

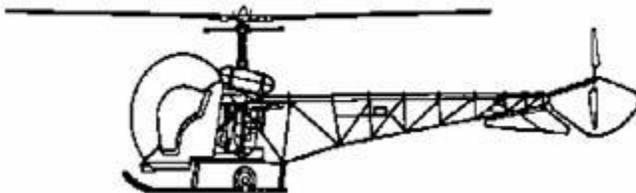
Washington Helitack

DNR Helitack -- History

The Washington State DNR Helicopter program has been in existence since the 1960's. Over the years the program has witnessed a variety of different aircraft and helicopter bases. The first aircraft were used mainly for reconnaissance. As the state acquired larger aircraft, small crews were then added along with buckets. The program has incrementally expanded to where it is today with larger crews and more effective firefighting equipment. All DNR helicopters were and still are acquired through the federal excess property program.



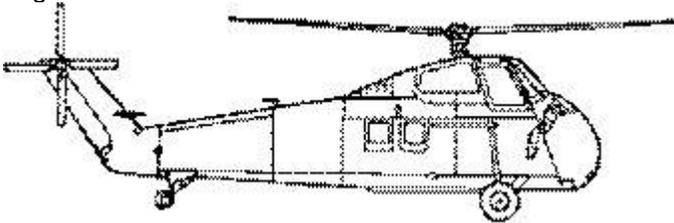
Introduced into the DNR in 1967, two Bell-47s served a reconnaissance role and had small 50 gallon buckets. These buckets were designed by DNR's own pilot Harold Clark. The same design was eventually used by Sims bucket company. The 47s carried a pilot and helicopter manager and were stationed in Deer Park and Olympia. They were phased out in the mid 70's and replaced by the Kaman helicopter.



Designed in 1943 as a light multi purpose helicopter the Bell 47 became the most popular helicopter of the 50's. During the Korean war it became famous for its role in rescue missions. The 47 was very popular in general aviation up to the late 70's.



The Sikorsky S58 (H34) Choctaw was the only one used by DNR in 1971 and offered extended capability for providing larger crews and greater water capacity. This helicopter carried a 450 gallon bucket and had a 1500 horsepower engine.



The S58 was one of the largest helicopters with a piston engine. It had a four-bladed main rotor, a gross weight of 5900 kg and the capability to carry 12 passengers in airline-style seating or 18 troops. The S58 was the standard aircraft in its class during the 50's and the 60's. More than 2800 were built, including the Westland Wessex.



The Kaman Husky replaced the Bell 47s in DNR fire use in 1974. The Kamans continued to use the Sims 450 gallon bucket, normally carrying 300 gallons (plugs removed). At various times six Kamans were stationed across Washington State. Three in Western Washington (Castle Rock, Enumclaw, and Sedro Woolley), and three in Eastern Washington (Ellensburg, Omak, and Deer Park). The ships generally operated with a crew of 2-4 firefighters. The Huskies started to be replaced in the late 70's due to a shortage of spare rotor blades, and the availability of the more reliable and faster Hueys.



The Kaman could be designed extremely compact because of its bi-rotor system. Between 1958 and 1965 some 365 were built.



The first Huey's in the program were the UH-1B models. The first one came into service in 1977. It carried a crew of 3-5 and a bucket, and served DNR until the end of the 1980's when the longer UH-1H model became available.

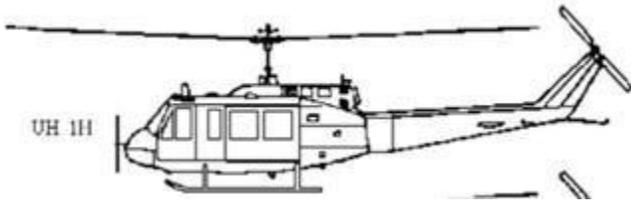


Developed in the late 1950s, the Bell UH-1B would achieve fame during the war in Vietnam. It was used primarily for battle zone transport (7 troops), attack (gunship), and search and rescue by the U.S. Army. It is large and can be loaded quickly through the large side doors. Pictured above is a B-model.



The UH-1H model helicopters were first introduced to the DNR Helitack program in 1989. In 1996, the Helitack program consolidated to one base on the west side at Enumclaw and one on the east side in Ellensburg. Four Hueys (338, 339, 340, 341) were available and three of those were staffed with crews: two rotors in Ellensburg, and one in Enumclaw. In 2001 the programs combined

and the Helitack program began full operation from Ellensburg. In 2002 the fire crew stood at twenty-one with five pilots.



The H model is an extended version of the B model and afforded more room for crew (12 / 14 troops) and gear in the transmission wells on either side.



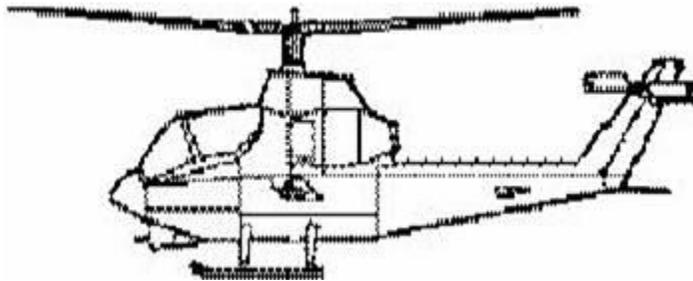
In 2003 Chelan County Rotor 1 was introduced to the fleet (338, 339, 340, and 341). This made it possible for the program to staff four helicopters while leaving one available as a spare. The program also added five crew members and two pilots bringing the total to twenty-six and seven respectively.



In 2007 the Huey's began receiving new paint jobs and pilot bubble windows. By the 2008 fire season, all helicopters in the fleet will show the green, blue, and white DNR logo paint scheme. Other changes include engine, tail boom strakes, and fast fin upgrades that give the hueys more versatility and lifting capability.



In 2004 a new helicopter became available to Helitack with the addition of the Bell AH-1 Cobra. Three AH-1 helicopters arrived in the spring and were placed in service for the 2004 fire season. The Cobra brings added versatility to the program with increased lifting capability and quicker response time. The Cobras fly with a pilot and manager and carry a custom Bambi bucket with a 320 gallon capacity. In response to the addition of the three Cobra helicopters the crew grew to twenty-nine personnel and eight pilots. The 2005 season is expected to see the addition of two more Cobras. The fire crew may increase in personnel and pilots.



The AH-1 Cobras were first used toward the end of the Vietnam War. The Cobra's narrow front gave it a defensive advantage making it a harder target to acquire.