

Wildland
Firefighter



Apprenticeship Program

Apprentice Handbook

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Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

Overview: This handbook outlines the duties and responsibilities of the apprentice. It will provide an overview of academy standards and expectations for the apprentice.

**You must be familiar with the National Standards of Apprenticeship (NSA) and Operations Plan. These documents give further explanation and expectations of the Apprenticeship Program. These documents can also be found at www.wfap.net.*

Program Purpose: The program provides a career entry firefighter with education, training, and work experience that will allow an individual to reach journey level status, fully qualified to perform the work at or above the level of a Senior Firefighter.

For Wildland Fire Apprenticeship Program (WFAP) information and resources, including pre-work, prerequisites, forms, and other program information, go to www.wfap.net

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Apprentices are required to pass all Academy course material at the 70% level or as stated in the NSA Appendix B. All tests will be closed-book written tests except for the manipulative skill tests. Apprentices must pass courses identified as pass/fail with a passing grade. Students found cheating will be removed from the Academy and the Apprenticeship Program.

Apprentices will be allowed to re-test only ONCE during the academy. Apprentices will be allowed to review their tests prior to the retake but will not be allowed to remove the tests from the classrooms. Re-tests will be given outside of schedules course hours so as not to interfere with ongoing courses. A test failure in a second course will result in the Apprentice being removed from that Academy. The removed individual may reapply and may be selected for future Academies.

Missing 25% or more hours of a course or missing the final exam will result in an “incomplete.” The apprentice will be required to make up the coursework in a formal academy setting.

Removal from the academy and Program does not automatically equate to termination of employment.

Curriculum: See Operations Plan for details.

GI Benefits for Education: You must be a registered Apprentice to qualify for GI Bill benefits. The VA will determine which Chapter you are eligible for based on type and length of service. Inform your Unit Manager/Regional Coordinator of your interest in using education benefits.

PHYSICAL FITNESS EXPECTATIONS

During your time at the Academy you will be introduced to various fitness programs and philosophies. To prepared yourself, please refer to [Fitness and Work Capacity, 2nd Edition](#) and [Introduction to FireFit](#) (PDF downloads are available on the wfap.net website, or you can go to: nifc.gov/FireFit) Following the fitness philosophies of these two documents will greatly enhance your chances for success.

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You are expected to arrive physically prepared to perform the duties of a firefighter and to fully participate in all physical training and field exercise. The physical fitness standard for the Academy is the Fitness Challenge established by the BLM National Fire Operations.

The Work Capacity Test (Pack Test) must be successfully completed in 45 minutes or less prior to arrival at the Academy. Your Regional Coordinator or Unit Manager will submit the documentation signed by an authorized pack-test administrator providing you have passed at the required arduous level within the last 12 months.

If you arrive unable to fully participate you will be required to return home and complete the Academy at a later date.

EXPECTATIONS WHILE AT ACADEMY

Conduct Expectations: The Wildland Fire Training Center has a code of conduct. The Apprenticeship program also maintains standard protocol for acceptable behavior. You will be expected to adhere to both sets of policies. Staff will cover all the policies on the first evening during orientation.

- There will be no days off during the weekdays while at the Academy. This policy is firm.
- The Academy has zero tolerance for cheating.
- Possession of illegal drugs, paraphernalia and/or consumption of illegal drugs will result in your immediate removal from the Academy and are grounds for termination.
- Medical Marijuana per the U.S. Forest Service/Bureau Of Land Management policy: U.S. Forest Service personnel are federal employees, doing Federal duties, usually on Federal lands. Therefore federal law applies to Agency personnel. Title 21 U.S. code 812 classifies marijuana as a controlled substance. 21 U.S. code 844 (a) makes possession of any controlled substance a misdemeanor crime, punishable by as much as one year in jail, and a *minimum* fine of \$1,000.
- Weapons of any kind are strictly prohibited at the Academy and will result in immediate removal from the program.
- Expect all apprentices to have and display self respect, respect for others, respect for authority, and respect for the law.
- Threats or acts of violence, possession of weapons, sexual harassment or any other type of harassment are also grounds for termination.
- Theft, vandalism, extortion, gambling or other unlawful acts are prohibited.
- There will be no smoking in any government facility or vehicle.
- Expect apprentices to follow dorm standards and classroom standards.

