



# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO

June 6, 2022

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Kiran Ahuja  
Director  
U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
1900 E Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20415

**Re: Top Demands on Federal Wildland Firefighter Occupational Series and Pay**

Dear Secretary Vilsack, Secretary Haaland, and Director Ahuja:

Thank you for inviting NFFE members and wildland firefighters (WLFF) to provide input on the development of a new Wildland Firefighter Occupational Series and the salary increase required Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. I wrote you letters in March and June with recommendations. Three of our members participated in a working group with your agencies in April and provided input. NFFE recently received details from your agencies on the draft occupational series and pay increase. It is clear to us your work on this front is not yet complete. Finalization and rollout should be halted until you take the top-line NFFE recommendations in this letter into full account.

NFFE wildland firefighters identify these ten critical actions you must take to improve recruitment and retention in all of wildland fire:

1. Establish a nationwide geographic area for determination of the salary increase required Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. Recruitment and retention of WLFFs is a problem everywhere in this country. You as secretaries and the OPM director have the exclusive authority in law to make this written determination ensuring a universal pay raise.

2. Make the WLFF series a career ladder position graded GS-7 to GS-12 for bargaining unit employees as the permanent fix to the pay issue. Equivalent jobs in the state, municipal, and private sectors starting pay is comparable to GS-7. The position must have rapid non-competitive promotion potential with a working grade, full performance, journeyman level GS-12 for retention purposes. Managerial positions would presumably be graded higher.
3. All extra pay must be retained or allowed under the new series. Ex: overtime, hazard pay, differentials.
4. The series should comprise only permanent full-time employees and permanent seasonal employees. The effect is to phase out hiring temporary employees to improve retention. Significant disparities exist in temporary employment: they lose health insurance coverage in the off-season, temporary time does not count toward retirement, and they have fewer legal protections. The limited hours for a temporary season no longer meet Agency needs because temps have received extensions on short notice three seasons in a row.
5. The series scope must be more specific and include many more specialties than what has been proposed to cover all fire-related positions. Include all specialty positions that are covered by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Standards for Wildland Fire Position Qualifications within the parentheses. Here are some examples:

- Wildland Firefighter (Unmanned Aircraft Systems)
- Wildland Firefighter (Airtanker Base Operations)
- Wildland Firefighter (Rappel)
- Wildland Firefighter (Short Haul)
- Wildland Firefighter (Engine Module)
- Wildland Firefighter (Support Dispatcher)
- Wildland Firefighter (Initial Attack Dispatcher)
- Wildland Firefighter (Engine Captain)

See [www.nwcg.gov](http://www.nwcg.gov) for relevant publications. Wage Grade positions should also be included in such a way to ensure consistency and equity between pay and work.

6. Official job titles and position descriptions under new firefighter series should reflect that the employee is a firefighter for those not currently indicated as firefighters. Position descriptions must reflect the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities of today's wildland firefighters. Position descriptions should comport with NWCG standards.
7. All employees must have a choice between a permanent seasonal position or permanent year-round/full-time position in the new series. Those in seasonal positions do not want to be forced into year-round/full-time positions due to the difficult nature of work that takes a toll on long time employees.

8. Agencies must maintain the currently available 13/13 tour (13 pay periods guaranteed/13 pay periods off) and give employees choice in their tour of duty in the new series (13/13, 18/8, 26/0). Agencies must not only have 18/8 as the minimum tour of duty for current employees to transition to. Current firefighters will resign if the 13/13 tours are eliminated.
9. Voluntary reassignment must be exclusively utilized to transition the current workforce into the new series. Agencies will presume all current Wildland Firefighters are qualified for a position in the new series. "Time-in-grade" requirements must be waived where appropriate. Personnel should have the choice of retaining their current series or moving to the new series without fear of termination or having to compete with other employees. Agencies will bargain with the Union fully on all aspects of the transition between series process prior to implementation.
10. Direct hire authority must not be used to fill WLFF positions in perpetuity. All WLFF positions in the new series should be permanent and generally hired under a career conditional appointment. Once the current direct hiring authority designation expires, agencies must revert to using competitive hiring authority for WLFF positions. Competitive hiring practices protect employee rights to Veterans Preference or Land Management Workforce Flexibility Act priorities.

Please also consider the attached handout from in the Office of Personnel Management's Wildland Firefighter Occupational Series Forest Service Focus Group session in April 2022 that has been edited to reflect the submitted recommendations from NFFE wildland firefighters.

To get this done right, please put all ten actions in motion immediately. I look forward to discussing the details further with you in upcoming meetings we plan for here in Washington, D.C. Thank you again for all that you do with NFFE to empower and dignify the federal workforce.

