

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Becoming a Forest Service Wildland Firefighter

Temporary Seasonal Wildland Fire Jobs

Fire and Aviation - Seasonal Wildland Fire Employment

As the name implies, Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management is a wide field, encompassing firefighters, fire ecologists, fuels specialists, fire managers, administrative personnel, helicopter and fixed wing pilots, aviation and ground safety professionals, radio communications and electronic technicians, dispatchers, fire prevention specialists, lookouts, and communicators. Generally, the Forest Service workforce reaches its highest numbers during the peak fire season each summer. There are many kinds of schedules available to work. Some sign on for a limited number of hours during the summer - they are called seasonals. Others have permanent seasonal positions, and work 26 weeks with 26 weeks off. Others work full time, year around, but have limited appointments or a "not to exceed" time limit of one to four years. And there is a large permanent, full time workforce as well — that have chosen Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management for their career.

Individuals who want to be seasonal firefighters need to think about wildland fire hiring as early as September as a lot of the announcements close in October. That's when most applications are due. Learn more about different job openings by visiting the [This Website](#).

Seasonal jobs in firefighting include working on a local unit Handcrew, on a Helitack/Helirappeling Crew, a HotShot Crew, a Fuels Crew, as a Smokejumper, Dispatcher, Lookout, or on an Engine Crew. Remember, these are tough jobs usually performed in primitive, backcountry conditions. In addition to specific requirements for each kind of job, it is essential that firefighter be in top physical condition for this demanding work. Employees and prospective employees must pass the [Work Capacity Test](#) annually before working on the fireline. The Forest Service will provide you Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) clothing, hardhat and fire shelter, but you must provide your own lug soled, leather eight-inch topped boots. The Forest Service also provides training in many specialty fields.

The people involved in Fire and Aviation Management well represent the pride exemplified by all Forest Service employees in "caring for the land and serving people." We look for dedicated men and women from all walks of life, of all abilities, to join our workforce.

Q – What qualifications do I need to become a firefighter with the Forest Service?

A – To apply for a wildland firefighter position, an applicant must be 18 years of age. After being hired, all fire support personnel must complete classes, task books, and other steps prior to being issued a “red card”. Qualified firefighters (Type 2 or Type 1) must complete additional classes, simulations, and task books and pass the arduous [Work Capacity Test \(WCT\)](#).

To learn about specific job opportunities, visit [USAJOBS](#); enter “wildland firefighter” in the “Keywords” box; and click “Search.” A listing of current job openings will come up. The job requirements and required documentation for each position are listed in each vacancy announcement.

Listed below are some of the requirements to apply for wildland firefighting positions:

- Must be 18 years of age at the time of the formal job offer.
- Passing the applicable Work Capacity Test is a condition of employment. The Arduous fitness (Pack) test requires completing a three-mile hike within 45 minutes while carrying a 45-pound pack. You are strongly encouraged to consult with your physician and begin training immediately if applying for a position that requires this.
- Final appointment and continued employment is conditional on negative results for illegal drug use.

For details about specific positions, visit the [National Incident Management System \(NIMS\) Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide](#).

Q – How can I find out about wildland firefighter jobs available?

A –The Forest Service posts all job vacancy announcements for wildland firefighter positions on the Office of Personnel Management’s [USAJOBS](#) website. To learn about specific job opportunities, enter “wildland firefighter” in the “Keywords” box; and click “Search.” A listing of current job openings will come up. Be sure to read the requirements for each job description carefully and to attach all required documentation to your application.

If you are interested in working at a specific location, contact:

Rapid City, SD / Hill City, SD Contact Information:		Jeremy Dalman	Jeremy.Dalman@usda.gov
New Castle, WY / Custer, SD Contact Information:		Todd Hoover	Todd.Hoover@usda.gov
Sundance, WY Contact Information:	(Suppression) (Fuels)	Adam Zeigler Josh Hoffman	Adam.Zeigler@usda.gov Joshua.L.Hoffman@usda.gov
Spearfish, SD Contact Information:	(Suppression) (Fuels)	Trevor Papenfuss John Snyder	Trevor.Papenfuss@usda.gov John.L.Snyder@usda.gov
Box Elder Job Corps (NEMO, SD) Contact Information: Alternate:		Robert Cota Kevin Argueta	Robert.Cota@usda.gov Kevin.ArguetaAyala@usda.gov
Rapid City, SD Great Plains Interagency Dispatch Contact Information:		Leith Mcauley	Leith.Mcauley@usda.gov
Rapid City, SD Air Tanker Base Contact Information:		Jerrod Hattervig	Jerrod.Hattervig@usda.gov
Black Hills Helitack (Custer, SD) Contact Information: Alternate:		Frank Haines Matthew Esser	Frank.Haines@usda.gov Matthew.Esser@usda.gov
Tatanka Hotshots (Custer, SD) Contact Information:		Dave Zortman	David.Zortman@usda.gov

Q – I am currently a volunteer firefighter in my community. Do I need any additional training to become a wildland firefighter with the Forest Service?

A – All fire support personnel must complete classes, task books, and other steps prior to being issued a “red card”. Qualified firefighters (Type 2 or Type 1) must complete classes, simulations, and task books as well as pass the arduous Work Capacity Test.

Q – I want to become a Hotshot firefighter. What qualifications do I need?

A – Contact Dave Zortman (*listed above*) to learn about open positions and requirements.

Q – What is the salary for a firefighter?

A – Depending on the position of the firefighter, wages vary from a GS-3 to GS-5. A GS-3 position is an entry level position. You can find specific information at [Office of Personnel Management's General Schedule Pay Scale](#).

Q – Do firefighters receive hazard pay?

A – Firefighters are entitled to hazard pay when they are performing hazardous duty or physical hardships that meet the requirements of 5 CFR 550.904 and subpart I, appendix A. Hazard pay is an additional 25% of an employee's base rate of pay that applies to all hours the employee is in a paid status for the day. For example, if an employee works hazardous duty for three hours out of an eight-hour day, hazard pay is paid for all eight hours.

Q. Do firefighters receive overtime pay?

A - Yes, firefighters do receive overtime pay. Generally, a firefighter may work up to 16 hours a day while fighting a fire. Their overtime pay rate is listed on the [Office of Personnel Management's General Schedule Pay Tables](#).

Q – Are firefighters eligible for insurance?

A - Forest Service temporary employees working intermittent schedules and seasonal employees working fewer than six months in a year are eligible to participate in the FEHB at the same cost as full-time permanent employees. These employees are eligible for health benefits with the full government contribution towards FEHB if the employee is anticipated to work 90 days or more, and the employee is expected to work full-time (130 hours per month or more). After they are no longer working for the Forest Service, they can continue to receive health insurance but are responsible for 100% of the costs plus a 2% administrative fee and they enter in a contract directly with the health insurance company. For more information, visit the [Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Health Benefits Program](#).