Lodging/Meals: All students are required to stay at the dorms with meals being provided Monday – Friday. Meals will be served during established meal times at the Training Center Cafeteria. Apprentices will be responsible for purchasing their own meals on Saturday and Sunday. Lodging is provided for the duration of the academy. Apprentices must follow Federal Travel Regulations when lodging and meals are being provided.

Uniform & Gear: The Academy stresses a professional appearance, so having a full uniform complement is required. Additionally, your uniform must always be cleaned and pressed. There are irons available in each dorm, and there are several dry cleaners in the area. There will be frequent uniform inspections to ensure uniform requirements are being adhered to.

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Your Unit Manager/Supervisor is aware of the uniform & field gear requirements. It is **your** responsibility to work with this individual to procure uniforms, name plates, agency badge and field gear prior to arriving at the academy. **A list of required uniform components & field gear is listed below.**

Uniform Components

- 2 each - short sleeve uniform shirt (polo style not allowed)
- 1 each - long sleeve uniform shirt
- 2 pair - dark green field dress uniform trousers (not nomex or mint green trousers)
- 2 each - name plate (1 ea. for shirt and jacket)
- 1 each - agency badge
- 1 each – uniform belt (black or brown leather, not cloth or web)
- 1 each – agency jacket (3-season, rain, fleece or Goretex)
- 1 each – agency ball cap (optional)
- 1 pair – professional dress shoes (black or dark brown leather, no sports/skating shoes or clog style)

Optional Uniform Components: Agency ball cap, beanie or any hat with your module or forest/district name on it are permitted outside the classroom. Non-agency ball caps and/or hats are not allowed.

Non-agency jackets are not allowed in the training center (for example: your fire module Carhartt, forest safety award fleece, etc). Non-agency jackets are not a part of the agency uniform and may be worn up to the doors of the training center, but like all hats, must be removed when you enter the academy building.

Required Field Gear

- 1 each - helmet, safety w/chinstrap
- 1 pair - goggles or safety glasses
- 1 pair - gloves, leather
- 1 each - IA pack (Mystery Ranch, Eagle, FSS, Hotline, etc.)
- 1 each - fire shelter w/case
- 4-6 each - canteen, 1 qt.
- 1 each - headlamp w/batteries
- 1 each - kit, first aid, individual
- 1 pair - ear plugs
- 1 each - file, tool, 10" w/handle and guard
- 1 each – nomex fire shirt
- 1 pair – nomex fire pants
- 1 set - rain gear (quality rain gear – rains a lot)
- 1 pair – leather boots, minimum 8" height w/vibram soles

Field exercises will require nomex pants and shirt, and full field gear (IA pack, gloves, helmet, etc), and leather 8" vibram sole fire boots. Prepare yourself and your gear as you would for a fire assignment.

Facilities: The Wildland Fire Training Center is located in McClellan Business Park, north of Interstate 80 off Watt Avenue. The address is: 3237 Peacekeeper Way, McClellan, CA 95652. There is unlimited driving access to stores, restaurants, recreation and services at this location. In the business park there's a fitness center, gas station, restaurant and several other amenities at your disposal.

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Air Travel: Those traveling by air will fly into Sacramento International Airport (SMF). Flight itineraries must be forwarded to the wfap@fs.fed.us email address a minimum of fourteen days prior to arrival. Be sure to include your cell phone number so we can contact you. Transportation to and from the airport will be provided by the Academy. You will be picked up in a green Forest Service van by Logistics who can be reached at #916.202.8346. **Do not plan on departing from Sacramento International on the last day of training prior to 1830.**

AGREEMENTS

Work Location: At time of program completion, the agency may choose to place an employee at a unit other than the one in which he/she was initially hired (agency specific).

During their apprenticeship training period, apprentices are expected to perform work such as engines, aviation, and hotshots which may require that they be assigned work at a variety of duty stations.