Sincerely,



Randy Erwin  
National President  
National Federation of Federal Employees,  
IAMAW, AFL-CIO

cc:

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## Wildland Firefighter Position Classification Focus Group Activities Handout

### NFFE Wildland Firefighters Feedback Summary

**Editing Note: Yellow highlights reflect recommended edits. Strike-out items should be removed or edited.**

#### Activity 1a -

1. Wildland Fire Firefighter (Overarching Title w/ Parentheticals starting below)
2. Dispatcher
3. Engine Module Fire Engine Operator
4. Fire Program/Management Officer
5. Fire and fuels Management Planning Specialist
6. Fuels Management Technician
7. Helitack
8. Rappel
9. Short Haul
10. Interagency Hotshot Crews (IHCs)
11. Wildland Fire Module (WFM)/Handcrew
12. Prevention
13. Smokejumper
14. Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)
15. Airtanker Base Operations (ABO)

#### Activity 1b –

1. **Wildland Fire Firefighter** - Work that involves performing, managing, supervising supervising, leading, and/or performing and providing leadership (\*\*\*) during wildland fire work to include: Pre-response preparation, engagement, mitigation activities, and post-response actions the engagement with pre-response mitigation or preparation, incident response, for incidents, wildland fire incidents, and All-Hazard Response for USFS personnel under ESF4 mandate, and post-incident response. The work also involves supporting and/or managing of wildland Work may involve all manner of fire suppression, fire management, and fuels management duties. fire to include fire-

preparedness, suppression, and/or fuels. Work may involve response to an emergency medical incident. (\*\*\*)Leadership is wholly different than supervising. There are plenty of supervisors in this game, but very few actual leaders. However, because of this acute fact, "Leadership" should/must remain in the description.)

2. **Dispatcher** – Work that involves dispatching, tracking, mobilizing, and coordinating assignment of, and recovering firefighters, fire support personnel, aircraft, supplies, and equipment. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
3. **Engine Module Fire Engine Operator** - Work that involves operating and driving engines to fire locations, frequently via unimproved roads, and positioning engines in the appropriate locations, considering the safety of the crew and equipment and how the equipment can best be used in control and mop-up operations. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
4. **Fire Program/Management Officer**- Work involves planning, developing, implementing, coordinating, and evaluating an integrated fire management program for a segment of the organization. Provides leadership, coordination, and direction for the administration of the fire program to include but not limited to preparedness, detection, budget, suppression, post-fire response, fuels/vegetation management, prevention, mitigation/education, aviation, dispatching and other fire support functions, and to ensure and integration between fire and other natural resources. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
5. **Fire Management Planning Specialist** - Work involves providing program leadership and consultation for short and long-term strategic fire management planning, assessments, and interagency and/or unit fire management plans. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
6. **Fuels Management Technician** - Work involves gathering data about fuel quantity and conditions, using firefighting skills to implement prescribed fire and mechanical thinning treatments that improve current vegetation conditions while reducing flammable materials that fuel wildfires. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
7. **Helitack** - Work involves being transported by helicopters to wildfires and providing incident support for all helicopter-centered activities, i.e., water delivery via bucket, transport of gear and supplies via internal loading and/or sling and/or longline, and providing the full range of Helibase operation and support duties. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.

8. **Rappel** – Work involves rappelling from hovering helicopters into rugged and/or remote areas for wildland fire or incident response. May also engage in the full range of helitack duties. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
9. **Short Haul** – Work involves emergency medical response to incidents and hanging via longline from a hovering helicopter to deliver short-term medical response, followed by medical evacuation via longline, to more accessible terrain, to facilitate transport to more definitive care. May also engage in the full range of helitack duties. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
10. **Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC)** - Work performed on organized Interagency Hotshot Crews (IHC) traveling throughout the U.S and abroad (response to Canada in the last decade). to respond to wildfire incidents and all-hazard incidents ~~suppress wildfires~~. Work performed as a member of an organized Handcrew IHC that utilize a variety of specialized tools, equipment, and techniques, to actively manage ~~suppress~~ wildfires and respond to non-wildfire incidents.
11. **Wildland Fire Module (WFM)/Handcrew** - Work performed on 20+ person handcrews and 10 person WFMs. Working on assigned districts and/or traveling throughout the U.S. to respond to wildfire incidents and all-hazard incidents ~~suppress wildfires~~. Work performed as a member of an organized Handcrew/WFM that utilize a variety of specialized tools, equipment, and techniques, to actively manage ~~suppress~~ wildfires and respond to non-wildfire incidents.
12. **Prevention** - Primary work involves all the Primary Duties of WLFF; with secondary emphasis ~~Work~~ involving planned effort toward reducing the occurrence of preventable forest and range fires. Personnel that specialize in the planning and implementation of strategies, plans and activities that may include fire prevention, public education, fire information, fire risk mitigation assistance and coordination, fire investigation and trespass (cost recovery). May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
13. **Smokejumper** - Work involves parachuting from airplanes to provide attack on wildland fires in remote areas. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.
14. **Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)** – Work involves operating and maintaining small Agency-owned UAS. Establishes landing/operations areas, plans flights, executes flights, and processes flight data in support of incidents. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.

15. **Airtanker Base Operations (ABO)** – Work involves all activities related to managing Tanker Base aircraft and providing retardant support. May also engage in the full range of wildland firefighter duties.

### Activity 2a: Occupational Series Coverage

This series includes

- **classes of positions**, which involve technical and specialized work in the protection of forest or range lands and resources from fire.
- **general fire control work**, which is preparatory to the assumption of technical or specialized assignments, and which is accomplished as a part of specialized functional fire control programs including forest and range fire prevention, presuppression, suppression, post-suppression, fire research, and other specialized work relating to fire control programs.
- **positions that supervise or perform work** to control and extinguish fires and involves technical and specialized work in the planning and execution of Wildfire management programs in fire adapted ecosystems while dealing with problems of smoke dispersion, and hazard reduction near urban areas. This includes, but is not limited to, fire prevention, pre-attack planning and wildfire suppression.

