



# 2024 Fire Year Key Messages

## Firefighter and public safety are our top priorities during a wildfire.

- The Forest Service uses all available strategies and tools to manage wildfires.
- Our fire managers make sound, science-based, risk-informed decisions.
- Flying drones near wildfires is dangerous for pilots and firefighters and can bring wildfire suppression efforts to a halt. Know before you fly. If you fly, we can't.
- Wildfires create smoke, which can impact communities. Check [www.fire.airnow.gov](http://www.fire.airnow.gov) for updates.

## The Forest Service is committed to a strong firefighting response this year.

- We are providing 900 engines, up to 29 airtankers, more than 200 helicopters and many other fixed wing support aircraft (lead planes, multi-engine water scoopers and smokejumper aircraft). We can also mobilize eight C-130s equipped with Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems (MAFFS) and a limited number of other airtankers through agreements with Canada and Australia.
- We will have more than 80 Forest Service Hotshot crews available. Contracted crews include 40 Type 2 IA and more than 400 Type 2 crews. Forty-four interagency complex incident management teams are available, as well as significant logistical support services under contract including mobile food and shower units.
- Our goal is to have 11,300 wildland firefighters onboard before the peak of the fire year (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/workforce>). These men and women will be highly trained in emergency response and quickly adapting to changing situations.

## Our goal is to minimize the number of devastating, destructive large wildland fires.

- Forest Service firefighters and managers make informed decisions based on science and risk assessments to safely deploy firefighting resources to suppress fires that threaten lives or property.
- Federal, state, tribal and local resources, supported by available airtankers and helicopters, collaborate to contain fires.
- That's why about 98% of wildland fires are contained within 24-hours of the initial response and less than 2% grow into the larger fires we often see in the media.

## Wildland firefighters play a crucial role on the frontlines of the wildfire crisis, and we must take better care of them.

### Firefighter Pay, Benefits and Housing

- Our focus is on increased pay and benefits, better housing, increased access to mental and physical health resources, and improved work-life balance.
- Agency leaders are fighting for a permanent pay fix (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/excel/firefighter-pay>) for wildland firefighters that more accurately reflects the difficult and dangerous work they do for the American people.
- The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has provided wildland firefighters with a pay supplement since FY 2022 that equals an extra \$20,000 per year or 50% of their base pay, whichever is less.
- Although the FY 2024 Forest Service appropriations continues the firefighter pay supplement, Congress must pass legislation to make a permanent pay solution a reality. If base pay returns to previous levels (sometimes as low as \$15 per hour), the National Federation of Federal Employees Forest Service Council expects 30-50% of Forest Service wildland firefighters to seek higher paying jobs.
- The president's FY25 budget provides \$216 million to implement a permanent pay increase for the wildland firefighter workforce, providing a more equitable wage, enhancing recruitment, and stabilizing retention.
- In addition, the president's budget proposes \$25 million to address the urgent need for suitable employee housing through necessary maintenance and repairs of Forest Service housing units.



## Firefighter Mental and Physical Health

- Long, extreme fire years and the difficult and dangerous nature of wildland firefighting requires investing in mental health and wellbeing tools and services to ensure wildland firefighters can successfully confront and manage the mental and physical aspects of their mission.
- The Forest Service has several reforms underway to provide better support to wildland firefighters, including an improved Employee Assistance Program that includes more trauma-trained and rural-based support, telehealth options, a smart phone app for quick access to services and expanding proactive and preventive mental health, and wellness and family services.
- Working alongside the Department of the Interior, we continue to implement the Joint Federal Wildland Firefighter Health and Wellbeing Program to specifically address the unique experiences and mental and physical health challenges of wildland firefighters (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/federal-wildland-firefighter-health-and-wellbeing-program-update>). This relatively new program will establish year-round prevention and mental health training, provide post-traumatic stress care, enhance capacity for critical incident stress management and create a new system of trauma support services with an emphasis on early intervention.

## The Forest Service takes the challenge of hiring and retaining firefighters very seriously.

- The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture together employ over 17,000 operational federal wildland firefighters each year. We can deploy more than 32,000 firefighters and support personnel when we include international, state, tribal and local partners, and contract and administratively determined emergency hires.
- The president's FY25 budget proposes \$136 million for additional federal firefighting capacity (570 more permanent firefighters and continued transition to a more full-time workforce) to enable the Forest Service to meet the demands of the increasingly long fire year more effectively and improve the work-life balance of firefighters and support personnel.
- These investments will help us recruit and retain the best wildland firefighters, who play a vital role in tackling today's wildfire challenges.
- Although we struggle to hire and retain firefighters in areas like the Pacific Northwest and California where the labor pool is limited and pay isn't competitive, we have added more permanent positions in some regions through our firefighting resource modernization efforts and funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

## Sustaining and restoring healthy, resilient fire-adapted ecosystems will help communities reduce wildfire risk. Communities and residents also must prepare for wildfires.

- Over a century of scientific data confirms that strategically designed fuels reduction treatments, such as mechanical thinning and prescribed fire, can reduce fire behavior and wildfire risks.
- The Forest Service's 10-year "Wildfire Crisis Strategy" (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/wildfire-crisis>) is fueled by Congressional funding and informed by scientific research. It aims to dramatically increase forest health treatments over the next decade.
- To be fully accountable to the "Wildfire Crisis Strategy" objectives, the Forest Service is using metrics to quantify the specific outcomes of our work. We are measuring wildfire risk and landscape conditions before and after treatment to understand how our work, and other naturally occurring landscape disturbances like wildfires and insect outbreaks, are changing risk and resilience over time.
- Knowing the outcomes of our fuel treatments and landscape disturbances will allow the Forest Service to 1) know if we are doing the right work in the right places; 2) communicate clearly about our "Wildfire Crisis Strategy" Landscape accomplishments; and 3) ensure we are spending Congressional funding wisely.
- Working with states, tribes and other partners, the agency is focusing on protecting communities and critical infrastructure and enhancing forest resilience in areas facing the most immediate wildfire threats.
- Learn about preparing homes and communities for wildfires at [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).

## National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Fire Outlook

- Visit <https://www.nifc.gov/nicc/predictive-services/outlooks> for the seven-day and four-month fire outlook. A new outlook comes out on the first day of each month.