Agency specific policy and provisions of collective bargaining agreements governing work assignments shall apply. Federal Travel Regulations will apply.

Training Agreement: Requirements for completion of the program and eligibility for noncompetitive promotion to the GS-5 Senior Firefighter position:

1. Completion of 3000 hours of work processes (on-the-job training).
2. Completion of all Academy Curriculum and fulfillment of Academic Standards.
3. Completion of all Required Related Training.
4. Completion of 120 hours of elective courses.
5. Recommendation by the unit on which the career-related work was performed.
6. Certified as a fully qualified FFT1/Squad Boss and fully meet the qualification standards for the position to which the student is to be promoted.
7. Completion of Work Process Competencies check list.
8. Certification by the Apprenticeship Program Manager and Department of Labor that all program components have been completed and documented.

DOL Agreement: This is the agreement between the Apprentice and the Agency, where the Agency enrolls the Apprentice in the WFAP program. The WFAP is a registered Apprentice Training Program with the Department of Labor.

TERM OF APPRENTICESHIP

The term of apprenticeship is 3000 (OJL) hours. The term will not exceed 4 years from the registration date, unless granted an extension.

Previous Experience: An applicant for apprenticeship may be allowed credit for previous experience towards the required work process hours on the job learning (OJL). The maximum credit given for previous experience prior to entering the program will not exceed 1,500 hours on a 1 hour to 1 hour ratio.

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Creditable experience can be determined using form “Calculating Work Processes for Previous Credit” found at <http://www.wfap.net>. Each month of applicable experience is equivalent to a maximum of 172 work hours (8 hours a day, 5 days a week).

The Unit Apprenticeship Manager will review documentation of prior experience provided by the applicant in determining credit for previous experience prior to the apprentice entering the apprenticeship agreement. Unit Managers may ask for proof of experience through resumes, IQCS Master Record, or other documentation.

Probationary Period: As an employee of the federal government, an Apprentice registered in this program is still subject to the employment probationary period, or trial period, normally one-year from date of hire, of the hiring authority used by the employing federal agency in accordance with government wide regulations. During the employment probationary or trial period, the employee in a bargaining unit cannot grieve his/her termination and does not have full adverse action appeal rights before OPM’s Merit Systems Protection Board in the event their employment is terminated by the employing agency.

Wage Progression: Apprentices will be paid a progressively increasing schedule of wages during their apprenticeship. As employees of the Federal Government, all apprentices will be paid according to the General Schedule for salaries as established by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Apprentices will enter the program at the GS-3, GS-4, or GS-5 level depending on their qualifying specialized firefighter experience and education as per the OPM Qualification Standards for General Schedule. The following wage progression will apply to all registered apprentices, regardless of the initial hiring authority:

- A. Progression for program entry at the GS-03 step 1 level will be:
 - After 6 total months of specialized experience - promoted to GS-04
 - Journeyworker level status - GS-05 (at appropriate step).

- B. Progression for program entry at the GS-04 level will be:
 - Qualification requirements must be met before advancement to journeyworker level. A minimum of 12 months specialized experience at the GS-04 level must be met prior to advancement to the GS-05 level, unless hired at the GS-05 level.
 - Journeyworker level status - GS-05 (at appropriate step). Note: Promotion to the GS-05 will be attained after qualification requirements of the GS-04 and journeyworker level requirements have been met.

- C. Progression for program entry at the GS-05.
 - If hired at the GS-05 level, the apprentice may be placed into a journeyworker level GS-05 position at the appropriate pay step immediately upon successful completion of program requirements.

There is no relationship between OJL hour’s worked and qualification requirements for pay grade progression. Some non-paid status time may count toward within grade increases as per OPM regulations. Overtime hours and non-paid status do not count towards hours for specialized experience for the purposes of the OPM Qualification Standards for General Schedule.

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Time in grade and FFT1 qualification requirements must be met before advancement to journeyworker level. Regardless of whether the apprentice has successfully completed the program requirements and received a Certificate of Completion.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE APPRENTICE

Apprentices, having read the NSA formulated by the NIJAC and signed an Apprenticeship Agreement agree to all the terms and conditions contained therein and agree to abide by the rules and policies, including any amendments, serve such time, perform such manual training, and study such subjects as the NIJAC may deem necessary to become a skilled Wildland Firefighter Specialist.