### Activity 2b: Occupational Series Coverage

Positions in this series require knowledge of:

- Comprehensive understanding and performance of Wildland Fire behavior.
- Comprehensive understanding and performance of Wildland Firefighting fire suppression and management techniques.
- Comprehensive understanding and performance of Wildland Firefighting and fire prevention theory and techniques.
- Comprehensive understanding and performance of Wildland Firefighting oriented manual weather observation and recording, fire weather forecasts, and long-term weather trends.
- Comprehensive understanding of Firing Operations techniques.
- Comprehensive understanding of fuels management knowledge and techniques.
- Comprehensive understanding of the hazards and risks resulting from the junction of the natural landscape and the built environment at the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).
- Comprehensive understanding of the hazards and risks involved in WLFF and All-Hazard Incident Response.
- Comprehensive understanding of the Risk Management System.

- Comprehensive understanding of the types and capabilities of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters used in suppressing and managing wildland fires.
- Wide range of methods for assessment and improvement of complex fire program management.
- ~~Fire behavior, fire hazard and risk analysis, fuel volume and flammability assessment.~~
- Operate, maintain, and repair all manner of WLFF handtools.
- Operate, maintain, and repair all manner of WLFF chainsaws.
- Operate, maintain, and repair all manner of WLFF Firing Devices.
- Operate, maintain, and repair all manner of WLFF pumps, hoses, and valves.
- Comprehensive understanding of handline construction and natural barrier/anchor point use for stopping and/or slowing the progress of wildland fires.
- Comprehensive understanding of tree felling operations, bucking operations, and how tree species impacts felling and bucking operations.
- Proficiently read and discern features and geographical landforms on topographical maps. Navigate to-and-from locations and identify geographic features and locations via map and compass.
- Operate and program standalone, phone, or tablet-based Global Positioning System (GPS) navigation and land management tracking systems/programs (Avenza, GAIA, Collector, ArcGIS).
- Operate fixed and mobile Wildland Firefighting communications systems, i.e., radios. Operate, program, clone, maintain WLFF radios.
- Comprehensive understanding of the Incident Command System (ICS). Knowledge of Command and Control, and the coordination of emergency response resources, provided for within the common hierarchy of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). ~~which responders from multiple agencies can be effective together, i.e. Incident Command System.~~
- Knowledge of basic first aid and CPR. (generally an OSHA employment requirement)
- Knowledge of resource values pertaining to the forest and/or range and the relationship to wildland firefighting and resource protection and fire use; managing vegetation and fuels; ~~protecting homes,~~ <<<(this is for Structure Firefighters) communities, and other values at risk; managing human-caused ignitions; and effectively and efficiently responding to wildfire.
- You may be required to obtain and maintain a CDL.



- You may be asked to train and certify and maintain certification as a Wilderness First Responder (WFR).
- You may be asked to train and certify and maintain certification as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT).
- You may be required to maintain a clean shaven face to provide sealing for a Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) breathing device when assigned to a Wildfire Engine in a Wildland Urban Interface environment. (VERY common in parts of R5/CA).
- You may be required to obtain FAA Parachute Rigger certification.
- ~~Risks presented to areas where a built environment meets or intermingles with a natural environment, i.e. wildland urban interface (WUI).~~
- Be proficient and comfortable living/camping in sparse/backcountry environments in which you will be required to sleep on the ground, create a fire for warmth, eat emergency rations for sustenance (MREs) and dig a hole for defecation. Engage in Leave No Trace (LNT) ethics when in areas designated as necessary.
- Function as a leader and mentor to new or less experienced WLFFs. Utilize the Risk Management System and make operational decisions and changes in tactics in consideration of different firefighter strengths, training needs, crew and individual safety, while functioning in a dynamic and hazardous environment; while upholding professional standards of conduct.
- Proficiency at completing various administrative tasks related to the job and grade level, to include, but not limited to: Time & Attendance; Work Travel Reimbursement (Concur); eSafety (Accident Notification System); Performance Management; Incident Qualification Management System (IQCS); misc other administrative tools.

### Activity 2c: Hazardous Nature of Wildland Firefighting

While most fires and hazardous materials incidents are kept under control, they all have the potential to cause physical harm to persons and/or property. Firefighters are regularly exposed to a variety of dangerous situations such as fires that are out of control, toxic spills, or possible explosions.

Hazards encountered by firefighters include the potential for:

- Entrapment - while on the job Wildland Firefighters may find themselves surrounded by flames pushed up against a wall surrounded by flames. and may have no choice but to deploy their fire shelter as a last resort for survival.
- Risk of injury due to contact with sharp handtools or running chainsaws.
- Environmental Hazards related to very high temperatures and working in the vicinity of flames include the risk of: sunburn, flame impingement or radiative burns, dehydration, and various forms of Heat Related Illness (HRI: heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke) or general hyperthermia.

