

ATISN 27262 – Water-bombing Aircraft

Extract from Natural Resources Wales Briefing sent to the Welsh Government on 17 July 2026

Helicopter Support

In extreme circumstances, helicopter support may be deployed to reduce the impact and damage to NRW land where standard firefighting techniques are ineffective, and only at the request of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). NRW has requested that each approved provider liaises directly with the relevant FRS (or jointly where appropriate) ahead of the wildfire season to ensure an effective operational response.

During an incident, any request for helicopter support must be made by the FRS to NRW's Incident Communication Centre (ICC). The ICC will forward the request to the Duty Tactical Manager (DTM) for consideration and action. NRW holds a framework agreement with three providers; details are set out in Annex 1.

Key Considerations

- **Timing of the Request**

As providers are not held on standby, the highest-ranked provider on the framework will be contacted first to assess availability. NRW allows up to one hour for an initial reply. The provider will then indicate an estimated time of arrival, including pre-flight checks and mobilisation, which is typically up to four hours. Requests made in the late afternoon may not be feasible due to limited daylight hours, particularly during early spring.

- **Approval for a Single Site**

NRW's DTM or Tactical Advisor (Tac Ad) will provide written authorisation to the selected provider and requesting FRS for deployment to a specific site. Should the FRS require helicopter support at an additional or alternative location, a new request must be submitted via the ICC.

- **Site Management**

Upon arrival, the FRS is responsible for directing and coordinating the deployment of the helicopter. The FRS will inform the pilot when the fire is sufficiently suppressed, at which point they will return to base. NRW will not provide on-the-ground direction during operations.

- **Water Sources**

NRW has supplied the service providers with a list from Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water identifying approved water bodies suitable for lifting. Pilots have been briefed to assess each site for safety, including ensuring no illegal swimming activity and considering potential underwater hazards, especially where water levels are reduced.

Designated Sites not under our direct management

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are legally protected areas designated for their special wildlife, habitats, geology, or landforms. They form the foundation of nature conservation across Wales and underpin many other conservation designations. There are just over 1,000 SSSIs across Wales. These sites are predominantly privately owned but are subject to regulation by NRW.

In most instances, NRW will not respond directly to wildfires occurring on SSSIs that are not in our direct management. However, our Environment Officers (EO) or Environment Manager Duty Officer (EMDO) will provide environmental advice to the FRS as required.

For the highest-value sites, NRW may support the FRS through the deployment of helicopter assistance. Any such support will be considered and authorised by NRW on a case-by-case basis.

Use of contractors in 2025

To provide context to the impact of the change in use of ground based support the following information has been provided by the place teams.

Type of Operation	No of times used	
	NRW staff	Contractors
Use of Helicopter		5

Helicopter Support Providers

NRW maintains a framework agreement with three approved helicopter service providers for wildfire support. These providers may be deployed only when authorised by NRW in accordance with the process described above. The details below are provided to support operational coordination during authorised deployments and to assist the Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) should they need to commission services directly where NRW has not authorised deployment.