

Reply To: 5100/1700

Date: September 16, 1991

Subject: Hispanic Resolution Item 50 Update , Wildland Firefighter Series

To: Chief

In April 1991, Region 5 participated in a task group to address issues that were raised at the Aviation & Fire Workforce Diversity Conference in Denver, 1989. This group was charged with the task of recommending solutions pertaining to the development of a wildland firefighter series. This group, lead by Harry Croft, WO, F&AM Staff, included the following:

Jim Webb, R-2, FS Rio Grande NF  
Ken Blonski, R-5, RO Fire Planner  
Sheryl Maddux, R-8, FS Cherokee NF  
LaDorothy Pittman, WO, P&CR  
Bob Serrato, R-5, Hispanic Representative  
Deanne Shulman, R-5, Greenhorn RD, ADFMO  
Lonnie Lewis, R-5, Chairperon Negotiation Committee

The following six alternatives were reviewed by the task group:

Establish a new wildland firefighter series  
Fully utilize the existing series 401, 301, 025, and 081  
Modification of X-118 standards for the 400, 460, and 462 series  
Stay with the existing 462 series  
Contract fire protection in the Urban Interface  
Creation of a California Fire Service

These alternatives were ranked with the following criteria:

Recruit and retain  
Career path  
Compensation  
Recognition (Self-Esteem)  
Standards, Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

Alternative 1, establishment of a wildland firefighter series, was viewed in the long-term as having the most potential to best address and resolve the aforementioned concerns in the criteria listed above.

Alternative 2, was identified as having the "quickest fix", but might not fully address employees and management concerns in the long-term.

Lastly, Alternative 3, 4, 5, and 6, for a number of reasons, did not adequately address the concerns.

In summary, the specific recommendations, as embraced by the Washington Office in the draft notes, address the concerns of Region 5 and specifically respond to Item 50 of the Hispanic Resolution Agreement. The Region will continue to make available members of the Hispanic Working Group as well as other knowledgeable individuals to facilitate and expedite this timely undertaking.

/s/ Beverly C. Holmes (for)  
RONALD E. STEWART  
Regional Forester

Preamble:

During the 1988 A&FM Workforce Diversity Conference establishment of a new series specifically focused on Wildland Fire Management was discussed. 259 of the 371 attendees at that session felt that a new series would resolve a considerable number of their primary concerns.

We reviewed the papers that evolved from that event and additional writings on the concept. The following issues appeared to be the focal points or goals for creating a new series:

- \* Enhanced recruitment and retention of a multi-cultural workforce.
- \* Improved career paths for folks that don't fit neatly within the GS 462 and or 460 series.
- \* Improved compensation in the form of pay, insurance and retirement.
- \* Recognition of Wildland Firefighting as an occupation with subsequent improved self-esteem.
- \* Better recognition of the knowledge, skills and abilities required by the complexities of todays fire management situation.

This term recognizes these goals as valid and desirable. We do not, however, believe that creation of a new firefighter series is the only or best way to resolve the issues identified above. It appears to us that a new "Series" is the surrogate for more complex issues. Ex.:

- \* Many FS firefighters in R-5 get their training with us and then go to work for other agencies with better compensation.
- \* There were several references to hostile work environments and managements incertitude in multi-cultural work environments.
- \* There is a harsh reality that not every seasonal employee will become an FMO or Fire Director.

There are a number of existing or emerging factors that must be considered during any reunification on the potential effects of a new "Firefighter Series."

The pay reform act of \_\_\_\_\_ requires that we review pay comparability of like jobs, by 1993. The results of this review is unpredictable.

During the 1991 NFS Deputy Chief's review of R-5 , a recommendation was to "Recognize that the structure of fire responsibilities changes in areas of urban interface. Change the organizational culture to fit the situation."

With these insights we looked at various alternatives to accomplish the goals above. There are obviously a number of actions that will help accomplish each. We limited our development of alternatives to "Series" specific actions.

### Alternative 1 - Establish a New Wildland Firefighter Series

#### Recruitment and Retention of a Multi-Cultural Workforce

Due to the long timeframe required to establish a new series. This alternative would not meet the short term need to respond to this issue. In the longterm, this alternative has the potential to best address and resolve this issue.