- Environmental Hazards related to working at very high altitudes, very wet conditions and/or low temperatures include the risk of: hypothermia, nonfreezing cold injury (NFCI).
- Environmental hazards related to working in rugged terrain in the wildland fire environment include: lacerations, bee stings and/or animal bites, slips/trips/falls resulting in broken bones and/or twisted joints, being hit by gravity hazards (rocks, fire and disease-weakened trees, and windfall). ~~lacerations Burns, dehydration, lacerations, and other effects of heat, smoke inhalation, heavy protective clothing, falling materials (rocks, fire and disease weakened trees), or explosions.~~
- Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS, High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) or other general altitude-related illness due to work at high elevations.
- Respiratory tract injury hazards from inhalation/exposure to: ~~Respiratory, Exposure to~~ very hot air, smoke, ash, airborne dust, toxic materials, and chemical/biological/radiological/ nuclear (CBRN), and explosive agents.
- ~~Heat-Related Illnesses - common heat-related illnesses that firefighters fall victim to include heat stroke, heat rash, heat cramps, and heat exhaustion.~~
- Hypothermia due to work in cold/rain/snow during shoulder seasons and/or work at high elevations. Risk of frostbite, immersion cold injury.
- Permanent hearing damage due to long-term exposure to noise from chainsaws, pumps, aircraft, and other mechanical devices. ~~Physical injury and sensory damage from firefighting activities and noise levels.~~
- ~~Dealing~~ Responding to with medical/trauma patients victims in varying stages of fright, panic, injury, and/or incapacitation, dismemberment and/or fatal injuries.
- Manually evacuating medical/trauma patients via various forms of litters/personnel evacuation devices through rough, rugged, uneven, loose, and mountainous terrain.
- Risk of injury and/or death due to crashes while being transported via ATV/UTV, government vehicle on rough roads/terrain, fixed-wing aircraft, helicopter.
- Operating UTVs/ATVs to access, resupply, or respond to wildland fire incidents.
- Operating or riding in vehicles under adverse conditions, on rough roads or roadless terrain to reach incidents or destinations. ~~or flying in aircraft to reach sites or fires in outlying areas.~~
- Being delivered via fixed-wing aircraft to reach wildland fire incidents or destinations.
- Being delivered by helicopter to reach wildland fire incidents or destinations.
- Jumping by parachute or propelling from helicopters into remote areas and/or rugged terrain wilderness to establish fire lines respond to wildland fire incidents.

- Rappelling from a hovering helicopter into remote areas and/or rugged terrain to respond to wildland fires/incidents.
- Hanging from a hovering helicopter while engaging in Short Haul Operations and Rappel Operations and/or Short Haul and Rappel training.
- Being transported by and hanging from a helicopter while engaging in Short Haul Operations.
- Working around live aircraft on the ground, with hazards that include working in the vicinity of: spinning rotors and props, very hot engine exhaust, and dust/dirt/debris being kicked into the air.
- Carrying large amounts of gear and supplies (45-110+ lbs) through rough, rugged, uneven, loose, and mountainous terrain, when heading into remote environments to engage wildland fires; or, when 'packing-out from Rappel fires, Jump fires, or Short Haul responses.
- Injury or death from aggressive animals, reactions to biting and stinging insects, poisonous plants
- Injury or illness (like strep, MRSA, yeast/fungal infections) from inadequate sanitation, food and water-borne illness, inadequate nutrition
- Insomnia and sleep deprivation from long shifts, night and swing shifts, hot and/or noisy sleeping areas
- Life and safety threats from active shooters in fire area (hunters or hostiles), booby traps, unexploded ordinance, hostile and aggressive persons, persons engaged in drug and/or human trafficking and other criminal activity
- Orthopedic injuries from repetitive motions, hand tool and chainsaw use, hiking, trauma
- Associated hazards from firearm carry and use (i.e. Alaska)
- Anxiety, depression, suicide, substance abuse and addiction from spending significant time away from home, financial issues, marital and relationship issues, sexual harassment and assault, alienation from friends and family outside of the wildland firefighter community, and witnessing traumatic events such as death or injury of other firefighters or civilians, near-misses and the destruction of homes and communities.
- Working in remoted and rugged environments, during which adequate radio communications, cell phone service, and/or even satellite phone service may be lost, due to unplanned communication system(s) outages, resulting in a need to utilize survival skill until adequate communications are restored. ~~Working with a crew in remote areas where it is possible to lose contact due to fire or communication system~~

~~outages and requires ability to use survival skills until help arrives or communication is reestablished.—~~

## Activity 2d: Occupational Information

The wildland fire system is complex and comprised of responders from Federal agencies as well as, State, local government, Tribal and contract resources. Wildland fire forecasts consistently predict fire seasons starting sooner, ending later, and with a higher severity throughout the nation. Science has changed the way we think about wildland fire and the way agencies manage it. Agencies still suppress fires, especially if they threaten people and communities, but understand that fire has a role in nature – one that can lead to healthy ecosystems. Agencies look for ways to manage it to play its role. The demand for firefighters and incident management personnel is constant throughout the height of fire season. Agencies have established interagency fire operating plans, cooperative agreements, state compacts, and other mechanisms to ensure we can effectively share resources and provide the necessary support. Increased development in the wildland-urban interface, long duration fire seasons, climate change, and navigating differing expectations among partners have rapidly and significantly increased the complexities involved in managing Agency responses to wildland fire and all hazard incidents.

Preparation and readiness are the cornerstone of the Wildland Firefighting occupation. Successful response to emergencies requires preparing for the unexpected. Wildland Firefighters are trained to react to a variety of conditions, which may occur on a forest, rangeland, and/or the wildland urban interface (WUI) with a response appropriate to the conditions encountered. Although firefighters follow established protocols or procedures and refer situations, they must also quickly and independently gauge the situation, make several assessments, and choose from a variety of actions.

