



INTERIOR/**WILDLAND FIRE**

Wildland Firefighter Presidential Pay Initiatives

Frequently Asked Questions

August 11, 2021

On June 30, 2021, [President Biden announced a series of short-term pay initiatives](#) to provide support for Federal wildland firefighters during the 2021 season. The U.S. Department of the Interior is in the process of implementing these pay initiatives. The following FAQs provide answers to anticipated employee questions.

BACKGROUND

Q: What do the pay initiatives do?

A: The Wildland Firefighter Presidential Pay Initiatives support frontline Federal wildland firefighters at the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service who directly respond to wildfires and are tasked in their official position descriptions with performing suppression operations.

Q: What is the purpose of the pay initiatives?

A: The purpose of these short-term pay initiatives is to support DOI and USDA Forest Service frontline firefighters and to establish and maintain a firefighter pipeline to ensure their availability throughout the year. The initiatives are intended to compensate these firefighters for the hazardous work they perform on a daily basis while improving pay competitiveness with other state, local, and private employees. Additionally, the pay initiatives encourage firefighters to remain available for duty throughout the year and to seek Federal employment as a firefighter in future years.

Q: Why are these pay initiatives being provided?

A: On June 30, 2021, President Biden and Vice President Harris held a roundtable discussion with cabinet members, governors from the western states, and industry leaders to discuss wildfire preparedness. At that meeting, the President highlighted a series of actions that the Federal Government is taking to immediately respond to wildfires, including making substantial investments in firefighting personnel by increasing firefighter pay.

Q: Who will receive support under these initiatives?

A: The pay initiatives are focused on frontline firefighters, including those making less than \$15 per hour; those at or below the GS-09 or equivalent Wage Grade level; and all temporary firefighters.

Q: How are these pay initiatives going to help firefighters and the Federal Government address the nation’s wildfire crisis?

A: The Wildland Firefighter Presidential Pay Initiatives will improve competitiveness with states, local government agencies, and private companies, which continues to be an influencing factor in the Federal Government’s ability to attract and retain qualified firefighters at all levels. They are also intended to further compensate Federal wildland firefighters for the grueling and hazardous work they perform during the wildfire season. The pay initiatives rely on existing human resources policies and flexibilities, which enable them to be implemented this year while the Biden-Harris Administration works to implement longer-term solutions.

Q: What are the specific pay initiatives?

A: To meet the President’s goal of taking immediate steps to invest in DOI and USDA Forest Service firefighting personnel, both agencies are ensuring that:

- Current permanent and temporary firefighters who earn less than \$15 per hour will receive an award to bring their basic rate of pay up to the \$15-per-hour threshold.
- All permanent and temporary firefighters at the GS-02 to GS-09 and equivalent Wage Grade level will receive an award equivalent to 10 percent of six months of their annual salary.
- All temporary firefighters, regardless of grade level, will receive a \$1,300 (gross) award.

Q: Are there plans to make long-term compensation improvements?

A: The Biden-Harris Administration has announced that it is working to address much-needed compensation, benefits, and work-life balance reforms for Federal wildland firefighters, which would provide long-term solutions to these issues. In addition to improving firefighter pay, the Administration is considering other long-term strategies to address the current wildfire crisis, including investing in a permanent workforce that is available year-round to address fuels management when not responding to wildfires.

FOR FIREFIGHTERS

Q: Is there anything that I need to do, like register, to receive the pay increase?

A: No. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have already identified all eligible employees. The awards will be provided automatically in employee paychecks. No action is required on the part of individual employees.

Q: What if I don't work for one of those bureaus?

A: Situations that involve a firefighter working for a bureau or office other than the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Those employees should consult with their human resources office.

Q: How will the pay increases be provided?

A: The Wildland Firefighter Presidential Pay Initiatives for DOI firefighters will be provided to *current* employees through one-time STAR Awards that will be made available directly through firefighter paychecks.

Q: I am eligible for a pay initiative. When will I receive it?

A: The pay initiatives for DOI firefighters will begin to appear in August 24 paychecks for all eligible employees.

