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Route To: (5100), (6130)

Subject: Qualification Requirements for Firefighter Positions Covered by Secondary (Administrative) Retirement Coverage

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Staff

The Forest Service Partnership Council has asked us to evaluate whether wildland firefighting experience was a proper requirement of secondary (administrative) positions as sometimes little or no firefighting experience was required by some units when advertising and filling these positions. This memorandum is issued to define wildland firefighting qualification requirements for positions covered by secondary (administrative) firefighter retirement.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations, wildland firefighting experience is a mandatory prerequisite for secondary (administrative) firefighter positions. Therefore, we reviewed covered position descriptions to see if prior firefighting experience was indeed necessary to perform the duties of the position. After discussion among fire management experts, it was determined that these positions were properly classified and that individuals must fully meet the requirements of wildland firefighting experience in order to qualify for these positions.

Because previous firefighting experience is required in order for an applicant to qualify for a secondary (administrative) position, this requirement is considered a selective factor. Forest Service policy has been that a minimum of 90-days is required to meet a selective factor requirement; therefore, a minimum of 90 days of wildland firefighting experience will be required to meet qualifications for secondary (administrative) covered positions. A resume or certified Summary of Work Experience showing primary/rigorous experience for at least 90 days would be sufficient evidence. The wildland firefighting experience can be gained at any grade level and series.

There is an appropriate concern regarding current employees applying to future secondary (administrative) positions who have never obtained the full 90 days of wildland firefighting experience before being placed into their current secondary (administrative) covered position. In the Office of Personnel Management Operating Manual, Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions, authority is provided to waive a requirement, on a case-by-case basis in such cases as administrative error on the part of the agency. It is important to recognize that on rare occasions there may be applicants who do not meet the exact requirements, but who, in fact, may be demonstrably well qualified to perform the work because of exceptional experience in that field. In instances where employees were placed in secondary (administrative) positions without



full 90 days of wildland firefighting experience, a more comprehensive evaluation must be made of the applicant's work history. To be considered qualified, the employee's work experience must reflect significant full performance-level accomplishments directly applicable to the position being filled; and be verified by a panel of at least two persons who have a standing in the field. Therefore, current employees who meet this situation should thoroughly document their work experience when applying to future secondary (administrative) covered positions and formally request a waiver of the 90-days of wildland firefighting experience.

The definition for wildland firefighting experience was developed by subject matter experts throughout the five wildland firefighting agencies. It is to be used when qualifying applicants for secondary (administrative) covered positions. In the recruitment process, include this definition in all vacancy announcements/recruitment notices as a selective factor when advertising positions that are under secondary (administrative) retirement coverage or under review for such coverage.

Previous Wildland Firefighting Experience Definition

On-the-line wildland firefighting experience gained through containment, control, suppression or use of **wildland fire**. This is the type of experience that could typically be met by serving in a temporary, seasonal, or equivalent private sector fire position for no less than a total of three months (90 days). Shorter periods of wildland firefighting experience (e.g. militia, non-fire positions, and rural fire departments) can also be credited, as long as the total amount of this experience equates to no less than three months (90 days).

Wildland Fire Definition:

Any non-structure fire that occurs in the wildland. Three distinct types of wildland fire have been defined and include wildfire, wildland fire use and prescribed fire.

Wildfire: An unplanned, unwanted wildland fire, including unauthorized human-caused fires, escaped wildland fire use events, escaped prescribed fire projects and all other wildland fires where the objective is to put the fire out.

Wildland Fire Use: The application of the appropriate management response to naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives in predefined designated areas outlined in Fire Management Plans.

Prescribed Fire: Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire plan must exist, and NEPA requirements (where applicable) must be met, prior to ignition.

The requirement of wildland firefighting experience when qualifying an applicant for a position utilizing a position description covered by secondary (administrative) firefighter retirement, should not be confused with an employee's eligibility for firefighter retirement coverage. An employee may be placed in a position description covered by secondary administrative coverage, and not be eligible for firefighter retirement. However, they can not go into the position without meeting the 90-day qualification requirement or receiving approval through the OPM waiver process.

Regional and Station fire management officials should contact Jim Barnett, 208-387-5350 or jbarnett02@fs.fed.us for assistance; local fire staff should contact their respective Region or Station Headquarters fire management officials. For HR questions or assistance, Region and Station Human Resources Employment Officers can contact Joy Thomas, 707-562-9178, or jrthomas@fs.fed.us; local HR offices should contact their perspective Regional or Station HR advisor.

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cc: pdl wo ops hrm class officers
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