



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Washington, DC 20415

Employee Services

June 21, 2022

Memorandum for Human Resources Directors

From: Kimberly A. Holden, Deputy Associate Director
Talent Acquisition, Classification, and Veterans Programs

Subject: Position Classification Standard for Wildland Fire Management Series, 0456

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is releasing for implementation, the final Position Classification Standard for Wildland Fire Management, 0456. The establishment of this series supports the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Public Law 117-58, or Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), enacted on November 15, 2021. Section 40803 (d)(1) of the BIL requires OPM to coordinate with the Secretary of the Department of the Interior and the Secretary of Department of Agriculture to develop a distinct “wildland firefighter” occupational series within 180 days of enactment.

For the past 50 years, there has been no specific federal wildland firefighter job series or position descriptions. Federal jobs with a variety of roles and responsibilities including firefighting have all been incorporated in one broad job series referred to as the Forestry Technician GS-0462 job series. This approach creates challenges for recruiting wildland firefighters and makes it difficult for wildland firefighters to understand a path for advancement. When there is no clear career advancement path, that can also negatively affect the morale of firefighters who are looking to spend a career in the occupation. Wildland firefighters are proud of the work they do and deserve an occupational series dedicated to their profession that will improve recruitment, retention, and advancement.

For decades, wildfires have been growing in size, duration, and severity, with the last two years being especially challenging. Fire seasons have extended into fire years due to a combination of effects of climate change, overstocked forests, and expanding development in areas where communities and forests meet.

The issuance of the new Wildland Firefighter occupational series is a critical step in addressing long-standing wildland firefighter talent management challenges across the government. It will identify and provide job titles and a clear path to career advancement that reflects the true nature of the work, no matter the agency that employs the firefighter. This will be a tremendous boost to recruiting, as agencies will now be able to publicize specific wildland firefighter job opportunities with a clear career progression. The clarity on career progression will also support better retention. Wildland firefighters will be able to readily understand the career path and the expectations and requirements for promotions. Accordingly, the new position classification standard creates a structure for wildland fire management work and equity among those performing wildland firefighter responsibilities. The implementation will improve efforts to unify the workforce and provide the structure to inform compensation for the wildland

firefighters who make sacrifices to fight wildland fires, protecting lives and property. The series is a part of the long-term solution to ensure federal wildland firefighters are supported, equitably compensated, and have a better work-life balance.

This issuance is part of a broader set of steps required by the BIL, and there will be additional issuances with respect to implementing the wildland firefighter pay provisions. The new standard is an important step toward recognizing and valuing the wildland firefighter workforce.

Background

In 1972, the work covered in the Forest and Range Fire Control, 0456 series was reclassified to the Forestry Technician, 0462 series at the request of U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Forest Service. The request for OPM to combine the two series was due in part to the intermittent seasonal work and to increase pay and provide retirement coverage for wildland firefighters. However, the prolonged and catastrophic wildland fire seasons have had an enormous impact on the wildland firefighter profession, increasing the demands on them to protect communities, natural and cultural resources, and wildlife from fire, and changing what's expected of our wildland firefighters. These developments have intensified the need to reestablish, as well as update the series for wildland firefighting work.

Occupational Study

In order to reestablish the series, we conducted a study, working closely with technical and subject matter experts to identify the key skills needed to perform wildland fire management work. The study was expedited in light of the 6-month timeframe for completion included in the BIL. Both technical agency fire management and human resources subject matter experts provided key insights into the duties and skills needed to perform wildland firefighting work. The process and steps for the study included a literature review; stakeholder engagement (e.g., meetings and focus groups) with wildland fire management, human resources, and union experts; data collection and analysis activities; drafting classification policy for agency comments; finalizing classification policy based on agency feedback; and issuing the classification policy for agency implementation.

Results

Based on the expedited occupational study and all relevant data, we determined, in collaboration with DOI and USDA/Forest Service, that the best approach was to reestablish and update the 0456 series to reflect the modern wildland firefighter qualifications and responsibilities. With respect to qualification requirements, OPM found that the work performed in the updated 0456 series does not support a requirement of completing a four-year accredited college program leading to a bachelor's degree as a qualification requirement. Rather, a skills-based approach to hiring that evaluates prospective firefighters based on tier skills and abilities is more appropriate for this series. OPM will provide additional guidance on the qualifications for wildland firefighters in the new occupational series.

Next Steps

Longstanding OPM policy provides that agencies must implement the Wildland Fire Management Series, 0456, Position Classification Standard to covered positions no later than 12 months of the date of issuance. To support agencies in meeting this timeframe, we will work closely with them to provide additional guidance as needed to implement the classification standard. We also plan to host agency briefings and provide agencies direct support to assist with implementation.

Attached are FAQs providing an overview of the Wildland Fire Management Position Classification Standard. In addition, we are requiring that each agency provide follow-up information related to their application of the Wildland Fire Management Position Classification Standard. Separate instructions will be provided to each agency including a timeframe for completing the application of the standard.

If you have any questions on your agency's implementation of the Wildland Fire Management Series, 0456, Position Classification Standard, please contact your human resources servicing office. The Classification and Assessment Policy team is available to answer agency leadership questions on classifying wildland firefighting positions via email at fedclass@opm.gov.

cc: Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs), and Deputy CHCOs

Attachments: *See 508-conformant PDFs below*