

# BLM Alaska Fire Service Crew Boss Summit

Summary





BLM Alaska Fire Service (BLM AFS) zone personnel and BLM AFS Emergency Firefighter / Administratively Determined (EFF/AD) Crew Bosses came together on February 20 – 22, 2018 at AFS headquarters on Fort Wainwright to review the EFF crew program and collaborate on practical solutions for existing and emerging issues. In addition, a professional leadership training team, Adaptive Training Options, was brought in to work directly with crew bosses on leadership and communication skills. The overall goal was to enable the future success of the program by developing stronger, more productive EFF crews.

# **Current Issues Facing the EFF Program**

Fire suppression agencies have relied upon Alaskan communities to provide a local workforce to aid in wildfire response for decades. Advantages of having EFF crews in remote villages in close proximity to fires is for rapid deployment and local knowledge of the area. EFF/AD firefighters supplement the fire suppression agency workforce and are hired on an as-needed basis during emergencies. As fire suppression organizations continue to evolve and grow, so will training and physical standards. This trend will continue to expand with the implementation of Department of the Interior Medical Standards Program and Fort Wainwright security screening. This will result in a decrease of EFF eligible for employment. AFS is responsible to ensure that all of its EFF/AD are trained to national standards.

Due to declining EFF/AD numbers and numerous other challenges facing the EFF program, AFS has proposed combining EFF/AD firefighters from neighboring villages into AFS Type 2 Regional Crews. This would give crew bosses a larger pool of firefighters to select from when filling out rosters for assignment. This could also provide opportunities for firefighters from villages that haven't been able to participate.

The issues that the AFS EFF Crew Program face includes:

- New 2018 HSQ Health Screen Questionnaire (HSQ) requirement by the Department of the Interior.
- AFS compliance with Fort Wainwright (Army) security screening and clearance process.
- 2019 DOI Medical Standards for all EFF/AD Firefighters.
- Conduct and performance.
- Lower 48 management's perception of Alaska Type 2 EFF crews.
- Decreasing number of village crews and firefighters.

# **Action Items for Crew Bosses**

- 1. Pre-season crew meetings to be held by crew bosses in their respective villages. Topics of discussion:
  - a. **Discussing HSQ** Crew members need to complete the Health Screen Questionnaire and get it sent back to AFS by <u>March 5<sup>th</sup> (NEW DEADLINE)</u>. Some individuals may need to have a physical exam done prior to participating in the WCT (Pack Test). You must be "cleared" and have a certificate in order to participate. WCTs are tentatively scheduled to start as early as April 1.
  - b. **Medical/Physical requirements coming in 2019** All federal EFF/AD firefighters may be required to have a physical exam in 2019 before they can participate in the WCT or work as a wildland firefighter. Firefighters who do not meet the DOI medical standards are not cleared for work will not be allowed to participate in the WCT or work as a wildland firefighter.
  - c. **Fort Wainwright security screening** AFS must maintain compliance with Department of Defense security screening and waiver process for individuals with certain convictions. In order for any EFF/AD responders (firefighters) to gain access onto Fort Wainwright for training and mobilization, they will need to be cleared through the Army's security screening processes. All EFF/AD will need to fill out a job application at the time of the WCT/pack test. Information from the forms will be used to determine if an individual will be granted access to Fort Wainwright. Individuals not passing the initial screening may be able to request a waiver. Individuals who are not cleared through Fort Wainwright security screening will not be hired by AFS. Responders who fail to reveal requested convictions on job application forms will be permanently removed from the EFF program.
  - d. **Regional crew model** Crew Bosses and AFS zone personnel collaborated on guidelines for the new AFS zone regional crew plan. This will give Crew Bosses a larger pool of people to roster from when going on assignments. AFS is still developing an operational plan. Further details to come.
  - e. **Issues and perceptions of Alaska crews on Lower 48 fires** Alaska crews are seen by Lower 48 geographical areas and fire managers as problematic.
    - 1. Disciplinary and conduct issues (drugs/alcohol and misconduct).
    - 2. Lack of self-sufficiency driver's license, credit cards and mobile devices.
  - f. Make sure crewmembers keep a copy of training certificates Not all training records are submitted to AFS, especially training conducted by organizations outside AFS (UAF and TCC). It is the responsibility of each and every individual AFS-sponsored firefighter to send copies of their training certificates. Individual firefighters also need to save copies of all training certificates, task books, individuals evaluations and red cards, and build their own personal folders.
    - AFS EFF Program Fax number is: 907-356-5609
    - AFS EFF Program Email address: AFS\_EFF@blm.gov
    - AFS EFF Program Website URL: https://afs.ak.blm.gov/eff.php
    - Toll Free Number: 1-833-532-8810
  - g. Discuss other AFS employment opportunities
    - North Star Fire Crew: blm\_afs\_northstars@blm.gov 907-356-5665 (April 1 deadline)
    - Chena IHC (Hot Shots): 907-356-5662 (Oded Shalom) (Fall deadline) https://afs.ak.blm.gov/fireops/fire-operations/hotshots.php