#### Career Path

The alternative could allow the employee to progress to a higher grade level than currently allowed under the 462 series.

#### Compensation

There is a potential for an increase in compensation. issues of hazard pay application, grade scale, and the effects of the Pay Reform Act are unknown at this time.

#### Recognition and Self Esteem

A noticeable positive impact on self esteem would result from implementation of this as firefighters would be recognized for the job they do.

#### Qualification Std's, KSA's, and PD's

The new series could provide accurate qualification standards, describe necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the position, and position descriptions reflective of the modern complexity of the fire management arena.

### Alternative #2

Fully utilize the existing series flexibilities in 401, 301, 025, 081, etc.

The discussion centered around the use of the 081 series, Fire Protection and prevention series.

Recruitment and retention of a multi-cultural workforce.

- \* Would help in the recruitment and retention of a workforce because it would provide a larger pool of applicants.
- \* Would provide more opportunity for firefighters to move up the career ladder, career path.
- \* Would provide more opportunity for employees to move up career ladder.

Potential for compensation, pay, insurance, retirement

- \* It is possible that there will be an increase in these benefits when the pay reform act is approved.

Recognition and self esteem

- \* 081 would provide recognition in that firefighters would be in a fire specific series.

Accurate reflection of standards, KSAs & PDs

- \* 081 is a new series and standards and position descriptions would have to be written.

We also looked at the 301 and 025 series but did not have enough information to address them.

Place fire management positions in the 401 series.

- \* X-118 has provisions for both professionals and technicians.
- \* It is within our authority to do.
- \* Should maintain the professional grade levels.
- \* Agencies with similar missions use this concept.
- \* Would keep firefighters in the natural resource series.

### Alternative #3

- \* X-118 qualification standards for the following series, 400, 460, 462 do not reflect the knowledge, skills and abilities that are actually needed to perform the duties of the position. Selective factors need to be added to the standard that are essential for the successful performance of the position and represent KSA's or other qualifications which could not be reasonably acquired on the job during the period of training customary for the position being filled.

The following issues were discussed as they relate to this alternative.

1. Recruit and retain a multicultural workforce. There would be an unknown time frame needed to update the X-118 standards. The ability to use selective factors is already available for use but it is not being utilized. Updating the standards would not address the friction between professional vs. technician in fire management.
2. Career path--There would be no change in development of career paths.
3. Potential compensation including pay, insurance and retirement.

Updating the standards would have no impact or change on this issue.

4. Recognition/self esteem--If selective factors were used to adequately reflect the job being performed on the ground a positive benefit could occur. Also using working titles could be used as recognition for the duties performed.

5. Accurate reflection of job thru using accurate standards, KSA's and PD's.

This alternative would have positive results for this issue.

#### Alternative #4

Stay with 462 series.

The general sense from our group was that as we applied the Matrix staying within the current 462 series would not address concerns that have been raised.

The exiting GS-462 standards do not adequately reflect the SKA, training, education, and physical requirements of wildland firefighters.

GS-462 will no longer exists.

#### Alternative #5

Contact Fire Protection in the Urban Interface.

This alternative would possibly eliminate FS jobs or shift the jobs to the private sector. Contractor responsibilities, pay rates, etc., would be a function of the contract and may or may not benefit individual firefighter. Diversity issues for the agency may not be benefitted.

Uncertainty over contract funding could reduce career paths; fewer FS positions could restrain career paths in affected areas.

Retirement benefits, wage rates are uncertain and would depend on the contractor.

Evaluation of Contract in Interface Areas Alternatives

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Recruit & Retain - N/A	-	+	?	-		?
Career Path - negative	+	+	0	-	-	?
Compensation ??	+	+	0	0	?	+
Recognition (Self-Esteem)	+	+	0	0	N/A	+
Stds, KSAs	+	+	+	-	?	+

Recommendations

1. The implications of classifying firefighters into the 081 series should be thoroughly explored. The analysis should carefully consider the following impacts or implications on:

- a. Hazard pay
- b. Grade structure
- c. Mixed fire positions
- d. Working titles

2. Within the new 400 series, Biological technician, standard position descriptions should be examined for accuracy of identifying firefighting jobs and where appropriate, supplement or otherwise accurately described the work activities and responsibilities.