In signing the Apprenticeship Agreement, apprentices assume the following responsibilities and obligations under the apprenticeship program:

- A. Maintain employment status with the Sponsor.
- B. Perform diligently and faithfully the work of the occupation and other pertinent duties assigned by the Sponsor in accordance with the provisions of the NSA.
- C. Practice safe working habits, and work in such a manner as to assure his/her personal safety and that of fellow workers.
- D. Attend and satisfactorily perform and complete required OJL hours, as documented in writing by the supervisor overseeing the work process activity.
- E. Attend and satisfactorily complete all required related subject instruction as provided under the NSA.
- F. Maintain physical fitness standards for the occupation.
- G. Maintain academic standards for all related subject area instruction.
- H. Maintain personal records of work experience and training received and submit approved OJL and training hours to the Unit Manager by the 10th of each month.
- I. Completion of the Work Process Competencies Checklist.
- J. The apprentice is responsible for familiarizing themselves with the provisions of the governing documents and timely raising questions or complaints regarding their application by the Sponsor.
- K. An apprentice will possess and maintain the appropriate driver's license or permit needed to operate any vehicle which they are directed to operate, or are being trained to operate.

Drug Testing: Apprentices, who are operating Department of Transportation (DOT) regulated commercial vehicles, will be subject to DOT drug testing requirements. Refer to agency policy and definition in position description.

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HOURS

Non-Wildland Fire Incidents/Assignments: Work Performed on an incident/assignment other than wildland fire does not necessarily count toward OJL hours. If an apprentice wishes to petition for credit they should:

1. Develop a short narrative describing the assignment; why the assignment should be counted toward OJL hours; and the specific number of hours being requested.
2. The Unit Apprenticeship Manager will review and concur; then forward the recommendation to the Regional Coordinator.

The Regional Coordinator will review the information and make a final determination and the number of hours to be credited, if any. The crediting decision will be returned to the Unit Apprenticeship Manager and apprentice and applied accordingly. Decision documentation will be submitted with the final work process package.

COMPLAINTS, EXTENSION, INJURIES, ACCOMMODATIONS

Complaint Procedures for the Apprentice Program: Refer to NSA Section XX. General Employment complaints will be dealt with via each agency's procedures.

Extension: An apprentice may request to extend their agreement beyond the maximum four year time limit for the purpose of completing the program. A formal request must be submitted through your Regional Coordinator to the AJAC.

Injuries: While at work, employees must immediately inform their supervisor upon sustaining an injury, or upon awareness of an injury (Form CA-1 or CA-2) to allow for action. While at the Academy, Apprentice must notify the Crew Boss who will coordinate with the home unit. The Academy will facilitate the documentation and treatment.

Reasonable Accommodations: Individuals who may have learning disabilities are responsible for notifying and working with their home units to determine any reasonable accommodation requests *prior* to arriving at the Academy. The Academy needs to be notified at least 60 days prior to arrival to the assigned Academy start date.

TRAVEL AND BENEFITS

Per Diem: Apprentices will be awarded per diem in accordance with Federal Travel Regulations (FTR's).

Benefits: Apprentices are eligible for some federal employee benefits, such as Life Insurance, Health Insurance, Dental Insurance and a Thrift Savings Program. It is the responsibility of the apprentice to complete forms to elect coverage for these benefits. Some of these benefits can only be applied for during certain times such as; at the time of hire, certain life events (birth of children, marriage, etc.) or any open seasons.

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PLACEMENT

Upon completing all the requirements of the NSA registered at the time of their enrollment, an apprentice will be eligible for placement into a Senior Firefighter position. The duty station location is subject to available position.

ELECTIVE TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The Apprentice must successfully complete a minimum of 120 hours of elective courses from the 13 subject areas identified in the related subject instruction outline in Appendix A of the Standards. To ensure apprentices are given broad exposure to subject areas, it is recommended that courses be completed from a minimum of three separate subject areas. The table below identifies approved courses from each of the subject areas. Regional Apprentice Coordinators are given discretion to grant credit for courses which fall under the subject areas and support the development of senior firefighters who are prepared to move into higher level fire and aviation management positions.