- Midnight Sun IHC (Hot Shots): 907-356-5633 (Chase Maness) (Fall deadline) https://afs.ak.blm.gov/fireops/fire-operations/hotshots.php
- AFS Fire Specialists: 907-356-5668 (Jake Livingston) (Fall deadline) https://afs.ak.blm.gov/fireops/fire-operations/specialists-recruitment.php
- Wildland Fire Jobs DOI FIRES: <a href="https://www.firejobs.doi.gov/">https://www.firejobs.doi.gov/</a>
- USA Jobs: https://www.usajobs.gov/ for other AFS jobs.
- h. **Discuss contract crew concept** The AFS is working on a process to solicit for contracted Alaska Type 2 Wildland Fire Suppression Crews beginning in 2018. AFS may select multiple locations (villages) within the boundaries of the Upper Yukon, Tanana and Galena Fire Management Zones. Details are still being worked out however, we do anticipate these contracts being open for solicitation sometime in the near future.

Contracting Officer: Theresa Coffenberry Bureau of Land Management National Operations Center (303) 236-5437 tcoffenberry@blm.gov

Alaska Point of Contact: Hudson Plass BLM Alaska Fire Service 907-356-5611 hplass@blm.gov

- 2. Communicate with crew bosses from other local villages to convey the guidelines for regional crews within their respective regions. This will be the subject of call facilitated by the zones to come up with regional crew rosters after the pack tests are completed.
  - **Crew boss rotation**: Crew bosses must come to an agreement on which crew boss will be first out, second out and so on.
  - **Rosters/Manifests**: Each crew must be manifested completely prior to being placed on the AICC Type 2 crew rotation list. Crew bosses should work together to come up with full rosters and alternate individuals to fill key positions.
  - **Key Information**: Each crew manifest must include:
  - o Full legal names (First, Middle, Last and Suffix)
  - o Date of birth
  - o Tribal ID # or State of AK ID # or Last four digits of the SSN
  - Location of pickup/drop off (point of hire)
  - **Mobilization Plan**: Crew bosses need to have the pickup locations (point of hire) for each individual crew member identified and relayed to zone management.
- 3. Crew bosses will review and understand the Alaska Emergency Firefighter Type 2 Crew Management Guide and discuss it with crew members. Review the conditions of hire and associated penalties for conduct and violations.
- 4. Crew bosses will become familiar with administrative duties, payroll forms and other documentation.
- 5. Identify individual crew members that should be recruited for the North Star Fire Crew or for other BLM AFS employment opportunities. (For information see section 1-g above).

# **Topics of Discussion at Crew Boss Summit**

Questions for break-out sessions

- 1. Alaska Fire Service is implementing a Regional Crew model beginning in 2018.
  - What do the regional areas look like?
  - How do we organize villages into regions?
  - What naming conventions should we use?

Those attending broke into groups that included each Zone FMO and Crew Bosses to come up with proposals. (See attached map)

# Tanana Zone

K River Crew – Hughes, Allakaket, Bettles, Evansville

Mooseheart Mountain Crew – Minto, Tanana, Ruby (Possibly include Manley and Rampart firefighters into the crew)

# Upper Yukon Zone

Chandlar Crew – Venetie, Arctic Village

Yukon Flats – Beaver, Stevens Village, Fort Yukon, Chalkyitsik, Circle

# Galena Zone

Yukon-Koyokuk Crew – Kaltag, Galena, Huslia, Nulato, Koyukuk

Paradise Crew (tentative name pending more consulting with Holy Cross folks) – Grayling, Anvik, Holy Cross

Lower Yukon Crew – Pitka Point, St Mary's, Marshall, Pilot Station, Russian Mission, Mountain Village

Norton Sound Crew – Stebbins, St. Michaels, Koyuk, Shatatoolik (new), Unalakleet (new), Buckland, Kobuk River Crew – Selawik, Norvik, Kiana, Shungnak, Kobuk.

Follow-up suggestion: AFS could revisit the regional groupings as needed.

# 2. How will the rotation work and who decides the initial rotation? Coin flip? How can Regional Area Crew Bosses ensure trainees are equally utilized to provide successional development?

### Suggestions:

- a. The Crew Boss rotation will be decided at the beginning of the season. Pool Crew Bosses' names and pick out of a hat for the initial order of Crew Boss. If the first Crew Boss on the list has a conflict when a fire assignment comes up, it falls to the next Crew Boss on the list. This was the easiest and most unbiased method to come out of the group discussion.
- b. It's important for Crew Bosses to communicate, whether it is by teleconference or in person on how to sort out the crew at the beginning of the season. It's also important to have follow-up conversations when it comes down to selecting the crew for an assignment. Crew Bosses must develop rosters before fire season instead of throwing together a crew at the last minute.
- c. Selecting Squad Bosses will be more complicated because there are more to choose from. One option was to not pick more than two Squad Bosses from your village and to rotate equally through your regions. Another suggestion was to pair up strong squad bosses with trainees to ensure they get quality training and experience.

