriff's Deputy saves newborn](http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/families/135061-spokane-valley-sheriffs-deputy-saves-newborn) (http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/families/135061-spokane-valley-sheriffs-deputy-saves-newborn)
- [Hoopefest announces Bailee Neyland as new marketing director](http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/events/135051-hoopefest-announces-bailee-neyland-new-marketing-director) (http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/events/135051-hoopefest-announces-bailee-neyland-new-marketing-director)
- [FEMA funds authorized for Carlton Complex fire](http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/environment/135041-fema-funds-authorized-carlton-complex-fire) (http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/environment/135041-fema-funds-authorized-carlton-complex-fire)
- [City Council asks for public comment on funding for park, roads](http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/news/135031-city-council-asks-public-comment-funding-park-roads) (http://downtownspokane.kxly.com/news/news/135031-city-council-asks-public-comment-funding-park-roads)

[North - West Spokane News](http://northwestspokane.kxly.com) (http://northwestspokane.kxly.com)

- [Military Warrior Support Foundation presents vet keys to new home](http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/news/135111-military-warrior-support-foundation-presents-vet-keys-new-home) (http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/news/135111-military-warrior-support-foundation-presents-vet-keys-new-home)
- [Man shot in early morning robbery at Apple Tree Inn](http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134951-man-shot-early-morning-robbery-apple-tree-inn) (http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134951-man-shot-early-morning-robbery-apple-tree-inn)
- [Hydration key to beating the heat](http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134921-hydration-key-beating-heat) (http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134921-hydration-key-beating-heat)
- [Dog killed during home invasion, suspects remain at large](http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/crime/134811-dog-killed-during-home-invasion-suspects-remain-large) (http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/crime/134811-dog-killed-during-home-invasion-suspects-remain-large)
- [Extreme heat poses safety threat to pets](http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134801-extreme-heat-poses-safety-threat-pets) (http://northwestspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134801-extreme-heat-poses-safety-threat-pets)

[South Hill - East Spokane News](http://southeastspokane.kxly.com) (http://southeastspokane.kxly.com)

- [South Hill detour frustrating residents, drivers](http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134901-south-hill-detour-frustrating-residents-drivers) (http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134901-south-hill-detour-frustrating-residents-drivers)
- [Keep your lawn green without breaking your bank \(or the aquifer\)](http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134871-keep-your-lawn-green-without-breaking-your-bank-or-aquifer) (http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134871-keep-your-lawn-green-without-breaking-your-bank-or-aquifer)
- [Police looking to create new precinct on South Hill](http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134361-police-looking-create-new-precinct-south-hill) (http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134361-police-looking-create-new-precinct-south-hill)
- [As temps soar, so do requests for AC repairs](http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134331-temps-soar-so-do-requests-ac-repairs) (http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134331-temps-soar-so-do-requests-ac-repairs)
- [Rockwood gunman reported suicidal by his wife in May](http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134181-rockwood-gunman-reported-suicidal-his-wife-may) (http://southeastspokane.kxly.com/news/news/134181-rockwood-gunman-reported-suicidal-his-wife-may)