3. Proposed pay reform regulations and subsequent classification activities should reflect active participation by the FS in addressing firefighter classification issues.

4. Existing methods for conversion to professional series need wide distribution for uniform application by managers. Included should be active efforts to gain accreditation for Fire Mgt courses in application to professional, positive education requirements. The Ca National Firefighter Joint Apprenticeship Training Program (NFFJATP) program should be examined for national application and incorporated in position requirements.

5. The implications of a new wildland firefighter series needs to be explored. Process, time frames, expected benefits, and impacts on the organization need thorough examinations.

Alternative #6--Creation of a California Fire service

\* This alternative assumes a California problem is the focus of this alternative.

\* The concept of a California Fire Service is based on the recognition of the successful trend towards ever increasing cooperative wildland fire efforts. This conceptual approach would distinguish between structural and wildland operational components. Additionally it would integrate systems, personnel and other support functions. A board of directors not unlike the present California Wildfire Coordinating Group would manage the multi-level government organization and provide direct linkage to sponsoring agencies.

\* While the effect of this proposal is speculative at best, however, it's potential warrants consideration as a way to streamline and standardize future policy, personnel practices and reduce duplicate costs.

\* Recruitment and retention would be dependent on practices but could be developed to create a system that mirrors the present population of California. Likewise a career path would be better than the present situation as the tendency would be to bring the federal compensation level towards the higher state and local levels. Recognition would be formally acknowledged. Lastly accumulate job descriptions and KSAs would be uniform throughout the organization.



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ISSUES:

A.

- \* Attraction & retention of minorities & females
- \* Why are they leaving?
  - recognition
  - pay
  - training environment
- \* Agency loyalty
- \* Gutsy Women

B.

- \* No clear paths for career development
- \* Perm. 462 attrition
- \* Is it a Nat'l problem? R-5?
- \* Tech. career cap at + or - 11 level
- \* Consider options beyond series
- \* Will this create the Fire Dept \_\_\_\_\_

C.

- \* Similar to other specialities
- \* What will it do to fire persons ability to branch out in other areas
- \* Is it one more wedge i.e. retirement, exempt/non-exempt
- \* Solutions different pay when we go to fires
- \* Folks hire on as firefighters
- \* Individual worth recognition
- \* Serious trouble @ GS-7 & below
- \* Present application of personnel system creates unnecessary noise
- \* Use of 460 series fails to recognize values others w/non forestry degrees can bring

D.

- \* X-118 don't recognize the requirements to do the job

E.

- \* What are positive education requirements/recognition of agency courses
- \* Don't need a degree to get 460 designation
  
- \* Perceptions--pay will increase
  - Formal (X-118) recognition makes the difference
  
- \* Integrate fire apprentice Program
  
- \* Series may have application on heavy loads at home or other places.

CLASSIFICATION OF WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER SERIES TO REFLECT  
ACCURATE STANDARDS, POSITION DESCRIPTIONS, AND COMPENSATION

Federal Wildland Firefighter Position Paper  
April, 1991

I. PURPOSE

This paper was developed to communicate the evolution of wildland fire suppression in the U.S.D.A. Forest Service (FS), and to relate these changes to classification standards, knowledge, skill requirements, and compensation issues.

Although these issues are shared by wildland firefighters from other regions and agencies in the country, the issues contained in this paper are specifically presented by the Federal wildland firefighters of the Pacific Southwest Region, California.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF FEDERAL WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER POSITIONS

A. History

Organized wildland fire suppression has roots in the establishment of the Forest Reserves in the early 1900's. The task of wildland firefighting increased in step with expanded human activity in or adjacent to the wildlands as populations grew. The early wildland firefighters were largely un-trained volunteers or conscripts, who were gathered up during emergency situations, and pressed into service. The creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's, provided the first major opportunity for the FS to maintain a trained and motivated firefighting force. By the early 1940's the CCC program was abolished, and the FS started to develop a trained cadre of agency wildland firefighters to continue the mission of protecting valuable timber resources, watersheds, and property. State forestry departments also developed similar wildland firefighting forces at this time.

