

LOCAL, STATE & REGION

Firefighters could get pay hike, switch to year-round

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Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho— U.S. wild-fire managers are considering shifting from seasonal to full-time firefighting crews to deal with what has become a year-round wildfire season and making the jobs more attractive by increasing pay and benefits.

There's a push in Congress to increase firefighter pay and convert at least 1,000 seasonal wildland firefighters to permanent, full-time, year-round workers, furthering a shift in their ranks over the past decade as fires have grown more severe.

It comes as fires raging in Western states parched by severe drought have burned more than 2,000 square miles this year.

That's ahead of the pace in 2020, which ultimately saw a near-record 15,000 square miles burned as well as more than 17,000 homes and other structures destroyed.

U.S. Forest Service Deputy Chief Christopher French testified Thursday before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources that firefighters need to be paid more in recognition of the growing workload.

The year-round firefighters could also remove brush and other hazardous fuels when not battling wildfires. French said the Forest Service treats 3 million acres annually, but to make progress would need to treat two to four times that much in the 193 million acres it manages.



Firefighter Raymond Vasquez on Oct. 26 battles the Silverado Fire, in Irvine, California.

Jae C. Hong/AP file

He called for a "paradigm shift" in forest management to address the impacts of climate change.

"We have a crisis," French said while testifying on an infrastructure bill sponsored by West Virginia Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin. "We must address it at the scale of the problem, and bring long term relief to our firefighters, our communities and our forests."

The challenge has grown in recent decades as more homes are built where urban and wildland areas meet, forcing wildland firefighters to protect the structures.

President Joe Biden recently called for an increase in firefighter pay from \$13 an hour.

"That's a ridiculously low salary to pay federal firefighters," he said.

Firefighters can often boost pay by working overtime, a regular occurrence in bad fire years.

Still, officials at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise said they face a potential shortage of firefighters this year because the \$13 starting wage isn't enough.

"There's not technically a shortage of firefighters because we always overprepare," said Jessica Gardetto, a fire center spokeswoman with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and a former wildland firefighter. "But it's a concern right now. We're seeing people taking jobs at local businesses that pay the same or more than starting fire positions."

She also said the length of time firefighters spend in the field has been increasing. That

can be a problem for seasonal firefighters who are college students and need to get back to class.

"In the past we had fire seasons; now we have fire years," she said.

Officials at the center on Tuesday raised the national preparedness level to 4 on a 1-5 scale, the second earliest dating back to 1990. The primary reason is the drought will likely make it harder to put out fires and strain firefighting resources.

As of Friday, the National Interagency Fire Center said almost 9,000 firefighters are battling fires across the U.S., including 43 large fires.

About 80% of wildfires annually are started by people, often while enjoying outdoor activities or using fireworks.

TODAY

It's Saturday, June 26, the 177th day of 2021. There are 188 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

In **2013**, in deciding its first cases on the issue, the U.S. Supreme Court gave the nation's legally married gay couples equal federal footing with all other married Americans and also cleared the way for same-sex marriages to resume in California.

In **1483**, Richard III began his reign as King of England (he was crowned the following month at Westminster Abbey).

In **1917**, the first troops of the American Expeditionary Force deployed to France during World War I landed in St. Nazaire.

In **1919**, the New York Daily News was first published.

In **1945**, the charter of the United Nations was signed by 50 countries in San Francisco.

In **1948**, the Berlin Airlift began in earnest after the Soviet Union cut off land and water routes to the isolated western sector of Berlin.

In **1968**, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced his choice of Abe Fortas to succeed the retiring Earl Warren as chief justice of the United States. (However, Fortas later withdrew in the face of stiff Senate opposition).

In **1977**, 42 people were killed when a fire sent toxic smoke pouring through the Maury County Jail in Columbia, Tennessee. Elvis Presley performed his last concert at Market Square Arena in Indianapolis.

In **1993**, President Bill Clinton announced the U.S. had launched missiles against Iraqi targets because of "compelling evidence" Iraq had plotted to assassinate former President George H.W. Bush.

In **1996**, the Supreme Court ordered the Virginia Military Institute to admit women or forgo state support.

In **1997**, the first Harry Potter novel, "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" by J.K. Rowling, was published in the United Kingdom; it was later released in the United States under the title "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone."

In **2008**, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a handgun ban in the District of Columbia as it affirmed, 5-4, that an individual right to gun ownership existed.

Ten years ago: New York City's

gay pride parade turned into a carnival-like celebration of same-sex marriage as hundreds of thousands of revelers rejoiced at the state's new law giving gay couples the same marital rights as everyone else.

Five years ago: Fourteen people suffered stab wounds, cuts and bruises when fighting erupted outside the California state Capitol in Sacramento between more than 300 counterprotesters and about 30 members of the Traditionalist Worker Party, a white nationalist group. Fireworks exploded as a huge Chinese-owned container ship made the inaugural passage through the newly expanded Panama Canal.

One year ago: After protesters in Washington, D.C., attempted to pull down a statue of Andrew Jackson, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to protect monuments, memorials and statues. Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan met with demonstrators who had thwarted the city's effort to dismantle an "occupied" protest zone. (The zone would be dismantled five days later.) Texas and Florida reversed course and clamped down on bars as the daily number of confirmed coronavirus infections in the U.S. surged to an all-time high of 40,000.

Today's Birthdays: Jazz musician-film composer Dave Grusin is 87. Rock singer Georgie Fame is 78. Actor Clive Francis is 75. R&B singer Brenda Holloway is 75. Actor Michael Paul Chan is 71. Singer-musician Mick Jones is 66. Actor Gedde Watanabe is 66. Rock singer Chris Isaak is 65. Rock singer Patty Smyth is 64. Singer Terri Nunn (Berlin) is 62. U.S. Bicycling Hall of Famer Greg LeMond is 60. Rock singer Harriet Wheeler is 58. Rock musician Colin Greenwood (Radiohead) is 52. Writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson is 51. Actor Sean Hayes is 51. Actor Matt Letscher is 51. Actor Chris O'Donnell is 51. Actor Nick Offerman is 51. Actor Rebecca Budig is 48. Retired MLB All-Star Derek Jeter is 47. Country singer Gretchen Wilson is 47. Rock musician Nathan Followill (Kings of Leon) is 42. Actor-musician Jason Schwartzman is 41. Actor Aubrey Plaza is 37. Actor-singer Jannet McCurdy is 29. Actor-singer Ariana Grande is 28.

—Associated Press



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Join our team and learn hospitality skills that will last a lifetime!

Save the date!

This Sunday from 1 to 3pm, Pronghorn Resort is holding a Food & Beverage Front of House hiring event.

Whether you are interested in servers, bartenders, bussers, hosts, food runners, baristas, banquet set up, or banquet servers there's a position for you!

\$15 to \$21 per hour with summer stipend plus tips and incentive bonuses! Pronghorn Resort will be holding on the spot interviews at this hiring fair.

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