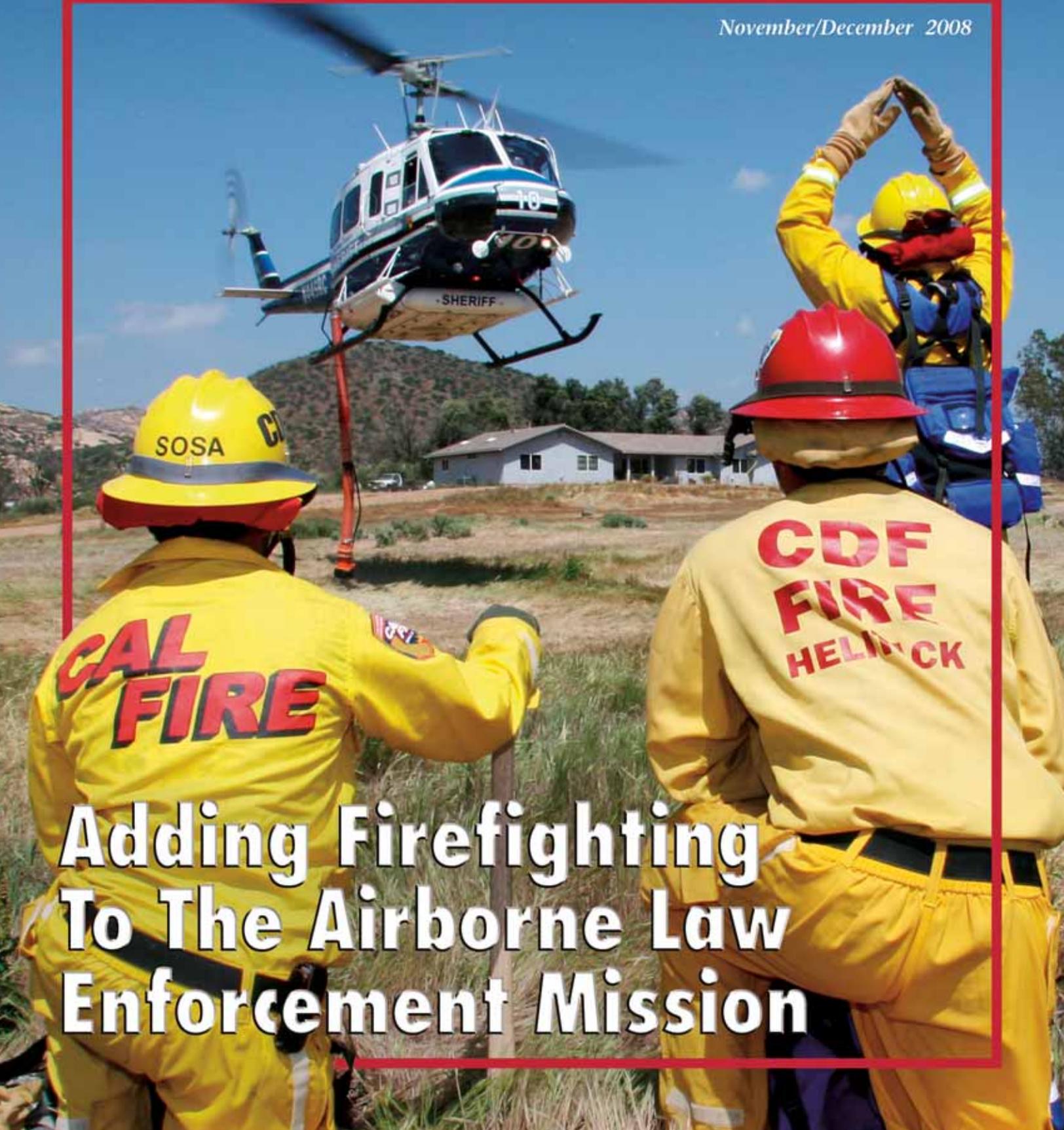


# AIR BEAT

The Official Journal of the Airborne Law Enforcement Association

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**Adding Firefighting  
To The Airborne Law  
Enforcement Mission**



# The Fires That **CHANGED THE FIGHT**

By **Dana Morris**, *Flight Operations Chief, Flagler County (FL) Emergency Services*  
*Photos courtesy of Dana Morris.*



"In January of 2002, Flagler County Emergency Services purchased a used AS350 B3 with landfill bond monies that were reallocated for countywide fire suppression. The helicopter was named FireFlight and was outfitted with a LifePort Air Ambulance configuration."



