



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
Washington, DC 20240

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors
Attention: Agency Superintendents
Regional Fire Management Officers
Wildland Fire Hiring Officials

Through: Deputy Bureau Director, Field Operations

From: Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Subject: Implementation and Utilization of the Wildland Fire Apprenticeship Program

People are the most important resource in managing wildland fire. With the growing complexity, severity, and duration of wildfires in recent years, the work of a wildland firefighter has become even more difficult and dangerous. That is why the President announced a compensation increase for wildland firefighters in June 2021, and Congress and the President enacted firefighter compensation and workforce reform measures in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). Investments made in the Wildland Fire Management program include funding to maintain a strong, talented workforce, along with provisions that allow for all recruitment strategies and incentives to be utilized when advertising wildland fire positions.

To continue investments in workforce development in the BIL, the Department of the Interior, Office of Wildland Fire has allocated the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) \$1.6M for workshops and training to assist in its development of a strong wildland firefighting workforce. The BIA Division of Wildland Fire Management (DWFM) is soliciting up to 20 wildland fire management apprentices, GS 3-5, to participate in the Wildland Fire Apprentice Program (WFAP).

Background:

The WFAP is designed to enhance and develop future leaders in wildland firefighting. Each apprentice will receive compensation as they complete a 3,000-hour on-the-job training program at a residential wildland fire academy. Wildland firefighter apprentices will be involved with wildland fire suppression, management, and control. Apprentices may be away from home for weeks at a time, work long hours outdoors and perform in a myriad of fire capacities and roles. Upon successful completion of WFAP, apprentices will have journey-level status as a wildland firefighter.

Program Benefits:

- WFAP participation does not require a college degree.
- WFAP provides a reliable, well-structured avenue for recruiting and training future wildland fire managers.
- WFAP apprentices are hired into a permanent Full Time Equivalent (FTE) and begin accruing federal benefits immediately.
 - Current General Schedule (GS) personnel may apply and upon admission convert from a 0462/0456 temporary position to a commensurate permanent apprentice position.
- WFAP apprentices are essentially “free” employees for the BIA host unit and will be funded out of BIL. DWFM has already been given approval and funding to recruit, hire, and enroll new and current firefighters into the program.
- WFAP training curriculum transitions seamlessly into the newly developed and mandated 0456 Wildland Firefighter occupational series.
- WFAP provides opportunities for current wildland fire personnel to attend the academies and serve as a cadre or staff member, thus ensuring the new recruits are properly mentored by already successful BIA personnel throughout their journey.
- Upon graduation from the WFAP program, apprentices will be non-competitively converted into a vacant GS-5 level FTE at a BIA agency and will have the training qualifications to be a Firefighter Type 1 (FFT1) or Helicopter Crewmember (HECM).

Currently, the WFAP is solely a federal program. Tribal personnel would need to apply for the WFAP, be hired as a GS employee, and convert to a federal GS position upon graduation to receive the full benefits of the program. We are working diligently to open opportunities for Tribal personnel to attend as students, however they will not be granted a permanent position nor be positioned for non-competitive placement back to their home unit as a federal employee would. Tribal employees that wish to enroll and attend the WFAP as a student will only be admitted if seats are available beyond what has already been allocated for federal employees.

Contact information:

For more information on the WFAP please contact Garth Fisher, DWFM Training Director at (208) 387-5315 or Mike Black, DWFM Training Specialist and Wildland Fire Apprenticeship Program Coordinator at (208) 387-5319.

Attachment