

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 17, 2022

The Honorable Kiran Ahuja
Director
Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20415

Dear Director Ahuja,

We write with an urgent and critical request for an update regarding the status of the new wildland firefighter occupational series and the delivery of the \$600 million in supplemental pay for wildland firefighters as provided in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) – both of which are now one-month overdue. The implementation of these provisions, as required in the IIJA, are imperative for the morale of federal wildland firefighters and for firefighter recruitment and retention, to address the concerning workforce shortages in Oregon and across the West.

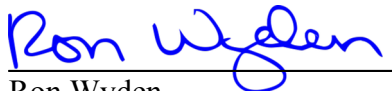
As you know, IIJA set a 180-day timeline for the development of a distinct “wildland firefighter” occupational series. We are deeply concerned that OPM has yet to issue this new classification and its associated pay scale. These brave individuals deserve appropriate recognition and compensation for putting their lives on the line to protect our communities from fire. Due to these delays, wildland firefighters are entering what is shaping up to be another difficult fire season in the dark as to whether they will be fairly compensated for their work. They deserve better.

Congress included \$600 million in IIJA to raise federal wildland firefighter salaries by up to \$20,000 per year. We have been told that the Forest Service and Department of the Interior have provided their pay supplement proposal to OPM. In recent testimony before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Forest Service Chief Randy Moore committed to providing higher pay for wildland firefighters by the end of June. We strongly encourage you to work with those agencies swiftly to meet this timeline.

The situation is urgent, and only grows more so the longer our hard-working wildland firefighters are kept in limbo on their pay, livelihood, and career path. Oregon is still struggling to rebuild after two, back-to-back horrific fire seasons. Proper implementation of the IIJA direction regarding wildfire is imperative to preventing another devastating fire season and supporting our firefighters, who risk their lives and tear themselves away from their homes and families every summer to protect Oregon’s communities and treasured landscapes. The failure to address these issues in a timely manner is contributing to the glaring shortage of firefighters in Oregon who are needed to sufficiently address the expected challenges of the upcoming season.

OPM must complete its work to ensure wildland firefighters are properly recognized and compensated for their lifesaving work immediately. If there are any barriers to completion and implementation, or if any congressional actions are needed to get these critical changes finalized, please contact my office without delay. This issue is vital to wildfire prevention, response, and recovery for all Oregonians.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior
The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture
The Honorable Shalanda D. Young, Director of the Office of Management and Budget