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Subject: Upgrade of Hotshot Squad Leader Positions

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

This letter provides direction and guidance on the structure of the Forest Service Interagency Hotshot Crews (IHC). The IHC are diverse teams who uphold a tradition of excellence and have solid reputations as multi-skilled professional firefighters.

The Forest Service IHC structure and grade levels are not comparable to other agencies in which we share resources. Our partnering agencies have established the Hotshot Squad Leader positions at the GS-7 grade level compared to the GS-6 grade level in the Forest Service. This inconsistency has caused morale issues and hiring difficulties. The Hotshot module was last reviewed in 1997 and much has changed in firefighting since that time.

On a recurring basis, the IHC are deployed and split into modules consisting of anywhere from five to eight individuals. These modules are required to work independently of other resources. The modules are given an objective by the crew Superintendent or other operational personnel such as the Operation Section Chief or Division Supervisor and are expected to assess the situation and determine how to best meet the objective. In the dynamic environment of fire fighting, the decision space is often limited and critical decisions must be made quickly, relying on knowledge and experience that will provide for the safety of the module crewmembers while meeting the overall objectives of the plan. Without the ability to take appropriate actions and quickly to implement decisions, fire fighters would be put at an unacceptable risk and mission success would be comprised.

Based on our analysis of the current Hotshot Squad leader GS-6 position, we have found it to be properly classified as a Forestry Technician GS-462-7, with the organization title Squad Leader. There are two approved organization structures for IHC in the Forest Service.

Structure 1

- (1) Superintendent, GS-462-9
- (1) Assistant Superintendent, GS-462-8
- (3) Hotshot Squad Leaders, GS-462-7

Structure 2

- (1) Superintendent, GS-462-9
- (2) Assistant Superintendent, GS-462-8
- (2) Hotshot Squad Leaders, GS-462-7

The remaining positions will consist of a mix of positions from GS-3 through GS-5.

It is important to note that no other positions in the IHC organization will be affected by this structure change and as such all other positions on the crew must be filled using competitive procedures.



The establishment of this position upgrade eliminates the GS-462-6 Hotshot Squad Leader position. There are two critical action points to consider.

1. Non-competitive promotions for individuals encumbering the GS-462-6 Hotshot Squad leader position.
 - a. All current employees that have occupied the GS-462-6 Hotshot Squad Leader for at least one year (52 weeks) will be noncompetitively promoted to the new Forestry Technician, GS-462-7, position upon receipt of an approved SF-52 from the Tracker. Units should submit these non-competitive promotion actions within the next 30 days to assure actions can be processed timely.
 - b. Employees not yet meeting the qualification requirements will be promoted upon meeting one year of specialized experience at the GS-06. Requests for personnel actions must be submitted by the unit in the SF-52 Tracker. Effective dates should be set at least 2 pay periods from the approval date. If a complete package is received, we can process the action within those timeframes.

Enclosure 1 contains step-by-step instructions to initiate and approve the action to upgrade the position. Personnel actions cannot be backdated nor are employees entitled to back pay as promotions as they cannot be processed retroactively (5 CFR 511.701).

2. Closing of the GS-6 open continuous announcement (OCR), opening of the new target level GS-07 OCR, and completion of actions in progress.
 - a. The GS-6 Hotshot Squad Leader open continuous announcement (OCR), ADS08-FSJOBS-IHC(SQDLDR)-06 will be closed upon issuance of this letter. No further referral lists will be issued from this OCR.
 - b. A new career ladder announcement will be open, target grade level GS-7 - OCR-PERM-IHC(SQDLDR)-06/07. Referral List requests will be accepted after the OCR has been advertised 28 days (as per Merit Promotion Plan). The unit may request referral lists at the GS-6 level (with promotion to the GS-7 level) or the target level GS-7. Applicants must meet one year of specialized experience at the GS-5 level to be considered for a GS-6 or one year at the GS-6 level to be considered for a GS-7.
 - c. Actions in Progress. Where referral lists have already been issued or selections made, supervisors can continue with the process. Upon meeting the one year of specialized experience at the GS-6 grade level, selectees can be promoted to the GS-7 as identified in 1b, above following instructions in Enclosure 1.

Supervisors should work with their Human Resources Liaisons or through their chain of command if there are additional questions.

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Enclosures

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