Q: What time period do the pay initiatives cover?

A: The pay initiatives are effective from June 30, 2021, to December 31, 2021.

Q: My usual hourly rate of pay is less than \$15 per hour, making me eligible for the pay increase. If I work overtime, will my overtime rate also be higher?

A: The pay initiatives are designed to ensure firefighters receive the equivalent of at least \$15 per hour for their *basic* rate of pay. The initiatives do not apply to overtime pay rates.

Q: I have questions about how much support I will receive. Where can I go for more information?

A: For questions related to the pay initiatives and how they apply to you individually, contact your local Fire Management Officer or your servicing human resources office.

Q: I'm currently on a temporary promotion so that my pay rate exceeds \$15 per hour, but when I return to my regular position, it will fall below \$15 per hour. Am I still eligible for the pay initiatives?

A: Yes. Employees who are currently on a temporary promotion are eligible for the Wildland Firefighter Presidential Pay Initiatives. However, due to your temporary higher pay status, you were not included in the initial data pulled by your bureau's servicing human resources office. Your awards will be processed after the expiration of your temporary promotion and return to your regular grade level. To confirm details about your inclusion in these initiatives and the timing of your individual award, contact your servicing human resources office.

Q: Who can I contact if I believe I am eligible for a pay increase but did not receive one?

A: For questions related to the pay initiatives and how they apply to you individually, contact your local Fire Management Officer or your servicing human resources office.

FOR PAYROLL PROCESSING STAFF & HUMAN RESOURCE SPECIALISTS

Q: What effective date should I use in processing the STAR Awards?

A: The DOI STAR Awards will be made effective for Pay Period 2021-17, meaning that employees can expect to see the amounts in their August 24, 2021, paychecks.

Q: Can I process these awards as group awards?

A: Yes. Consistent with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) [Guide to Processing Personnel Actions](#), the STAR Awards provided under these pay initiatives may be processed as group awards.

Q: Do I have to complete a DI-451 for each award?

A: No. A DI-451 will not be required to process awards related to the pay initiatives. Instead, servicing human resources offices should enter a remark on the SF-50 that indicates the award is being processed in accordance with the Wildland Firefighter Presidential Pay Initiatives or the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Policy and Management and Budget memorandum, "Process Implementation of Bonuses (STAR Awards) for Firefighters in Fiscal Year 2021," dated August 5, 2021.

Q: Do these awards need to be approved by the Office of Personnel Management?

A: Consistent with 5 CFR 451.107, OPM is required to approve any award recommendation that would grant more than \$10,000 to an individual employee. When a recommended award would grant more than \$25,000 to an individual employee, OPM reviews the recommendation and submits it (if approved) to the President for final approval. The DOI STAR Awards provided under the Wildland Firefighter Presidential Pay Initiatives are not expected to fall into these categories. Consult with your servicing human resources office if an award exceeds \$10,000.

Q: Fire personnel who were on temporary promotion to a higher rate of pay that exceeds \$15 per hour were not included in the bureau analysis at the time the data was pulled. Based on a permanent position of record (excluding compensation for the temporary promotion) do these employees maintain eligibility to receive this initiative payment?

A: Yes. Servicing human resources offices should determine eligibility and give due consideration to permanent employees who were on temporary promotions and excluded by the parameters of the data pull. Awards should be processed following the expiration of the employee's temporary promotion and change back to a lower grade, in accordance with the Wildland Firefighter Presidential Pay Initiative and the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Policy and Management and Budget memorandum, "Process Implementation of Bonuses (STAR Awards) for Firefighters in Fiscal Year 2021," dated August 5, 2021. Servicing human resources offices are also highly encouraged to consult with local Fire program

managers to ensure awareness of the inclusion of these employees for programmatic and budgetary planning purposes.

Q: Is there is a specific cost structure that the awards are to be charged against?

A: After budgetary analysis, it was determined that all costs for this initiative will be covered within each bureau's fiscal year 2021 program funding allocations. For additional information, contact bureau's Wildland Fire Branch Chief.