*According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Flagler County has a total area of 571 square miles, of which 485 square miles is land and 86 square miles is water, much of it in the Atlantic Ocean. The total area is 15.03% water.*

**F**lorida's Flagler County suffered greatly from wildfires 10 years ago. The major fires began when a fire in a subdivision burned over 1,100 acres, destroyed 20 homes and damaged 17 others in June of 1998. Then, one month later, numerous limited area fire evacuations were ordered, culminating in an evacuation of the entire county when an additional 51 homes were destroyed and 175 were damaged. By the time the drought and fires ended, 71 homes had been destroyed, 192 damaged, over 82,000 acres had burned and more than \$1,278,714 had been expended by the county on protective measures alone.

This was not the only time a major wildfire event had impacted the county. In 1985, a wildfire raged through a portion of Palm Coast, which caused the total loss of 131 homes and damaged an estimated 200 others. The combined dollar losses of these fires were staggering: 202 homes destroyed and 393 damaged, totaling an

estimated \$16 million. These figures are low when compared to the hundreds of millions in lost timber revenues as a result of the fires.

During this time period, if a helicopter was needed for firefighting in the area, the U. S. Division of Forestry had to call aircraft in from another region of Florida. If committed to another fire, they were not available to help. During the 1998 wildfires, the assistance of aircraft was needed but unavailable. The fires could have been controlled in the early stages.

The reports from the 1998 Wildfire Citizens Advisory Taskforce, Florida Fire Chief's Association Review of the Wildfires of 1998 and the Division of Forestry's critique of the 1998 event each discussed the important role aircraft play in controlling fires while they are small, ultimately saving timberlands, structures and potentially lives. The reports stated that if aircraft had been used early, no homes might have been lost.

In January of 2002, Flagler County Emergency Services purchased a used AS350 B3 with landfill bond monies that were reallocated for countywide fire suppression. The helicopter was named FireFlight and was outfitted with a LifePort Air Ambulance configuration. The following year, Flagler County obtained FAA Part 135 certification to enable billing for air ambulance transports. The billings have helped fund approximately half of the yearly operating budget for the entire flight operations department.

A NightSun was installed in 2006, as well as a FLIR 8500 and three sets of night vision goggles to help in aiding county and city law enforcement agencies. The FLIR and night vision goggles are also used for search and rescue missions, as well as locating hot spots on fires.

The primary function of FireFlight is fire suppression using a 210-gallon Bambi Bucket with a Sacksafoam foam injection system that makes drops 15 times more effective than with water



Since FireFlight went into service in February 2002, no homes have been lost to wildfires. The following is a chart showing the number of flights, hours and gallons of water used since the helicopter went into service.

TYPE OF FLIGHT	# OF FLIGHTS	%	HOURS	%	GALLONS OF WATER DROPPED
EMS	345	17%	197	13%	
FIRE					
RECONNAISSANCE	547	27%	360	24%	
<b>FIRE SUPPRESSION</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>950,748</b>
LAW ENFORCEMENT	218	11%	168	11%	
SEARCH AND RESCUE	97	19%	73	21%	
OTHER	517	26%	356	23%	
<b>GRAND TOTALS:</b>	2018		1530		<b>950,748</b>



**Air Ambulance Part 135, Billing Income**

FY 2004 -	\$181,450
	(Partial year)
FY 2005 -	361,900
FY 2006 -	481,826
FY 2007 -	337,159
FY 2008 -	237,714
	(As of 06/30/08)

**TOTAL \$1,600,049**

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alone. Although some might assume there is plenty of water in Florida, during the dry season or drought, water sources are scarce. It is critical to have a quick turn around between drops to keep the fire under control, so the county retrofitted an old 4,500-gallon fuel tank and put it on a flatbed trailer to have an economical portable dip tank.

All pilots hired by the department must have prior firefighting experience with a Bambi Bucket, along with other minimums. Once hired, all pilots are sent to a three-month Florida Division of Forestry course to become Florida Certified Firefighters, Structural Firefighter 1s and First Responders.

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FireFlight and other county and city firefighters work closely with the Florida Division of Forestry, which manages most of the forestlands in the state. When FireFlight arrives on scene, the pilot contacts the Division of Forestry with a situational update and coordinates directions for the bulldozer crews. This information is also relayed to the county dispatcher so other firefighters can be dispatched if necessary. FireFlight also works with the Florida Division of Forestry air attack airplanes and helicopters to coordinate a safe and effective aerial suppression effort. 

*Editor's Note: Chief Dana Morris is a Florida Certified Wildland Firefighter, Structural Firefighter 1, First Responder and certified with the U.S. Forest Service for Aerial Firefighting. He is also a member of the Airborne Law Enforcement Association.*







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