## Activity 3: Duties and Responsibilities

Please find below examples of functions commonly performed by employees in the following specialty areas:

All positions may have common duties and responsibilities pre and post season, and pre, during, and post incident including:

- Hiring, onboarding, offboarding
- Pre season prep and seasonal readiness/administrative: physical training programs, equipment and facility readiness, critical training preparation and delivery, medical preparation and training, purchasing, time and attendance documentation, travel reimbursements, fire records, training documentation
- Leadership and employee development: training opportunities, task book initiation and training

**Note:** A good Rule-of-Thumb is that any specialty area within WLFF overarching title that has its own form of “Operations Guide” should have its own parenthetical category in WLFF. For example, some of the following areas have their own “Operations Guide” and/or “NWCG Standards for Operations” publications which govern how they operate at the organizational level: IHCs; Smokejumpers; Rappellers; Short Haul; UAS; etc. [Links to the aforementioned online pubs are situation next to the parenthetical specialties listed below.](#)

**1. Wildland Fire Firefighter –**

- a. Performs fire suppression activities, locates fireline, implements appropriate fireline construction methods (e.g., mineral soil scrape, cup trenching, removal of ladder fuels) necessary to stop fire spread and ensure completion to acceptable standards, engages in Firing Operations, and holding/patrol/mop-up operations.
- b. Constructs handlines in various vegetative types.

**2. Dispatcher –**

[https://www.nifc.gov/nicc/logistics/references/National SOG Contracted Resources Guide.pdf](https://www.nifc.gov/nicc/logistics/references/National_SOG_Contracted_Resources_Guide.pdf)

<https://www.nwccg.gov/sites/default/files/training/docs/d-312-pw-reference-guide.pdf>  
<https://www.forestsandangelands.gov/WFIT/applications/IDIP/IDOG.shtml>

- a. Coordinates mobilization and demobilization activities related to wildland fire suppression. Evaluates and coordinates operations and assists in plan development.
- b. Evaluates, plans, and coordinates wildland fire and other daily operational situations to ensure adequate quantities of resources and machinery are dispatched to incidents.
- c. Provides coordination or emergency communications to ensure rapid, focused, and cost-effective responses to wildland fires and wildland urban-interface/intermix situations.
- d. Coordinates emergency response for serious injuries and mishaps. Contact local ground and air ambulances, notifies appropriate managers and duty officers, provides critical information

**3. Engine Module Fire Engine Operator –**

- a. Operates or directs the operation of a wildland fire engine, ensuring the correct positioning, proper use, and operation.
- b. Serve as incident commander to the level qualified. Makes initial evaluation of fire situations, determines rate of spread, potential hazards to property and other improvements, orders additional resources, suppression method to use, hose lays, deployment of crew, point of initial attack, type of tools to use and application of water. May direct aerial resources such as retardant or helicopter bucket drops.

- c. Performs and/or directs others in starting pump engine, priming pump, adjusting engine speed and pump valves, laying hose, and using appropriate nozzles and nozzle adjustment in the effective use of water and additives.
- d. Locates fireline, implements appropriate fireline construction methods (e.g., mineral soil scrape, cup trenching, removal of ladder fuels) necessary to stop fire spread and ensure completion to acceptable standards, and holding/patrol/mop-up operations.
- e. Responsible for maintenance of specialized equipment used to respond to wildland-urban interface/intermix situations.
- f. Ensures the engine is kept in a full state of readiness for emergency fire dispatch.
- g. May use specialized firing equipment including fuses, drip torches, flares, and terra torch.
- h. May be required to be a fully qualified chain saw operator.
- i. Participates in prescribed fire and fuels reduction projects
- j. May assist in the emergency medical treatment and extrication of injured firefighters

#### **4. Fire Program/Management Officer –**

- a. Directs all aspects of the unit's fire and/or aviation program. Is responsible for coordinating the accomplishment of the unit's fire management activities, program direction, coordination, and evaluation of the fully integrated fire management program.
- b. Reviews and evaluates fire management plans for technical soundness and adequacy.

#### **5. Fire Management Planning Specialist –**

- a. Assist with coordination and review of plans developed in the region to ensure that they reflect national, regional, and local management goals, requirements, and strategic objectives related to fire and aviation management.
- b. Provide technical expertise in strategic and local fire planning analysis systems, models, and decision support systems.
- c. Provide coordination and direction in the formulation of standards, methods, and guidelines for complex interagency and/or national forest and grassland fire management programs.
- d. Evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of fire and aviation management programs through periodic on-the-ground inspections or visits to field units.

- e. Design and delivery of wildland fire management training and competency evaluation systems.

6. **Fuels Management Technician** –

- a. Responsibility for prescribed fire, fuels management, smoke management, and wildland fire planning.
- b. Perform field reconnaissance of prescribed fire units. Determine complexity level of prescribed fire. Evaluate on-site and off-site values at risk and level of public and/or political interest. Determine factors such as safety, fire behavior, fuel arrangement and loading, ignition methods, smoke impacts, holding and ignition plan, burn organization, resource objectives, implementation constraints and project logistics. Prepare prescribed fire plan using agency template, incorporating information gathered during field reconnaissance and fire behavior modeling, ensuring compliance with NEPA analysis document. May consult with other resource specialists as necessary. May perform technical review of prescribed fire plans. May prepare and implement post burn fire effects monitoring plans
- c. Perform layout for manual and mechanical hazardous fuels treatments. May use GPS or mobile mapping applications to identify treatment area. Mark treatment area and use gps or mobile mapping applications to update treatment units boundaries May serve as contracting officer's representative (COR) or contract inspector for contracted mechanical hazardous fuels treatments.
- d. May inventory fuel beds, prepare associated reports, perform hazard fuel reduction projects, monitor burning conditions, pile vegetation debris, and act in assigned positions such as ignition or holding specialist or other designated positions during fuel reduction efforts by prescribed fire.

