

# KLAMATH NATIONAL FOREST

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# NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 27, 2004

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## Earn and Learn – An Apprenticeship In Wildland Fire Job Fair this Thursday in Yreka

Yreka, CA – On Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup> from 12 noon to 6:00 p.m., the Klamath National Forest is hosting a job fair for local residents interested in becoming an apprentice in the National Interagency Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program.

The job fair will take place in the Walmart parking lot in Yreka. The Klamath National Forest hopes to recruit approximately 30 new apprentices into the program. “This is an opportunity that does not come-along everyday in Siskiyou County,” stated Jeff Stone, Klamath National Forest deputy fire management officer. “I strongly encourage everyone interested to attend the job fair.”

Time is of the essence! Applications must be post-mark by close of business on Friday, April 30<sup>th</sup>. Firefighters and human resource professionals will be on hand at the job fair to answer questions and provide assistance in filling out the application. Applications can be turned in immediately to Forest Service officials at the job fair.

### **About the Apprentice Program:**

These three young men pictured to the right agree on several things: They are all easygoing, yet enthusiastic; they have a great opportunity with challenging training; the pay is good and the program will lead to better prospects; and, they’re ready.

Being a wildland firefighter is what they’ve always wanted to do, and now they’re being paid for learning, with the promise of a steady job when they finish the program. They’ve been accepted into the National Interagency Wildland Firefighter



Apprentice firefighters Lathan Sidebottom, Bob Hanley and Jerry Padilla will go through a rigorous two-year training program before earning their jobs as federal wildland firefighters. (Photo by Kathy Pitts)

## Apprenticeship Program on the Klamath National Forest.

Ahead of them are two month-long residential courses at fire academy in Sacramento and 4000 hours of on-the-job training. At the end: a desirable career position with the U.S. Forest Service.

“I got into firefighting for the money,” says Forest Service apprentice Bob Hanley. “But after my first time on the fire line, I was really hooked. Now I can’t believe I get paid to do this. I get to travel; I go hiking out in the mountains and I protect our natural resources. This is great.”

“But there’s a lot to learn,” Hanley continues. “That’s the focus of the apprenticeship program. They really watch out for you; they stress the safety issues that come with this hazardous work. I really think the program is the neatest thing the Forest Service can do.” Hanley stated that back in the old days, old-timers will tell you; it took years to get on full-time as a firefighter. And when you finally did, actual firefighting training was not like it is today.

The apprenticeship program is designed to change all that. These apprentice firefighters will experience a broad range of opportunities in all phases of fire suppression work to develop their skills and proficiency by the time they complete the program.

“This is the future of fire suppression,” says Mike “Howie” Howerton, assistant fire management officer at Scott River District, Klamath National Forest. “This gives the trainees valuable and well-rounded experience in wildland fire suppression. Where one might love working on a hand crew, we make sure they get experience on a helitack module as well.”

New apprentice Jerry Padilla says the mix of training is what appeals to him. Studying for his first test, Padilla noted that he was “kind of nervous,” but he hopes to get a lot out of attending the basic academy in March.

Lathan Sidebottom, another apprentice at the Scott River District, just graduated from the advanced academy in February. His favorite class was on fire behavior, “a really well-taught class and stuff I’ll use for the rest of my career,” he noted.

Sidebottom expects to finish his apprenticeship late this year, but he’s already looking ahead. “I expect to get a four-year degree at some time,” he said. “I want well-rounded experience and look forward to advancing into fire management, planning or maybe battalion chief someday.”

### **Candidate Criteria:**

Candidates may be male or female, between the ages of 18 and 37, healthy and physically fit for the demanding work of firefighting. Prior experience as a wildland firefighter is helpful, but not necessary. “The main thing we’re looking for is leadership quality,” Stone said. Candidates should have good references to demonstrate their potential.

Once accepted into the program, the next hurdle for candidates is a physical fitness test. The apprentice will then attend the first fire academy course after a minimum of 500 hours of actual wildland fire experience and passing an exam on basic fire behavior. Trainees will spend two to four years in the apprenticeship program before converting to seasonal permanent employees.

The Klamath National Forest currently has 37 trainees in various stages of their apprenticeship, with all assigned to fire crews at the district level. “We’re always looking for more candidates for the program,” added Stone. “They do have to meet pretty high standards to get in and I again strongly suggest that interested candidate attend the up-coming job fair.”

For more information on the National Interagency Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program, go to <http://www.wfap.net>. or call the Klamath National Forest at 530-842-6131.

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