

NFFE News



NFFE Wildland Firefighters Provide Input on New Classification Series in OPM Focus Group

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Earlier this month, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) was invited to join the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials in a focus group to help develop a new occupational series that aims to properly classify wildland firefighters. The development of a new series was a specific requirement included in the bipartisan infrastructure bill passed in late 2021. For years, wildland firefighters have been improperly classified as “forestry technicians,” a role that does not account for the dangerous nature and complex range of duties involved in fighting wildfires.

Three NFFE wildland firefighters from across the country were asked to participate in the focus groups. Their input is critical to OPM and USDA officials tasked with drafting the new occupational series, as experienced firefighters are the only qualified source that can accurately describe the actual job duties that wildland firefighters undertake.

“There is definitely an academic disconnect between the higher-level USDA and OPM folks between the realities of this job and how they view it from above,” said one firefighter. Speaking on the initial draft of the new classification, he said, “it was quite a bit of the generic stuff, very old stuff that needs to be updated. That’s where we can have a lot of feedback.”

NFFE firefighters are working on reviewing and providing input to the focus group officials on drafts of documents regarding the new job series. Specifically, they are tasked with helping define terminology and duties so that the classifications properly reflect the various responsibilities of different positions that wildland firefighters may hold. OPM is aiming to finalize the language of the job series in mid-May.

“NFFE is grateful for the opportunity to work with OPM and USDA to try and get this classification right,” said NFFE National President Randy Erwin. “For far too long, federal wildland firefighters have been stuck in a job series that does not accurately describe their duties, nor does it provide the pay and benefits that they deserve for putting their health on the line combatting the wildfire crisis. We look forward to finally having an occupational series that is appropriate for federal wildland firefighters because they have been able to contribute to this process.”

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