7. **Helitack** – <https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms510.pdf>

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms501.pdf>

- a. Provide initial attack, facilitate the arrival of additional personnel, and deploy the helicopter water bucket. Loads helicopter personnel and cargo considering methods, weight distribution, necessity for securing, total weight, etc., and completes manifests of personnel and equipment being transported to the fire or other work site.
- b. Inventories and inspects helicopter accessories, fire tools, and equipment. May rappel from helicopter in remote areas to construct helispots, or to attack small fires, hot spots and spot fires.
- c. Provide aerial firing/ignition support via helitorch or Plastic Sphere Dispenser Operations.

**8. Rappel – [https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05/2019\\_usfs\\_nrog\\_final\\_approved.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2019-05/2019_usfs_nrog_final_approved.pdf)**

- a. Provide initial attack, facilitate the arrival of additional personnel, and deploy the helicopter water bucket. Loads helicopter personnel and cargo considering methods, weight distribution, necessity for securing, total weight, etc., and completes manifests of personnel and equipment being transported to the fire or other work site.
- b. Inventories and inspects helicopter accessories, fire tools, and equipment.
- c. Provide aerial firing/ignition support via helitorch or Plastic Sphere Dispenser Operations.
- d. Rappels from a helicopter into remote areas and or rugged, sloped, and inaccessible terrain in timber or other areas in which a helicopter and/or Smokejumper may be unable to land and engage in fire suppression duties, fire monitoring duties, or other incident response.
- e. May serves as a Rappel Spotter, Rappel Check Spotter, and/or Helicopter Manager.
- f. May perform Cargo Letdown of gear for resupply of remote incidents.
- g. May require 'pack-out' of gear weighing in excess of 110 lbs, from remote areas and/or rugged terrain, when incident is located in a Wilderness Area or other circumstance in which a helispot cannot be established.
- h. Maintains, inspects, documents, and inventories, Life Safety rappel specific equipment in strict accordance with Manufacturer and Agency requirements.
- i. Maintains, inspects, documents, and inventories, non-Life Safety rappel specific equipment in strict accordance with Manufacturer and Agency requirements.
- j. Familiarity with and proficient operation of Life Safety Equipment such as harnesses, cutaway knives, ropes, carabiners, and aircraft rigging and Rappel Operations procedures and emergency procedures per the FS Standards For Rappel Operations (FS-SFRO).
- k. Builds IA response and re-supply cargo boxes for cargo let-down operations.
- l. Performs wildland fire suppression duties using a variety of hand and power tools.



**9. Short Haul –**

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_wysiwyg/2019\\_emshop\\_final\\_v.1\\_02.22.2019.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_wysiwyg/2019_emshop_final_v.1_02.22.2019.pdf)

[https://www.nps.gov/subjects/aviation/upload/nps\\_short-haul\\_ops\\_plan.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/aviation/upload/nps_short-haul_ops_plan.pdf)

- a. Provide initial attack, facilitate the arrival of additional personnel, and deploy the helicopter water bucket. Loads helicopter personnel and cargo considering methods, weight distribution, necessity for securing, total weight, etc., and completes manifests of personnel and equipment being transported to the fire or other work site.
- b. Inventories and inspects helicopter accessories, fire tools, and equipment.
- c. Provide aerial firing/ignition support via helitorch or Plastic Sphere Dispenser Operations.
- d. May serve as a Short Hauler, Short Haul Spotter, or Short Haul Check Spotter.
- e. Maintains, inspects, documents, and inventories, Life Safety Short Haul specific equipment in strict accordance with Manufacturer and Agency requirements.
- f. Familiarity with and proficient operation of Life Safety Equipment such as harnesses, cutaway knives, patient packaging, secondary release systems, Short Haul ropes, ballast, aircraft rigging, and emergency procedures per the National Park Service (NPS) National Short Haul Ops Plan (NSHOP) or the Forest Service (FS) Emergency Medical Short-Haul Operational Plan (FS EMSHOP).
- g. Performs wildland fire suppression duties using a variety of hand and power tools.
- h. May be required to pack-out gear and supplies from a remote location, after insertion into a remote area.

**10. Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) –**

<https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/standards/SIHCO.pdf>

- a. Performs fire suppression activities, locates fireline, implements appropriate fireline construction methods (e.g., mineral soil scrape, cup trenching, removal of ladder fuels) necessary to stop fire spread and ensure completion to acceptable standards, and holding/patrol/mop-up operations.
- b. Constructs handlines in various vegetative types.
- c. Engages in Firing Operations.
- d. Engages in falling operations to mitigate hazard trees, including trees severely compromised by fire.

- e. Performs complex firing operations in a variety of fuels and fire weather conditions.
- f. May respond to medical incidents.