In the past, both the Department of Interior, and the Department of Agriculture utilized the GS-456 Fire Control series for Park Service, BLM, and FS wildland firefighters. The GS-456 was utilized until 1972, at which time OPM, at the request of the FS, consolidated the GS-456 with the GS-462 Forestry Technician, and GS-455 Range Technician under the same position classification standard. The GS-456 series was dropped at this time, and wildland firefighting was covered under the GS-462, and the GS-455 series.

This change allowed firefighters an opportunity to effect easy transfers into timber or recreation specialties within the GS-462 series. However, the advent of primary and secondary Federal firefighter retirement limited the incentive and flexibility of individuals to switch between fire and non-fire disciplines.

The classification changes that occurred in 1972 reflected a change in management philosophy from strict wildland fire control to integrated resource management. This change allowed employees the opportunity to broaden their job experience by becoming well versed in areas other than fire control, including recreation, timber and range management. The belief held by management was that firefighting was a seasonal occupation that lasted three to six months of the year, and that a less specialized position classification standard better reflected the true nature and expectations of the wildland firefighter throughout the year.

Today, most wildland firefighters covered by Federal firefighter retirement are in the GS-462 series, and occupy grade levels from GS-3 through GS-11. There are a few GS-462-12 positions, and one GS-462-13 position in the FS, and essentially all GM-13 through GM-15 positions in wildland fire are in the GS-460 Forester series.

## **B. Current Situation**

**National Perspective** - Since 1975 major impacts have occurred in wildland fire management programs which have dramatically changed the role and responsibility of wildland firefighters at all levels of the organization. The cumulative effect of these impacts have not been addressed to varying degrees in most fire position descriptions.

**1. Total Mobility:** Is the positioning and utilization of established resources to meet anticipated and existing fire protection needs without geographic or agency limitations. Implementation of the total mobility philosophy resulted in the broad scale movement of fire suppression resources throughout the United States in response to fire and other incidents. Previously, emergency hiring of temporary firefighters was common place. Total mobility has resulted in all Regions being "in fire season", at least to support others, from February to November. Through total mobility Federal wildland fire agencies succeeded in providing increasing numbers of trained, qualified personnel during and enhanced operational efficiency. A direct result of this concept has been to lengthen and intensify the traditional fire season for wildland firefighters.

**2. Closest Forces:** Implementation of the closest forces concept, a dramatic change in traditional single agency dispatching procedures, resulted in each dispatching level (Forest, Regional, National) seeking out the closest available qualified force to respond to requests, regardless of Agency affiliation. This was a major departure from the previous system of seeking out the closest agency force. Developing

and implementing closest forces operations, plans and agreements has required traditional structural fire departments to develop wildland fire expertise, and in turn required wildland agencies to embrace responsibilities normally required of structural fire departments.

**3. Interagency Coordination:** All levels of Dispatching and Coordination have been effected by the dramatic increase in Interagency Coordination. Over half of the of the Forest Level Coordination Centers in four of the Western Regions are staffed with interagency personnel. The remaining Forest offices are very involved in interagency operations though staffed solely by the Forest Service. Eight of the 9 Regional Office Coordination Centers are now servicing all Federal and State agencies within their boundaries. Additionally the scope of dispatching has increased to include: Hazmat, medical aids, search and rescue, law enforcement and disaster assistance.

**4. The Incident Command System (ICS):** Implementation of the Incident Command System by all Federal, many state and local governments, and the multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional emphasis has resulted in operational partnerships unanticipated in the early 1970's, and not formally recognized in the 1980's. The establishment of shared, jointly funded, multi-agency fire suppression forces is now common. Fire suppression management teams (at all levels) are staffed with employees of all agencies within a geographic area. Wildland fire managers have been deeply involved in the implementation of ICS to the point of providing national leadership for ICS implementation through the FIRESCOPE program in California in the 1970's, and in conjunction with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in the 1980's.

