



Critical Issues/Unintended Outcomes Regarding New Wildland Firefighter Classification

While the pay supplement is inclusive for all employees in special retirement-covered positions, the new 456 series will exclude a large number of employees currently in those covered "wildland fire" positions, most notably dispatchers. Others excluded are fire equipment operators in the Federal Wage System (dozer operators, tractor plow operators), numerous aviation positions (aviation officers, fixed-wing specialists, helicopter operations specialists, aviation safety managers, etc), and some fire training managers. Save for dispatch, all of these positions require operational fireline qualifications and are currently included in special retirement.

Not only will dispatchers *not* be included, but they will be moved into a fleet/transportation series (GS-2151) that is *not covered under special firefighter retirement*. These positions do not require any previous wildland firefighter experience unlike the current position descriptions (GS-0462 and GS-301) most FS dispatchers currently occupy. This series is more widely used in the DOI agencies, and has often been used as a "work around" for previous wildland fire experience requirements in the 462/301 series.

Unintended Outcomes:

1. Exclusion is a serious negative consequence of positions being "left out" of the new 0456 series. Exclusion fails to acknowledge the hundreds of other critical employees such as dispatchers, fire equipment operators, aviation specialists, and training managers as part of the federal wildland fire workforce. This is an insult to the women and men in these positions; the fire equipment operators who are literally on the front-lines fighting fire and the dispatchers and managers who have "come up" as wildland firefighters.
2. Retention of women. The majority of current dispatchers are women, and, though unintended, this will unfairly affect a large number of women. The FS and DOI are already experiencing a steep decline in the numbers of women in wildland fire. Dispatch is a viable career option for women who want to move out of fire operations in order to start a family and for women and men who find themselves needing a more stable job to care for elderly parents or sick/disabled family members. Dispatch affords them the opportunity to stay at home, put their fire experience to use, and develop new skills and possibly a new career path. It allows the employees who meet the requirements to retain their firefighter retirement. By not only excluding dispatchers from the 0456 series, but also moving them into the 2151 series, many will lose their firefighter retirement. National forests and DOI agencies are already struggling to fill and retain dispatch positions; we fear this will only further compound the short-staffing in these extremely critical positions. Most firefighters will not want to move into dispatch



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positions and lose their special retirement. Wildfires don't get suppressed without dispatchers. The 0081 series (federal structural firefighters) *does* include dispatchers.

3. Dispatch is also a viable option for many firefighters who are injured on the job and have to move into a light duty position, either temporarily or permanently. Unless they can retain their firefighter retirement, which they likely won't be able to in the 2151 series, they have few options to stay in fire.
4. Loss of future benefits/provisions through legislation. Currently there are several bills that affect federal wildland firefighters. There is real concern that any pending or future legislation that targets federal wildland firefighters will only include those in the 0456 series and leave out those critical positions listed above. For example, H.R. 5118 refers to reforms only for employees in the 0456 series. Legislators do not understand that the FS and DOI agencies have a lot of wildland fire employees that will not be in the 0456 series.



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