**11. Wildland Fire Module (WFM)/Handcrew -**

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms430.pdf>

- a. Performs fire suppression activities, locates fireline, implements appropriate fireline construction methods (e.g., mineral soil scrape, cup trenching, removal of ladder fuels) necessary to stop fire spread and ensure completion to acceptable standards, and holding/patrol/mop-up operations.
- b. Constructs handlines in various vegetative types.
- c. Engages in Firing Operations.
- d. May respond to medical incidents.

**12. Prevention –**

[https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/products/pms455\\_wfprevnttrat.pdf](https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/products/pms455_wfprevnttrat.pdf)

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms474.pdf>

- a. Plans or assists in planning activities in wildland fire prevention and mitigation and developing a coordinated approach to hazardous fuels reduction, with particular emphasis on the wildland-urban interface.
- b. Manages, supervises, leads, and/or performs wildland fire suppression. Operates and positions emergency vehicle, operates pump, valves, and water handling equipment, and uses hand tools and hose-lays to construct fire breaks. Responsible for maintenance of specialized equipment used to respond to wildland-urban interface/intermix situations, and ensures emergency vehicle is kept in a full state of readiness for emergency fire dispatch.
- c. Performs duties related to Forest Protection Officers, accountable directly to Law Enforcement. Conducts wildland fire investigations using approved methods, including witness interviews, scene protection and documentation, and evidence collection. Enforces forest rules and regulations through education and use of written warnings and citations. Performs investigations relating to regulation violations and possible tort claims.
- d. Connects with the public and local partners to spread awareness on how to prevent human-caused wildfires.

**13. Smokejumper –**

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_wysiwyg/ismog\\_fss\\_final\\_26feb2018signed.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_wysiwyg/ismog_fss_final_26feb2018signed.pdf)

- a. Performs a variety of duties in the areas of parachute jumping and fire suppression.

- b. Makes parachute jumps from various aircraft under many conditions while executing landings on rough terrain, open areas, mountain slopes, or timber.
- c. Performs wildland fire suppression activities, locates fireline, implements fire line construction, burning/hazardous tree removal with chainsaws or crosscut saws in various vegetative types
- d. Must be able to complete work independently and without support due to remote deployments, making expertise in all wildland firefighting tactics essential.
- e. Must have medical training due to remote work locations far from medical care
- f. Climbs trees to recover paracargo
- g. critical thinking in high stress environments to assess fire spread potential, and determine appropriate staffing levels
- h. must have logistical skills to order additional resource needs such as crews, air tankers, helicopters and others to suppress wildfires
- i. Delivers smokejumpers and para cargo safely to an incident by ordering where to drop from an aircraft.

#### 14. Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) –

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/Forest%20Service%20Standards%20for%20UAS%20Operations%2007012020.pdf>

<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/opm-11.pdf>

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms515.pdf>

- a. Work involves operating and maintaining small Agency-owned UAS. Establishes landing/operations areas, plans flights, executes flights, and processes flight data in support of incidents.
- b. Provide aerial firing/ignition support via UAS aerial ignition plastic sphere dispenser.

#### 15. Airtanker Base Operations (ABO) –

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms508.pdf>

- a. Manage Retardant Base aircraft.
- b. Manage Retardant Base ground operations.
- c. Mix, load aircraft with retardant.
- d. Operate and maintain retardant

**Follow-On Questions Asked Near End of 04/21/2022 Session:**

5. What core tasks do Wildland Firefighters perform?

Identified in the edits above.

6. What are the most common tools, technology, and equipment used to perform Wildland Firefighter work?

- Various types of legacy, modern, and custom-built handtools.
- Various makes and sizes of chainsaws.
- Miscellaneous Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), e.g., hardhats, safety glasses, Nomex clothing, hardhats, Flight Helmets, gloves, chainsaw chaps.
- Line Gear/Backpacks and methods of manually hauling large amounts of gear into remote areas.
- Belt Weather Kits & Electronic Weather Observation Instruments
- Handheld/Standalone, phone, and tablet-based GPS/navigation/Land Management tracking systems.
- Maps & Compasses
- Strobes, signal mirrors, and panels for calling-in aircraft for water drops or landing sites.
- ATVs/UTVs
- Mobile and Handheld Radios & satellite phones
- Firing devices: pneumatic, primer-based, and hand-held
- Pumps, valves, and hose lays
- Water holding devices such as Fold-a-tanks, Blivets, and backpack water pumps.
- SKEDs and other forms of personnel evacuation litters
- EMS Trauma Kits
- Laptop/Desktop computers and tablets to complete various administrative duties, e.g., Time & Attendance, Travel, etc.

7. What laws, regulations, and/or other guidelines have an impact on Wildland Firefighter work?

U.S.C./C.F.R.s, FAA Policy (FARs), OPM Policy, FEMA Policy, USDI Policy, USDA-USFS Policy, Regional Policy, NWCG Operations Policy Guides/Documents, State/Local Jurisdiction Laws governing the non-federal lands upon which we may engage on incidents.

8. Are the duties and responsibilities for each title sufficient?

Please see edits above.

9. What core competencies or skills are important for performing Wildland Firefighter work?

It is important to note the Teamwork and Leadership requirements that seem to get overlooked in KSA's for "technicians." These employees are technically skilled and trained, but communication and collaboration are imperative to efficaciously completing the work.

Developing and maintaining a working rapport and common language among crews and Interagency modules is imperative to safe and successful operations; as is the ability to train new WLFFs; or, operate within a cohesive unit.

