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TIMBERWEST SEEKS BUYERS FOR MARTIN MARS WATER BOMBERS

Vancouver (BC) -- TimberWest Forest Corp. today announced that it is selling its two Martin Mars water bombers.

"We have made the decision to seek buyers for the Martin Mars water bombers as the planes are not part of our core business functions," said Paul McElligott, TimberWest President and CEO. "TimberWest is a forest land management company and we believe there are other private sector interests who are in a better position to operate these planes."

TimberWest has made arrangements with public and private sector agencies to ensure that its forest land holdings on Vancouver Island continue to receive forest fire protection services.

"The company is confident that by working with the systems in place, we can protect our land assets on Vancouver Island from forest fires," said McElligott.

The Martin Mars water bombers, initially conceived as military bombers, have been providing fire-fighting services in British Columbia for over 40 accident-free years. They are based in Sproat Lake, near Port Alberni on Vancouver Island, and were originally operated by a consortium of partners, including TimberWest. However, for the last five years, TimberWest has been the sole operator.

"Over the years, the company has put significant resource into upgrading these planes. We believe the two planes have been rigorously maintained to keep them in a safe and effective operating condition. They will be attractive to those parties whose business interests are suited to operating these types of aircraft," said McElligott.

As a condition of sale, TimberWest will require that one of the planes be donated to Port Alberni upon retirement for use by the community as a heritage attraction.

"This is consistent with a commitment we made to the people of Port Alberni and reflects our support for local communities," added McElligott.

Some interest has already been expressed by the private sector to operate the aircraft, which, in addition to forest fire-fighting capabilities, have solid tourism and marketing potential for the right buyer.

The tendering process for the sale of the Martin Mars aircraft closes on December 31, 2006.

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BACKGROUNDER

- A total of five Martin Mars aircraft were built in Baltimore, Maryland in 1942-43.
- They were originally conceived as a military bomber for long-range mission and patrols.
- The planes were redesigned and classified for long-range general transportation because of their demonstrated heavy lift capability.
- In 1959 a consortium of British Columbia coastal forest companies formed Flying Tankers, which then purchased the remaining aircraft and converted them to water bombers.
- Two of the aircraft have continued to operate, providing unsurpassed fire-fighting protection services to British Columbia's coast and interior and as required to neighbouring jurisdictions in Alberta, Washington State, Oregon and California.
- The planes are operated by a crew of four, including a captain, first officer and two flight engineers.
- Each plane can hold over 27,000 litres (7,200 US gallons) of water/foam load, enough to cover three to four acres in a single drop. The planes have the capability to use fresh or ocean water.
- It takes the aircraft a skimming distance of about two kilometres to pick up a load of water. They can operate from a body of water as small as six kilometres depending on surrounding topography and other approach and departure requirements.
- Both aircraft have the capability to drop either straight water or water mixed with foam onto fires. In 2005, one of the aircraft was also fitted with long-term suppressant.
- Once the planes are airborne, foam concentrate is injected into the water load at a ratio of 30 U.S. gallons into the 7,200 U.S. gallon water load.
- Once dropped, the tumbling action causes aeration which converts the water load into a foam load, a process repeated for each drop.
- The planes are housed at Sproat Lake on Vancouver Island, but have the capability to operate for extended periods away from their base.