

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Implementation of Section 40803 of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Public Law 117-58)

June 21, 2022

The document was created to provide answers to the most frequently asked questions related to the new GS-0456 Wildland Firefighter occupational series announced on June 21, 2022, and the temporary wildland firefighter base salary increase.

Please contact your servicing Human Resources Office with questions.

1. Why did OPM create a new Wildland Fire Management occupational series?

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided that a new occupational series be created that covers positions for which the primary duties involve the prevention, control, suppression, or management of wildland fires. OPM has created GS-0456, Wildland Fire Management series.

2. Who will be impacted by the issuance of this new occupational series?

Federal wildland firefighters and anyone interested in applying to a Federal wildland firefighter position will be impacted. Current firefighters—defined as Federal employees covered by the General Schedule Classification System under Title 5, United States Code Chapter 51, performing wildland firefighting work—will have the opportunity to opt-in to the new Wildland Fire Management occupational series. Future firefighters will be able to apply for jobs specifically designated as wildland firefighters.

3. Do firefighters have to move into the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series?

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides that current employees may elect to move into the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series, or they may elect to remain in their current position – the choice is yours.

4. If a firefighter elects not to move to the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series, will they have another opportunity to do so later on and will the process be any different?

Forest Service and Interior are developing detailed guidance concerning the process for selecting whether to move to the new series, including whether there will be subsequent opportunities to do so. They will provide more information as it becomes available.

5. Do firefighters need to move into the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series to receive the base salary payment provided for under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law?

No, firefighters will receive the base salary increase payment whether or not they decide to move into the new wildland fire management position as long as they continue to meet the eligibility requirements for payment.

6. Will firefighters still be eligible for hazard pay for firefighting if they move into the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series?

Yes. Firefighters are entitled to hazard pay when they meet the criteria for hazard pay under 5 CFR 550, appendix A to subpart I for fighting forest or range fires on the fire line, whether or not they move into the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series.

7. How will the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series be an improvement for firefighters?

The Wildland Fire Management 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. For the past 50 years, there has been no specific Federal wildland firefighter job series or position descriptions instead 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. Moving forward the Wildland Fire Management series will identify and provide job titles/specialties and a clear path to career advancement that reflects the true nature of the work.

8. What approach did OPM take to develop the Position Classification Standard for Wildland Fire Management Series, 0456?

Creating a new occupational series requires extensive research, stakeholder engagement, consultation with employers from other sectors, detailed job analysis, collaboration with employing agencies, among many other activities. Typically, it takes over a year to create a new position classification standard. OPM used an expedited approach to develop the series in light of the 6-month statutory deadline imposed by Congress.

Under this expedited schedule, we coordinated regularly with the Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture/US Forestry Service. OPM's Classification and Assessment Policy Office also held multiple focus groups with subject matter experts and Union Officials representing wildland firefighters at various Federal agencies, conducted an extensive literature review of pertinent documents, collected agency comments and data, and analyzed a comprehensive array of occupational information.

Based on this analysis, OPM concluded that refreshing and updating the Position Classification Standard for Wildland Fire Management Series, 0456 was valid and expeditious path to best satisfy the needs for a new position classification standard.

9. Why did OPM refresh the GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series rather than create a new occupational series for wildland firefighters?

A version of the 0456 series had been used many years ago for wildland firefighters. 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. At the time, the fire season was shorter and the work more seasonal in nature. As a result, an occupational series geared toward a full-time, permanent wildland firefighter job was less relevant and useful. Accordingly, the Departments used other occupational series—such as forestry technician. But with the changing nature of the fire season and the need to employ wildland firefighters year-round, updating the 0456 series was appropriate. In the classification policy development process, preexisting policy is always considered. It must be proven through the study that the preexisting policy is insufficient for covering the work. Because the 0456 series deals specifically with wildland firefighting, classification policy supported its use, though with appropriate modifications to reflect the changing nature of the fire season and the work. In any event, the fact that we have refreshed a previously used series did not change our approach to creating the occupational series—we used the same process and conducted the same analysis.

10. What updates did OPM make to the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series?

OPM provided substantial updates to the Wildland Fire Management Position Classification Standard including the series definition, titling, knowledge required to perform wildland fire fighting work, occupational information, illustrations of work performed by wildland fire fighters, and comments section. OPM included in Part 3 of the Wildland Fire Management Position Classification Standard, 0456 comments related to the content of the standard.

11. Will the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series help agencies recruit and retain new wildland firefighters?

Yes. We expect the classification to help agencies recruit because they will now be able to easily identify applicants for specific wildland firefighting jobs instead of trying to identify which of the individuals who applied for Forestry Technician positions are interested in firefighting work. The Forestry Technician position includes both firefighting responsibilities and other functions that are separate from wildland firefighter functions. Both prospective applicants and current firefighters will see that they have opportunities for career progression and advancement, and they will be able to clearly identify the steps necessary to achieve that progression. The new series, together with the associated interim temporary pay increases and laser focused efforts on long-term solutions, will result in a lower attrition rate and significantly improved retention rate of Federal wildland firefighters.

12. Have the grades for wildland firefighters changed as a result of the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series?

No grades will change specifically as a result of the new position classification standard. The overall grading structure for the position classification standard includes grades 3 through 15. OPM, Interior, and Agriculture verified through the classification process that this grading

structure is adequate. Agencies have the delegated authority to determine the work and grades supportable for their positions. Accordingly, the Departments will now apply the standard to evaluate specific positions within the occupational series.

13. Will OPM provide minimum qualifications policy guidance?

OPM will provide separate guidance on qualifications for wildland firefighters.

14. How does the new Wildland Fire Management series align with OPM's recent guidance on skills-based hiring?

The new wildland firefighter occupation is aligned with EO 13932 on Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates and OPM's recently issued skills-based hiring guidance. While education institutions may offer associated college level degrees for this work, the existence of degree availability and course content is not required for the performance of the work in the 0456 Wildland Fire Management series. In accordance with 5 U.S.C. 3308, OPM and Federal agencies are prohibited from prescribing education when the work can be performed without it. While training for this occupation is needed, the best training is on-the-job training, rather than higher education. This correlates to qualification requirements and degree availability for the 0081, Firefighting, occupation.

15. How have agencies been notified of the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series?

Notification of the release of the final standards will be sent to the Chief Human Capital Officers Council, Deputy Chief Human Capital Officers, and Classification Policy Forum participants.

16. What are the next steps for implementing the new occupational series?

There is a significant amount of work to implement the new occupational series, and agencies typically have up to a year to do so under OPM policy. The Forest Service, for example, has over 400 classified position descriptions that need to be reviewed and reclassified with the new classification standards prior to moving employees into the new series. The positions at the Forest Service and Interior all need to be reviewed, after classification is completed, to designate these new positions as Wildland Firefighters for Federal firefighter retirement coverage. Forest Service and Interior will be in a position to post vacancies with the new series once position descriptions are developed for the new series. Implementation of the new series will be negotiated with the firefighters' labor unions.

17. On what date was the new GS-0456 Wildland Fire Management series released?

The release date of the final standard is June 21, 2022.