**5. Domestic Disasters:** As the result of the Incident Command System (designed for all risk management), wildland firefighters at all levels are involved in domestic preparedness planning and in incident response. National emphasis was given to the Forest Service fire support role in the Federal response to a catastrophic earthquake and other natural events if appropriate, in the Federal Register of June 30, 1986 (pages 23657, 23658 and 23659). The Register assigns the USDA Forest Service with the primary role of providing operational support and liaison with all Federal, state agencies, and local fire departments in an anticipated mass fire environment. Forest Service firefighters are specifically assigned with the coordination and support of incidents which may involve applying wildland strategies and tactics to urban situations.

Domestic disaster planning and coordination include high visibility events such as: flooding in most Regions; support, coordination and preparedness planning at Mt. St. Helens and the Mono Lakes Caldera; communications for the Three Mile Island incident; Search and Rescue in a number of circumstances; planning, coordination and support for Southern California earthquakes; coordination with the Thistle and

Teton Dam disasters; and numerous other smaller scale operations. National, Regional and Forest level wildland firefighters are extensively involved in planning and preparing for these events.

**6. International Disaster Assistance:** The Forest Service has taken a proactive role in supporting international disasters. Through the established dispatching and coordination system, international disaster assistance has been provided to the Mexico City earthquake, fire in the Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica, Argentina, Canada, and insect infestations in Africa. This support has included aircraft, fire assessment teams, advisors, equipment and supplies. Through existing agreements with the DOD, modular airborne firefighting systems (MAFFS) have been sent to Italy. Planning for, and coordination of these operations have been shared by fire management at all levels.

**Regional Perspective -** The Region 5 fire suppression organization includes 20 dispatch centers, of which 13 are interagency, 9 air tanker bases, 11 air tankers, 19 helicopters, 204 engine companies, 18 Interagency Hot Shot crews, and a Smoke Jumper unit. This current organization involves 1379 career firefighters. An additional 1200 temporary firefighters are hired at the start of each season to increase the total workforce to approximately 2600 fire fighters in the region. This organization is augmented by an additional 1150 career firefighters in other Regions, which brings the total number of career wildland firefighters covered under primary and secondary Federal firefighter retirement to 2529 within the Forest Service.

Although the primary fire mission of the Forest Service is to protect wildlands and natural resources, the impacts of the wildland/urban interface scenario, and population demographics have greatly effected the mission with inclusion of non-wildland fire responses.

An example can be found in the response records of one particular National Forest where in addition to the primary wildland fire responses, units were also dispatched in a one year period to:

- 22 structure fires
- 93 vehicle fires
- 269 vehicle accidents
- 10 HAZMAT incidents
- 5 downed aircraft incidents

In California the "fire season" encompasses a period from May through December. On some National Forests, fires can and do occur all year long. In 1990, the response records of one National Forest indicates that 52 of the 401 fire responses, or 13%, occurred from January through April.

The response records also indicated that 75% of the fire responses occurred between the hours of 0930 and 1800, which is the standard tour of duty for firefighters during the summer months. In this example, 25% of the responses occurred between the hours 1800 and 0930, which required 100 call back situations. This requires dispatchers and key fire personnel to carry pagers and maintain "fit for duty" status during off-duty hours in order to manage incidents that occur outside the normal tour of duty.

### C. Outlook

In the past several years, management has come under increasing pressure from firefighters to develop a wildland fire series for use by the Forest Service. During the Diversity in Fire Conference in Denver, 1989, Deputy Chief Allan J. West, and the Washington Office Director of Fire and Aviation Management, agreed to study the development of a wildland fire series.

In 1990, as part of the Region 5, Hispanic Resolution Agreement, The Pacific Southwest Region agreed to support the development of a model Wildland Fire Series. Within the last year, the fire series has become an issue with Regional Consent Decree Committee as it relates to recruitment and retention of women firefighters.

In 1990, a written response from Fire and Aviation Management, Region 5, to OPM in regards to the draft GS-400 Series standards, stated that the majority of firefighting positions within the GS-462 Forestry Technician series could not be adequately classified under the proposed standard. The letter proposed that the Forest Service consider an alternative; a wildland fire series.

Concurrently, a response signed by the Acting Regional Forester congratulated the Washington Office for an excellent job in revising the GS-400 Series standards to meet the needs of the region, including wildland firefighters. At this writing it appears that the wildland firefighters will be classified under the standards for Biological Sciences rather than receive formal recognition and occupational classification for the job they are funded to perform.

