Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Providing helicopter support and transport services to programs within Indian Affairs is an important function of the Branch of Wildland Fire Management's Aviation Program, especially when it comes to transporting personnel and equipment to the Supai Village. Located eight miles below the rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, the Department of Agriculture considers it to be one of the most remote villages in the nation; only mules, hikers or helicopters can access it. It is home to the Havasu Baaja, People of the Blue Green Waters, also known as the Havasupai Tribe.

Between May 2nd and June 12th, 2017, the BIA Navajo Region Helitack Crew flew eight helicopter transport missions to the Village in support of law enforcement officers from BIA's Office of Justice Services.

2017 Navajo Region Helitack Crew.

Using an A-star B-3 helicopter capable of lifting 2,000 pounds, the 10-member helitack crew was responsible for ensuring the safety of passengers and cargo. This included transporting a 250 gallon propane tank, ultra-terrain vehicles, cabinets, safes, and horse panels. Cargo nets filled with food and drinking water were also packaged, weighed, balanced and delivered to the Village. Over the course of their assignment, helicopter N32HX flew 34.3 hours, transported 18,791 pounds of cargo, and hauled 123 passengers, including crewmembers, law enforcement personnel and inmates.

Working in canyons that have shifting wind and temperature gradients can create a complex environment. This is why all crew members must have a thorough understanding of how temperature

influences a helicopter's performance and thus its carrying capacity before they can certify as a helitack crew members. Once qualified, the BIA will depend on these firefighters to respond to wildfires and safely manage and transport internal and external cargo loads. For crew members, these missions offer specialized training that builds their experience and confidence, which in turn strengthens the overall BIA Aviation Program.

These missions are part of a developing partnership between BIA's Branch of Wildland Fire Management's Aviation Program and other Indian Affairs programs. The Navajo Helitack Crew has also assisted BIA's Office of Facilities, Property and Safety Management and the Bureau of Indian Education.

The Branch funds eight helicopter modules to provide wildfire response, helicopter transport and search and rescue support services across the nation. Learn more about the BIA's Aviation Program at: https://www.bia.gov/bia/ots/dfwfm/bwfm/aviation.

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