

STANDARDS FOR VETERAN CREW OPERATIONS



**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

April 2021

CHAPTER 1

STANDARDS FOR VETERAN CREW OPERATIONS DEFINITION, POLICY AND MISSION STATEMENT

DEFINITION

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) veteran crews are a unique resource within wildland fire, and they are configured as Type 2 Initial Attack (IA) or Type 1 Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC). Veteran crews are comprised primarily of veterans and serve a dual mission of providing highly skilled hand crews for all aspects of wildland fire management while recruiting, employing, and training veterans as wildland firefighters and promoting individual career development for placement throughout all disciplines within the BLM. The BLM Fire and Aviation Directorate (FAD) financially supports one crew in each of the following states: Arizona, California, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Wyoming. The *Standards for Veteran Crew Operations* applies only to those crews.

POLICY

BLM states that host a BLM veteran crew shall provide direction, support, and review processes that ensure veteran crew operations are safe, effective, and meet the veteran crew mission and standard as outlined in this document. Veteran crew base funding additions to Arizona, California, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Wyoming must be maintained by the states, less appropriate indirect costs. Indirect support costs are limited to 10 percent. The BLM Veteran Fire Program Committee will facilitate any proposed revisions to these standards under the direction of the BLM FAD.

OBJECTIVE

The *Standards for Veteran Crew Operations* provides the standards for crew operations and will be adhered to by crew members, crew leadership, fire managers, and agency administrators. It provides the basis for planning, administration, and crew operations. The standards are used as a measure of crew qualifications, and to ensure that crews are meeting the individual crewmembers' development goals, and overall development of the modules.

MISSION STATEMENT

Provide a safe, professional, and highly skilled hand crew comprised primarily of veterans, for all functions within wildland fire operations that has an emphasis on career development within all disciplines of the BLM.

PROGRAM EMPHASIS

Veteran crews can be utilized to meet management objectives other than the primary mission of wildland fire operations. Veteran crews place specific emphasis on individual veteran development, with the intent of creating better qualified and well-rounded employees, in preparation for a successful career within the BLM. Veteran crews are expected to perform within the specific crew type classification (T2IA, T1) while also highlighting the strengths and skillsets brought forth and expanded upon from a previous background in military service. The BLM recognizes that experience and situational maturity gained during military service (e.g., leadership, communication skills, aviation skills, medical skills) is of great value to the agency, and should be acknowledged and integrated into crew operations. These skills should also be evaluated when placing a veteran to best capture the individual strengths and areas of interest, and to prepare the individual veteran for future employment opportunities within BLM. Veteran crew use includes:

- Wildfire Operations
- All Hazard Operations
- Resource Management
- Training Cadre Members
- CISM/Peer Support Training
- Advanced Medical Experience/Training
- UAS operations
- Aviation Training
- Communications Training
- Vehicle/HEQB Training Operations

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Veteran crews acknowledge the responsibility to uphold the highest standard of ethics as a professional wildland fire resource as well as the responsibility to adhere to agency policy. Veteran crews will set the example and exhibit the highest standard of professionalism when representing our program and agency. Veteran crews continually strive to diversify their skillset portfolio, and crew members will only perform duties that they are fully qualified, trained, and equipped to accomplish safely. Veteran crews embody a workplace free of harassment and will always provide support, guidance, training, and mentorship to the rest of the fire community. It is the intent of all the veteran crews to build a professional reputation based on duty, respect, and integrity. The basic tenets are:

Duty – Get the job done quickly and correctly the first time.

Respect – You get what you give and treat everyone the way you wish to be treated.

Integrity – Uphold agency policy, and be accountable with local units, incident management teams, adjacent resources, and your own crew.

NATIONAL ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

Veteran crews should work with their district and state management to make sure there is a unified and coordinated statewide strategy that is aligned with the national mission of the veteran crew program. There is an expectation that managers at all levels will support the recruitment, retention, and career development of all veteran crew members.

BLM VETERAN FIRE PROGRAM COMMITTEE

The BLM Veteran Fire Program Committee is formed under the authority of the BLM Fire Operations Group. The mission of this committee is to provide leadership in all areas of BLM veteran fire program management. Each veteran crew provides a representative to this committee to provide insight and direction to meet fire program goals for veterans.

