



Forest Service Strategy for Pursuing Maximum Utilization of Domestic Labor and Long-term Workforce Development

The Forest Service is responsible for managing 193 million acres of National Forest System lands; conducting forestry research; and providing aide to state, local, private, and international forest owners. Critical to the accomplishment of these responsibilities are the over 29,000 permanent employees and over 9,000 temporary seasonal employees annually.

Workforce Needs Strategy

The Forest Service, through multiple legislative funding authorities, is actively engaged in increasing federal workforce and capacity with various partners and collaborators to complete mission critical work and to meet administration and legislative priorities.

The Forest Service strategies for meeting its workforce needs are anchored to the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Human Capital Framework,¹ which is organized across four systems.

- Strategic Planning and Alignment: a system to ensure that Forest Service workforce programs are aligned with agency mission, goals, and objectives through analysis, planning, investment, and measurement.
- Performance Culture: a system that engages, develops, and inspires a diverse, high-performing workforce by creating, implementing, and maintaining effective performance management strategies, practices, and activities that support mission objectives..
- Talent Management: a system that promotes a high-performing workforce, identifies and closes skills gaps, and implements and maintains programs to attract, acquire, develop, promote, and retain quality and diverse talent.
- Evaluation: a system that contributes to agency performance by monitoring and evaluating outcomes of human capital management strategies, policies, programs, and activities.

The Forest Service expects to increase its permanent workforce to approximately 35,000 employees by the end of fiscal year 2024. To recruit the additional 5,000 positions, the Forest Service has made an agency-wide commitment to implement talent pipelines through local and national partnerships and utilize OPM's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategic Plan Goals² to strengthen Forest Service hiring and retention best practices.

The Forest Service commitment to increase its permanent workforce will focus on recruiting, developing, and sustaining a highly skilled and diverse workforce capable of meeting current and future needs. National human resources management and regional recruiters work collaboratively to implement strategies to: 1) resolve challenges (e.g., candidate pool depth, increased declination rates); 2) fill vacancies through targeted hiring events; 3) produce webinars to help candidates prepare for and apply to federal positions; 4) offer job seekers resources for receiving regular opportunity updates; and 5) schedule one-on-one virtual recruiting

¹ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/human-capital-framework/#url=Human-Capital-Framework-Structure>

² <https://www.opm.gov/about-us/our-mission-role-history/agency-deia-strategic-plan/deia-goals/>

consultations with interested parties. Forest Service human resources management and regional recruiters also maximize the use of available hiring authorities to recruit more local candidates where government housing is a concern, utilizing direct and non-competitive hiring authorities (e.g., Resource Assistants Program³).

Domestic Labor

The Forest Service does not use the Department of Labor (DOL) H-2B Temporary Labor Certification Program (hereafter referred to as “H-2B program”) to hire Federal employees. Some Forest Service contractors do hire personnel under the H-2B program. These individuals support wildland firefighting crews and perform thinning, planting, and other by-hand fuels management work. The applicable contractors must certify adherence to the Federal Acquisition Regulation clauses and the Forest Service validates the contractor is registered with the DOL.

In fiscal year 2022, approximately 20 percent, or around 86 of the Forest Service contracts with companies that employ Type 2 Firefighter Crews indicated their intention to hire individuals under the H-2B program. Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, there is a statutory numerical limit on the total number of noncitizens who may receive an H-2B visa during a fiscal year. This numerical limit could potentially reduce contractor performance if contractors do not have sufficient staffing to fill required positions.

H-2B Program Through Contractors

DOL oversees and enforces the H-2B program. Via issuance of the certificate, DOL affirms “that a sufficient number of qualified U.S. workers have not been identified as being available at the time and place needed to fill the job opportunities for which certification is being sought.” Information regarding specific policies and oversight responsibilities of the H-2B program is located at the DOL website: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/immigration/h2b>.

The Forest Service’s responsibility regarding H-2B workers is to ensure the applicant has certified it will or will not use H-2B program workers; and if so, has a valid Form ETA-9142A.⁴ This form is required for the applicant to remain eligible for the award. If an H-2B program violation is suspected, the Forest Service is obligated to contact DOL and report the incident.

In accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) Part 5 Publicizing Contract Actions, unless an exemption applies, the Forest Service publishes contract actions over \$25,000 in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov). As stated in FAR Part 5,

Contracting officers must publicize contract actions to 1) increase competition; 2) broaden industry participation in meeting Government requirements; and 3) assist small business concerns, veteran-owned small business concerns, service-disabled veteran-owned small business concerns, HUBZone small business concerns, small disadvantaged business concerns, and women-owned small business concerns in obtaining contracts and subcontracts.

It is the contractor’s responsibility to post job opportunities within their company. A contractor may choose to reach out to local communities to hire for a particular contract, but there is no contractual requirement to do so.

³ <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/volunteers/resource-assistants-program>

⁴ Final Determination: H-2A Temporary Labor Certification Approval.

Long-term Workforce Development

The Forest Service continuously evaluates and implements process improvements in the areas of workforce recruiting, hiring, onboarding, development, retention, and offboarding. Additionally, the Forest Service continues to perform detailed reviews of mission critical series, identifying skill needs and gaps, which drive agency workforce development strategies and succession plans.

The Forest Service has internally established best practices for development of trainees and partners, a training program for continuing education and gated career progression, and certification management. The trainee program has reduced the time required for new Forest Service employees to be able to operate independently in their roles. The program is being shared widely for cohort development in different occupational specialties which also creates a peer group and network where new employees can build relationships. These programs include key policy and operational topics as well as introductions to the Forest Service culture and practices. The Forest Service also includes multiple training opportunities for Forest Service partners, which provide development and orientation for Forest Service partners as well as the Federal workforce on the skills, knowledge, and connections needed to be successful.