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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum Crew Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Superintendent</td>
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<tr>
<td>One Assistant Superintendent/Captain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Squad Leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Senior Firefighters</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

OR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum Crew Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Superintendent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Assistant Supts/Captain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Squad Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Senior Firefighters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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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 nation’s 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLM Hand Crew Standards by Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crew Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fireline Capability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Requirement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crew Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crew Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full-Time Organized Crew</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crew Utilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sawyers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum Weight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dispatch Availability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production Factor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tools and Equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crew Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Gear</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
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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:

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

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.
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.