

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

The Forest Service employs approximately 10,000 wildland firefighters, including hand crews, Interagency Hotshot Crews, engine crews, helitack crews, and Smokejumpers. Positions range from entry-level firefighter to senior fire management positions. Appointments range from temporary, seasonal positions to permanent, full-time year-round positions.

Wildland Firefighters are involved with wildland fire suppression/ management/control working on an engine, helitack module, or hand crew with responsibility for the operation and maintenance of specialized tools or equipment. Other wildland fire related duties may involve fire prevention, patrol, detection, or prescribed burning.

Wildland firefighters may be required to work long hours in challenging and changing conditions, such as high temperatures and steep terrain. This job does have many rewards, including the opportunity to work in some of the most beautiful places in the country and create friendships that last a lifetime.

We've prepared the list below to respond to some of the most frequently asked questions from aspiring firefighters. If you have additional questions or need more information, please contact the Forest Service Human Resource Management (HRM) Contact Center at (877) 372-7248, Option 2. The HRM Contact Center is available 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Mountain Time), Monday through Friday and closed on all Federal holidays.

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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 under the age of 37 –OR- less than age 37 after subtracting the months of federal service worked in a primary or secondary firefighter/law enforcement position –OR- a veterans preference eligible, older than age 37 and requesting a waiver to the maximum age requirement.
- Successful completion of the Primary National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Requirement of [Firefighter Type 1](#) (FFT1).
- Successful completion of NWCG Course [Intermediate Wildland Fire Behavior](#) (S-290). Currency of NWCG qualifications is not required for selection. If not currently qualified, the applicant must provide documented evidence that they have been fully qualified in the past and are able to regain currency within one year of being hired. Firefighters are required to maintain currency once hired into the position.

To be considered, you must submit copies of your Incident Qualification and Certification System (IQCS) Master Record (or equivalent training documents), which contains documented proof of the certification or attainment of the Interagency Fire Program Management Standard (IFPM) Selective Placement Factor for this position. ***Failure to provide this documentation will result in disqualification.***

Passing the [Work Capacity Test](#) at the “Arduous” level 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 on a specific National Forest, go to the main [Forest Service](#) web site and use the “Find a Forest or Grassland” tool in the upper right corner of the page. Contact the Fire Management Officer on that Forest directly to ask when they will be hiring wildland firefighters.

Information about contract firefighting positions is available on the [National Wildfire Suppression Association](#) website.

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 – The Forest Service and most other federal and state agencies do not hire individual firefighters or accept individual volunteer firefighters. To work on wildfires with the Forest Service, you would typically need to be mobilized through your volunteer fire department, or you would need to be hired to work as

part of a federal, state, or local agency or contract crew. 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 – Visit the website, or contact the Superintendent, of a [Hotshot Crew](#) that you are interested in working for to learn about open positions and requirements.

Q – What is the salary for a firefighter?

A – Depending on the position of the firefighter, salaries vary from a GS-3 to GS-9 (\$26,150 - \$49,765 annually). 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. The Office of Personnel Management’s [Hazardous Duty Pay Frequently Asked Questions](#) might be useful in understanding Hazard Pay.

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 permanent, full-time employees have the opportunity to participate in the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program (FEHB), which includes health insurance, life insurance, dental insurance, and long-term care insurance. The agency pays for 72-75 percent of the premiums, and employees are responsible for the remaining balance of the premiums. There are no agency contributions towards dental or vision premiums.

Forest Service permanent, seasonal employees also have the opportunity to participate in the FEHB, which includes health insurance, life insurance, dental insurance, and long-term care insurance. The agency pays for a prorated percentage of the premiums based on a percentage of full-time service being worked, and employees are responsible for the remaining balance of the premiums. When they are not actively working for the Forest Service, permanent seasonal are responsible for their share of the premiums.

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](#).