At the same time the new draft standards for the GS-081 Fire Protection series, have been expanded to include a wider range of wildland fire suppression capabilities, and may be a more appropriate series for Federal wildland firefighters.

### III. ISSUES

#### A. Recruitment and Retention

In California, Forest Service men and women are being lost to State and Local agencies that accept the changing nature of firefighting, and provide their employees with adequate compensation and more importantly, professional recognition. The Department of Defense (DOD) has frequently recruited firefighters from Forest Service ranks in order to fill vacant GS-081 firefighter positions at military installations. The Forest Service firefighters are enticed by better pay and training with DOD, with the goal of eventually moving on to a municipal department where the compensation is more equitable. Both the Forest Service and the DOD in California have severe firefighter retention problems associated with pay and compensation. It would appear however the Forest Service retention problem is more severe; consider as an example, 70% of the GS-081 firefighters stationed at the Camp Pendleton USMC base are ex-Forest Service employees. The Forest Service in California has long been an employee training ground for other agencies.

#### B. Skill and Knowledge Requirements

The existing GS-462 Forestry Technician standards do not adequately reflect the skill, knowledge, training, education, and physical requirements of wildland firefighting. As an example, the Wildland Firefighter Specialist apprenticeship was developed in 1989 with the USDA Forest Service Region 5. This is a 3000 hour apprenticeship with two residential training academies, and is currently in the second year with 275 indentured apprentices. The program has attracted national attention, and in 1991 involved participation from the USDI Bureau of Land Management. This program provides formal recognition of the occupational basis of wildland firefighting.

The National Firefighter Joint Apprenticeship and Training Program (NFFJATP) was developed under the auspices of the Department of Labor - Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards and Training in 1972. NFFJATP is sponsored by the International Association of Firefighters and the National Association of State Fire Marshals, and provides services to municipal, state and Federal departments and agencies.

It is important to note that recent efforts by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) include the formation of NFPA 1051 Technical Committee to develop the professional standards for wildland firefighters. The committee hopes to have a proposal ready for adoption as a standard within the next two years.

#### D. Career Ladder

The current system limits persons classified as GS-462 Forestry Technicians access to the top positions in Federal agencies with wildland fire responsibilities. This policy is a constant source of frustration for many firefighters who see their skills, knowledge and leadership ability underutilized, and obstructed by an arbitrary, and inequitable policy.

#### E. Classification:

Federal wildland firefighters are aware of the disparity between Federal and the non-Federal sector agencies performing the same job. Federal wildland firefighters have only recently become aware that the Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act of 1990 provides opportunities for future pay reform. Federal wildland firefighters are also aware of the fact that they are not included in the pay reform/reclassification for Federal firefighters, as they are not formally recognized as firefighters. Specific issues include:

- 1). Formal recognition and classification as firefighters
- 2). Pay comparability with non-federal sector for like jobs
- 3). Full compensation for restricted movement in fire camp situations
- 4). Development of fire mission pay and environmental differential for non fire support personnel
- 5). Expand firefighter uniform allowance beyond present \$150.00 level to include the cost of boots
- 6). Develop pay adjustments and incentives for firefighter education and certifications

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Part of*

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Many of the issues surrounding federal wildland firefighters involve basic classification and compensation. These issues have surfaced as a result of a changing wildland fire environment, firefighter roles, and performance expectations in the wildland/urban interface. The current and proposed standards do not reflect the responsibilities, skills, education, and decision-making that effect the modern wildland firefighter today. The current and proposed standards and position descriptions are lagging behind management performance expectations of wildland firefighters.

The Forest Service is at a crossroad with respect to wildland firefighter classification. The agency has the option of adopting the GS-400 Biological Science standard for firefighters, or provide another classification option that could more adequately address Federal wildland firefighter issues. Management has also agreed to evaluate the fire series option, but from an



employee perspective this process is not being whole heartedly embraced, and timing is critical at this juncture.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Federal wildland firefighters need to pursue every avenue available at this time in order to facilitate necessary changes in classification. Union members, NFPA associates, and employee groups need to contact their appropriate representative verbally and in writing about the importance of Federal wildland firefighter classification standards.