CHAPTER 2

STANDARDS FOR VETERAN CREW OPERATIONS

STANDARDS AND QUALIFICATIONS

MINIMUM VETERAN HAND CREW MOBILIZATION STANDARDS

(Not applicable for veteran fire suppression modules)

For mobilization to an incident, the following standards apply:

- The standard hand crew size is 18-25, with a minimum of 18 fire line qualified personnel required for mobilization.
- 60 percent of the crew members will have at least one previous season of fire experience.
- Hand crews should have a minimum of seven (7) permanent or career seasonal leadership positions.
- Have an availability period with a minimum of 90 consecutive calendar days (including required days off).
- Work and train together a minimum of 40 hours per week during their availability period.
- Be able to mobilize within two hours of receipt of an order during their availability period.
- Be available for incident assignments with no geographic restrictions.
- Have four certified FAL2 per crew, with 50 percent of the crew certified as FAL3 or better.
- Have the ability to break down into a minimum of two squads for initial attack and/or other independent operations.
- Have assigned vehicles, hand tools, power saws and communications equipment configured for their needs.
- Have a minimum of eight (8) programmable radios.
- Be logistically self-sufficient utilizing credit card or agency purchasing authority.
- When mobilizing via commercial or charter airline to an incident and the crew is authorized to transport crew vehicles, staffing of the crew at the incident will not drop below 18 fireline qualified personnel without approval from the ordering unit.
- When mobilizing via commercial or charter airline to an incident the crew will not have more than 20 personnel flying without prior approval from the National Interagency Coordination Center.

MINIMUM VETERAN CREW LEADERSHIP STAFFING

Veteran crews will be staffed to accomplish veteran crew missions and objectives. Veteran crews should strive to maintain a minimum of seven permanent/career seasonal positions and have a long-term plan that works towards a 100 percent veteran crew. States that host a veteran crew should have a succession plan in place for veteran and non-veteran crewmembers as they progress on the crew and look to move off the crew.

Minimum veteran crew leadership will include the following positions as part of the table of organization:

One Superintendent	OR	One Superintendent
One Assistant Superintendent/Captain		Two Assistant Supts/Captain
Three Squad Leaders		Two Squad Leaders
Two Senior Firefighters		Two Senior Firefighters

POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

While specific job descriptions of leadership personnel may vary among veteran crews, each crew will provide the positions to perform the following functions:

Superintendent

The superintendent is a permanent employee with administrative and supervisory skills to conduct training and sufficient fire experiences to provide capable leadership to the crew. The superintendent is responsible for all crew program management activities including certification that the crew is available for incident assignments. This position recruits and develops veteran employees within the wildland fire crew environment. The superintendent should work with management at the local and state level to formulate developmental plans for crew members to meet the BLM Fire Veteran program mission of developing career opportunities for our nations' veterans. This is a career position.

Assistant Superintendent/Captain

Assists the superintendent in all aspects of crew management and fills the role of acting Superintendent. This is a career position.

Squad Leader

Provides day-to-day leadership for squad members. Keeps crew superintendent and assistant superintendent/captain informed on all aspects related to safe and effective crew operations. This is a career position.

Senior Firefighter

Serves as a senior wildland firefighter on a hand crew, or on a wildland or prescribed fire module. Performs all aspects of wildland and prescribed fire operations including preparation, ignition, monitoring, holding, and mop up. Collects fire weather data, fuel and/or soil moisture samples, maps projects, and maintains records. Performs the duties of a chainsaw operator and performs chainsaw maintenance and minor repair. May on occasion serve as driver of a crew carrier. Veteran crews will strive to fill these positions with veteran crew members whenever possible.

Firefighter

In effort to maintain a high level of capability and experience level, no more than 40 percent of the crew should be first-year firefighters.

REQUIRED AND EXPECTED STANDARDS FOR BLM VETERAN CREWS

In support of the BLM Veteran Crew program's dual mission of providing a highly skilled and mobile wildland firefighting force and providing veterans with career developmental opportunities, BLM veteran crews will be expected to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Veteran crews shall strive for 100 percent veteran staffing.
- Veteran crew leadership shall coordinate with local unit to develop and implement a succession plan based on individual development plans (IDP) and organizational needs.

- Succession plans shall provide for the development and advancement of all crew members (veteran and non-veteran), with a focus on career development opportunities throughout the BLM.
- Local units shall consider all shoulder season work and training opportunities for interested veterans.
- Veteran crew leadership and local units may utilize all available and appropriate hiring authorities, and appointment types to support the program mission.