Examples of the types of training or education which may be considered are college courses, agency specific training courses and training courses from private sector vendors. Discretionary courses should be identified on an apprentices training plan and/or IDP. Specific examples of acceptable courses are included in the table below. The maximum number of creditable hours for discretionary courses, regardless of training or educational duration is 20 hours per course.

Subject Area	Acceptable Courses and creditable hours*	Examples of discretionary courses **
Orientation	N/A	N/A
Human Performance	N/A	College courses in nutrition, sports psychology, or exercise physiology are acceptable. 20 hrs. maximum credit.
Leadership	NWCG "L" courses not offered at the academy and described in the most current Field Managers Course Guide.	Rapport Leadership , Leadership Breakthrough 1, 20 hrs. USFS Middle Leader Program, 20 hrs. LEAD 114, Leadership for Effective Organizations, 20 hrs. (example of college course).
Lessons Learned	N-9053 Learning From Unintended Outcomes: FLA Workshop, 40.	Formal staff ride(s), maximum of 20 hrs.
Fire and Aviation Management Operations	"D", "S", "ICS" Courses listed in the most current Field Managers Course Guide and not identified in another subject area in this table can be considered as an elective.	Courses which support development of skills in wildfire incident operations or agency specific fire management program elements. Examples: N9006 -GPS for ICS. N 9018 PMS 419, Engine Operator.
	FS-503, Emergency Vehicle Operator Training, 16 hrs.	
	A-110 Aviation Transport of Hazardous Materials, 1 hr.	
	A-111 Flight Payment Document, 1 hr.	
	A-112 Mission Planning and Flight Request Process, 1 hr.	

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	A-116 General Awareness Security Training, 1 hr.	
	A-200 Annual Mishap Training, 1 hr.	
	Geographic Engine Academy, 40 hrs.	
	SCBA Training, 16 hrs.	
	Wildland Fire Detection/Lookout Training, 8 hrs.	
	ROSS for Dispatchers, 32 hrs.	
	HAFF HazMat Awareness, hrs vary.	
	H1655 HazMat Operational, 16 hrs	
Fire Ecology/Land & Fuels Management	“RX” and Fire Behavior courses (S-190 listed in the most current Field Managers Course Guide	FOR 446 Wildland Fire Ecology, 20 hrs (Example of college course).
	Horsemanship Skills/Stock Management Training, 8 hrs.	
	RAWS Maintenance, 24 hrs.	
	N9042 Resource Advisor Course, 32 hrs.	
Practical Medical Skills	N/A	Course leading to licensing as an Emergency Medical Responder, Emergency Medical Technician, or Paramedic, 20 hrs. May not use course delivered at academy to meet elective requirement.
Business Administration	S-261, Applied Interagency Incident Business Management, 16-20 hrs.	Technical writing course (either traditional college, or college “short course”), up to 20 hrs.
	M-410 Facilitative Instructor, 36 hrs.	
	NFPA Fire Instructor I, 40 hrs.	
	e-Isuite, 24 hrs.	
	CISM, 40 hrs.	
Career Development	N/A	Career Development courses in AG learn and DOI Learn.
Physical Training	N/A	N/A
Senior Firefighter Skills Development	N/A	N/A
Wildland Fire Prevention, Education, and External Relationships	Forest Protection Officer, 32 hrs.	College, private vendor, or agency courses in public affairs or communication.
	FI-210 Wildland Fire Origin and Cause Determination, 40 hrs.	

*Current version of Field Managers Course Guide will be used to determine hours awarded for a given course. Where a range of hours is listed, credit will be granted for the minimum number listed in the guide. Credit for previous Related Subject Area Instruction can be granted as stated in NSA Appendix A, Credit for Previous Subject Area Course Work.

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**To receive credit apprentices must submit college transcripts, completion certificate, and/or other documentation which verifies completion and duration of the course. College courses will be granted the maximum 20 hours regardless of course credit hours.