

Wildland Firefighter

Fight fire in forests and rangeland with hand tools, chainsaws and water. Seasonal, brutal, and the hardest job to walk away from.

TYPICAL PAY

\$59,280

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$35k to \$101k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

National forests, rangeland, fire camps, engine crews, hotshot cre...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma and turn 18** Grade 12
 Get in shape now. The fitness standard is the part that surprises people, not the fire.
- 2 Apply in the fall for next summer** Fall and winter
 Federal wildland fire hiring runs on announcements posted months ahead on USAJOBS (the federal government's official hiring site). Miss the window and you wait a year.
- 3 Basic training and the fitness test** 2 to 3 weeks
 Introductory wildland fire behavior, firefighting, safety and fire shelter courses, plus the arduous pack test. All paid.
- 4 Your first season** About 6 months
 On an engine, a hand crew or a helicopter crew. Digging line, holding line, mopping up, and a great deal of waiting.
- 5 Build your qualifications** 3 to 10 years
 Each season adds positions to your incident qualification card: sawyer, squad boss, engine boss and upward. That card is your career.

Pros and cons

- + No degree, no debt and paid from your first day
- + Work outdoors in country most people never see
- + Crew bonds that people talk about for the rest of their lives
- Seasonal, so most people are unemployed for part of the year
- Genuinely dangerous. Firefighters are killed in the line of duty every year
- Smoke exposure over a career carries real long-term health risk

Optional boosts

Sawyer certification. Emergency medical technician. Helitack and rappel crews. Smokejumper.

Good to know

One building in Boise runs the whole system

The National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho coordinates wildland fire across the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of De...

The scale is hard to picture

On a single day in September 2026 the national center listed 31 large fires being actively suppressed and more than 1.9 million acres burned in large fires so far that year. Crews from across the country get sent...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Firefighters (33-2011.00)
 National Interagency Fire Center, the national coordination center for wildland fire
 Forest Service: jobs and how to apply
 Department of the Interior, Office of Wildland Fire

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/wildland-firefighter>



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