BLM Hand Crew Standards by Type

Crew Type	Type 1 IHC	Type 2 IA	Type 2	Fire Suppression Module	Veteran Type 2 IA Target
Crew Size*	Minimum 20 Maximum 25	Minimum 18 Maximum 20	Minimum 18 Maximum 20	Minimum 5 Maximum 10	Minimum 18 Maximum 25
Leadership Qualifications	1 Supt. 1 Asst. Supt. 3 Squad Leaders 2 Senior Firefighters (FFT1) OR 1 Supt. 2 Asst. Supt. 2 Squad Leaders 2 Senior Firefighters (FFT1)	1 CRWB 3 ICT5	1 CRWB 3 FFT1	R	1 Superintendent 1 Asst. Superintendent 3 Squad Leaders 2 Senior FFT's (FFT1) OR 1 Superintendent 2 Asst. Superintendent 2 Squad Leaders 2 Senior FFT's (FFT1)
Fireline Capability	Initial Attack – Can be broken up into squads, fireline construction, complex firing operations (backfire)	Initial Attack – Can be broken up into squads, fireline construction, firing to include burnout	Initial Attack – Fireline construction, firing as directed	Operates as a single module w/T5 command capability	Initial Attack – Can be broken up into squads, fireline construction, complex firing operations (backfire)
Language Requirement	All senior leadership including Squad Leaders and higher must be able to read and interpret the language of the crew as well as English.	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1

Crew Type	Type 1 IHC	Type 2 IA	Type 2	Fire Suppression Module	Veteran Type 2 IA Target
Crew Experience	80% of the crewmembers must have at least 1 season experience in fire suppression	60% of the crewmembers must have at least 1 season experience in fire suppression	20% of the crewmembers must have at least 1 season experience in fire suppression	Agency only	60% of the crewmembers must have at least 1 season experience in fire suppression. At least 50% of the crewmembers should be veterans.
Full-Time Organized Crew	Yes (work and train as a unit 40 hours per week)	No	No	No	Yes (work and train as a unit 40 hours per week)
Crew Utilization	National Shared Resource	Local unit control	Local unit control	Local unit control	Local unit control
Communication	8 programmable handheld radios 1 programmable mobile radio in each truck	4 programmable handheld radios	4 programmable handheld radios	2 programmable handheld radios	8 programmable handheld radios 1 programmable mobile radio in each truck
Sawyers	4 FAL2, 50% of crew FAL3	1 FAL2, 2 FAL3	None	2 FAL3	4 FAL2, 50% of crew FAL3
Training	As required by the <i>Standards for Interagency Hotshot Crew Operations</i> OR agency policy prior to assignment.	Basic firefighter training OR once red carded, 4 hours annual fireline refresher training prior to assignment.	Basic firefighter training OR once red carded, 4 hours annual fireline refresher training prior to assignment.	Basic firefighter training OR once red carded, 4 hours annual fireline refresher training prior to assignment.	Basic firefighter training OR once red carded, 4 hours annual fireline refresher training prior to assignment.
Logistics	Squad-level agency purchasing authority	Crew-level agency purchasing authority recommended	No purchasing authority	Self-sufficient for 48 hours; purchasing authority recommended	Crew-level agency purchasing authority
Maximum Weight	5,300 lbs	5,300 lbs	5,300 lbs	N/A	5,300 lbs.
Dispatch Availability	Available Nationally	Available Nationally	Variable	Variable	Available Nationally
Production Factor	1.0	.8	.8	Variable	Variable
Transportation	Own transportation	Need transportation	Need transportation	Own transportation	Own transportation
Tools and Equipment	Fully equipped	Not equipped	Not equipped	Variable	Fully equipped

Crew Type	Type 1 IHC	Type 2 IA	Type 2	Fire Suppression Module	Veteran Type 2 IA Target
Personal Gear	Arrives with crew first aid kit, personal first aid kit, headlamp, 1-qt canteen, web gear, sleeping bag.	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1
PPE	All standard designated fireline PPE	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1	Same as Type 1
Certification	Must be annually certified by the local host unit Agency Administrator or designee prior to being made available for assignment	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

*See table in the *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations*, Chapter 13 for “Minimum Crew Standards for National Mobilization”

CHAPTER 3 STANDARDS FOR VETERAN CREW OPERATIONS TRAINING

TRAINING PLAN

Veteran crews will establish training plans that meet the mission objectives of the agency. There will also be an increased emphasis on employee career development and individual training inside and outside of the fire organization. The following are the required National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) training courses and qualifications for veteran crew personnel by crew position:

BLM Veteran Crew Training and Qualification Requirements

Position	NWCG Qualification	Additional Required Fire Training
Firefighter	FFT2	None
Senior Firefighter	FFT1, FAL3	S-212 Wildland Fire Chainsaws S-290 Intermediate Wildland Fire Behavior
Squad Leader	FFT1, ICT5, FAL2	None
Assistant Superintendent or Captain	STCR or TFLD, CRWB, ICT4	S-260 Interagency Incident Business Management L-280 Followership to Leadership L380 Fireline Leadership
Superintendent	TFLD, ICT4, FIRB	None

ANNUAL TRAINING

All veteran crew personnel will meet the mandatory 40 hours of operational preparedness training as defined below. This will be a combination of classroom, field exercises and other fire-related courses determined by the superintendent. This training must be completed before the crew is available for assignments. All training will be documented. Training will include but is not limited to fireline refresher, OSHA and agency required safety training, firefighter safety training, first aid, fire behavior, and crew operating procedures. Refer to the *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* for required annual training.

OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS TRAINING

Veteran crews will put a strong emphasis on fireline training and building strong individual foundations amongst all crew members. Superintendents will certify to management that all required training is completed prior to being available for assignments. The following are suggested training and in no way exclude other crew specific training:

- Fire Behavior and Safety
- Leadership Development and Human Factors

- Lessons Learned
- Crew Organization
- Intra-Crew Communications
- Transportation/Driving

FIELD EXERCISES

Classroom training is not a substitute for field training. Veteran crews should spend considerable time in the field whenever there is a sufficient opportunity. Field exercises give the crew an opportunity to train in real time and to simulate fireline and other all hazard scenarios. This will provide valuable opportunities to practice cut and scrape techniques as a crew, breaking up into squads, medivac procedures, fire shelter use, and structure assessment and triage. Field exercises help build cohesion within the crew. They also give firsthand views of best practices collectively learned by the overhead and crew members. Field exercises give the crew members the time and opportunity to familiarize themselves with the individuals and tools that they will be working with.

FITNESS TRAINING

The physical ability to perform arduous labor is a critical part of the job for fire crews. Physical training helps build morale on modules by building a shared sense of hardship and perseverance. It builds physical and mental fortitude and helps crew members prepare for situations they will face on the fireline. All crews will be required to participate in a minimum of 1-hour of fitness training during every workday that they are unassigned to an incident. Crew overhead should emphasize a year-round physical training regimen that includes off-season recovery workouts in the fall and winter, ramping up and building endurance in the spring, and beginning the western fire season in peak condition.

It has been proven that physical fitness benefits the mental well-being as well as the physical well-being of the individual. Building mental and physical fortitude should be the key goals of any physical fitness routine. Since many veteran crew members have previously endured physical injuries and hardships in the military, fitness regimes should focus on stretching, aerobic fitness and strength preseason, during season and post season. Crews will work to build strong peer support programs and develop custom trainings that help address both physical and psychological hardships of the job.

All veteran crews will be required to pass the annual arduous work capacity test. Individuals should also participate the annual BLM Fitness Challenge, and crews should strive to meet the following targets:

- 1.5 mile run in a time of 10:35
- 40 Sit-ups in 60 seconds
- 25 Pushups in 60 seconds
- 7 pull-ups or chin-ups

AGENCY TRAINING

The local unit and the hosting state will work with crew overhead to develop the veteran crewmembers outside of the primary fire training. States should have a plan in place to facilitate job training and career development that goes beyond traditional fire seasons.

CHAPTER 4

STANDARDS FOR VETERAN CREW OPERATIONS

SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS

LOCAL UNIT SUPPORT

Veteran crews require management oversight, administrative support, and facilities to accomplish the mission. Veteran crews are available to assist the local unit with other resource management objectives when not assigned to incidents. Local units benefit from the skills, knowledge, and abilities of crew personnel. Veteran crews are available to assist with instruction of a variety of local, geographic area and national fire management courses. Home units should have plans to incorporate veteran crews into the broader structure of the agency. Home units should work with crew leadership to provide the training and support for individuals looking for alternate career routes within the agency. Home units should work with the veteran crew leadership to assist with the succession plan and to strive for 100 percent veteran staffing.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The host unit first line supervisor and agency administrator shall:

- Certify the veteran crew has met all required training and qualification standards prior to being made available for assignment.
- Collaborate with crew leadership and assist with creating developmental opportunities for crew members within the broader BLM.
- Ensure that crew health, safety and welfare needs are addressed.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

The host unit first line supervisor and agency administrator are responsible for providing administrative support such as personnel management, time and attendance, travel, purchasing and fleet management.

FACILITIES

The host unit is responsible for providing adequate facilities for the crew including office space, crew ready room, access to physical training facilities, equipment storage and fire cache.

CHAPTER 5

Standards for Veteran Crew Operations Crew Certification and Mobilization

ANNUAL CREW PREPAREDNESS REVIEWS

On an annual basis crews are required to complete a preparedness review. These reviews are conducted by either a local, state or national review team on a rotational basis. Regardless of the level of review, veteran crews, fire management officers, and agency administrators will complete the applicable national preparedness review checklists prior to crew mobilization.

National standardized preparedness review checklists are available at <https://www.nifc.gov/standards/blm-preparedness-review>. These checklists are updated annually, and Checklist # 17 “Handcrew/Non-IHC” contains several checklist items specific to BLM veteran crews.