For example: running "throw-together/militia" crews – crews comprised of various Land Management Agency employees with basic WLFF training and qualifications – that are called upon to assist in staffing crews alongside Primary Fire employees – is a skill/competency that needs to be recognized on paper.

10. Is a license and/or certification needed to perform Wildland Firefighter work?

- a. Commercial Drivers License: Many folks that drive Engines and some folks that drive IHC Crew Carriers must obtain these. I had to obtain one for one of the IHCs I worked on. The Agency can pretty much be guaranteed to cover the cost of this.
- b. FAA Pt 107 Drone Operators License: Anyone that operates an Agency small UAS must obtain this. The Agency has covered the cost for most folks I know that have gotten this certification, including myself.
- c. Emergency Medical Technician (EMT): Most folks in the Agency(ies) with this certification obtained it on their own dime and time. I have worked with a few folks that had it paid for at the Agency, but that is the exception, rather than the rule. The BIG issue with this qualification/certification which is outside of the NWCG/Agency(ies) scope is that maintaining it has proven to be VERY difficult for many of us when we are working with the Agency a lot and not doing work with outside services like ambulances, etc. Many organizations do not provide much in the way of monetary or time support to complete all the necessary Continuing Education Requirements (CEUs). Even more of an issue is the fact that many EMTs function within their crew/organization without any Medical Direction/Formal Support. This has been a very dirty 'secret' for a LONG time in this job, in which, effectively, many EMTs are operating under 'Good Samaritan' laws. The Agency(ies) pretty much depend on those of

us that have repeatedly jumped through all the difficult hoops, often without support, to maintain our EMT certifications; but, has, in most cases, not provided for legal and/or medical protection to adequately practice within our scope. I continue to maintain my certification and level of knowledge knowing that may be useful at a critical time; and, it has, several times during my career. This is an excellent example of where an 'Incentive Pay' would be very helpful.

- d. FAA Parachute Rigger Certification: This is a certification specific to the Smokejumpers. It is my understanding that support is provided for obtaining this certification in the Smokejumper community.

11. What is the highest level non-supervisory Wildland Firefighter work?

**Note:** the extremely low-level rating of WLFFs is borderline criminal when it is taken into account what we are expected to do at full functionality, when compared to the pay that many receive at comparable 'journeyman' wage levels such as the WG series, for MUCH more basic functional employment duties. This truly is a moral dilemma that OPM now has an opportunity to rectify. The range for WLFFs should range from GS-06 – GS-13. The Lead/Non-Supv and Permanent Seasonal Employee (PSE) positions should be adjusted to range GS-06 – GS-09.

#### **Additional Issues Not Brought Up During Focus Group Meeting:**

##### **Maintaining Seasonal (Permanent Season Employee (PSE)) Status:**

The seasonal nature of lower to mid-level WLFF positions is a big recruitment and retention component for many individuals in this line of work. Therefore, the current push from Washington D.C., to make more WLFF positions year-round, is an action by well-meaning folks, without a comprehensive understanding of our lives.

Due to the nature of the work of low to mid-level WLFFs, (500-1000 hours of overtime in 6 months, going weeks without seeing family/friends, delaying preventative medical care, rarely getting to attend common summer social events like reunions and weddings, or getting to plan anything) it seems that working year-round for would only accelerate burn-out. The 'off-season' provides time for physical and mental/emotional recuperation, spending time with family, and addressing chores/activities that were impossible to do during fire season. This is particularly important, since the 'physical load' (hiking, digging, cutting - common estimates account that some firefighters burn up to 6,000 calories/day) of this group of employees is much higher than for

Supervisors. In effect you're asking for firefighters to work more, with fewer breaks and increasingly diminished and/or nominal compensation. That's not an improvement.

It's possible that a change to 26-0 employment could and may likely actually hurt the long-term recruitment and retention of high-quality employment candidates. To effect positive change, the Agencies should provide both seasonal and year-round employment options for low to mid-level Permanent employees.

### **On-Call Status (uncompensated time):**

In much of the IHC and WFM/Handcrew world, you are on some sort of 'callback' during your 'days off'. Most IHCs/WFMs/Handcrews have two (2) hour 'callback'. This is not time for which we are compensated, unless we are actually called to a fire; which, then, we receive compensation for the two extra hours. Here is the rub: When you are in 'callback' status on your 'days off', you are SERVERELY limited in what you can do, since are you expected to be able to respond to your station within two (2) hours. Therefore, you must:

1) Remain within cell coverage, i.e., no extensive weekend outdoor activities; 2) You cannot consume alcohol – a very common day off activity for many Americans; 3) You are limited in how far away from your station you can venture on your 'days off' since you must remain within two (2) hour 'callback'.

Nurse, for example, usually get some sort of 'callback' pay on any days that they are in 'callback' status; usually equivalent to some percentage of their base pay. A 'callback' pay of 25% of WLFF Base Pay (which is still quite low), would seem like a reasonable minimum compensation for this rarely discussed and unfortunately uncompensated element of the job.

**The Pay has not kept pace with the times. Here is a personal anecdotal example of why I would not recommend this line of work to many folks looking into it – in the present day:**

When I went to my first fire with the Agency in 2002, my base wage was approximately *twice that of minimum wage*. After 20 years, the starting WLFF wage *is the minimum wage*. And the job is still as demanding. It's simple math, and it's unacceptable.