- d. The goal is to make it fair to everybody and make sure the same people are not getting picked for fire assignments because it would discourage other firefighters and potential firefighters from joining the crew. The roster should vary from assignment to assignment to provide equal opportunity.
- e. Ensure other Crew Bosses are aware of problem crew members and any issues a firefighter may bring with them on an assignment.
- f. Keep an eye on the AICC crew rotation list and anticipate when your turn for an assignment. Start making phone calls and do finalize crew roster days ahead of the assignment.

# 3. AFS seeks to provide the strong, efficient and experienced crews for every assignment. Who should be on a crew?

Is physical ability considered? Is mental fortitude considered? Is a positive attitude required? Do village politics come into play when you select your crew? What can AFS do to assist Crew Bosses with crew selection?

Things to take into consideration when deciding a crew:

- Look for traits in individuals such as open minded; good communicator; leadership; physical ability; good work ethic; good attitude; someone you can trust; experience and squared away (and their squad is squared away).
- Traits for Crew Bosses: Lead by example; make corrections timely and consistent; be fair in selections; build relationship/contact with new and potential crew members; self-study; conduct evaluations and feedback. Mentor and monitor upcoming leaders and get that information back to the zones.

What AFS could do to help when selecting crews?

- More leadership and teambuilding (this is often dependent on funding). Possibly bring crew bosses in again next year and do a review of the EFF program and more training.
- More mentoring opportunities at the AFS level. Consider training as a single resource for ICT5.
- AFS detail opportunity and bring them into the Zone to help with zone tasks.
- Coming up with a standardized individual evaluation.
- Backing up the Crew bosses if someone gets low marks. Zone personnel can make the decision and Crew Bosses won't face retribution.

# 4. What do we do about the drug and alcohol abuse on AK crews?

- Crew members are frequently sent home for drug and alcohol violations while on assignment, particularly down south. This is troublesome as Alaska EFF crews have a national reputation as troublesome. Do we need stricter penalties for those individuals who use drugs and/or alcohol on assignment?
- Who is ultimately responsible when a member of a crew violates the conditions of hire? Current standards within the Crew Management Guide state the Crew Boss to be "Responsible for the performance, conduct and discipline of the EFF crew at all times". Should squad bosses and/or crew bosses be penalized as well? Should the whole crew be sent home for the actions of one individual?

It's up to Crew Bosses to make sure their crew members know and understand drug and alcohol policies are while on assignment and their penalties. Start out with condition of hire that people sign when taking the pack test/refresher and make sure people know what they're signing. Make sure they're aware of policies that intoxicating substances shouldn't be consumed or in possession while **on assignment.** 

## Decisions made:

- To strictly enforce current policy. Possession and or being under the influence of alcohol/drugs Do it once, suspended for rest of fire season and the next fire season. Do it again and you are kicked out of the program.
- Definition of in-pay status is the time period between initial point-of-hire until you return to point-of-hire.
- A person who commits two offenses at the same time such as drinking while on a fire assignment and assaulting someone is dropped from the program.

# **List of Attendees**

## **Crew Bosses**

Clifford Alexander, Minto; Walter Ansaknok, Fort Yukon; Arlo Beetus, Hughes; Bruce Deacon, Grayling; Stanley Demoski, Nulato; Jason Malemute, Koyukuk; James Martin, Venetie; Adolph McGinty, Kaltag; Rudy Moses, Allakaket; Nicky Myers, Pilot Station; William Penn, Huslia; Barney Pete, Selewik; Benjamin Peter, Venetie; Nicholas Roberts, Minto; Darrell Sam, Huslia; Robert Stevens II, Fort Yukon; Allen Titus, Ruby; Maurice Turet, Marshall; Ernest Erick, Venetie; and Richard Williams, Beaver.

# **BLM Alaska Fire Service personnel**

Galena Zone Fire Management Officer Doug Downs, Galena Zone Assistant Fire Management Officer Mike Roos, Upper Yukon Zone Fire Management Officer Jay Wattenbarger, Upper Yukon Zone Associate Fire Management Officer Branden Petersen, Tanana Zone Fire Management Officer Mike Butteri, Acting Tanana Zone Assistant Fire Management Officer Abe Davis, Multi-Zone EFF Program Coordinator Hudson "Hud" Plass, Alaska Interagency Coordination Center Manager Ray Crowe, Acting Branch Chief of Business and Technology Willie Branson, Fire Operations Administrative Supervisor Susan Vincent, Upper Yukon Zone Fire Specialist Tim Hatfield, Tanana Zone Crew Coordinator Matt Robinett, Galena Zone Crew Coordinator Matt Kilgriff, Public Affairs Specialist Beth Ipsen, Fire Support Assistant Paula McQuestion, Galena Zone Fire Support Assistant Mary Jane Derendoff, Tanana Zone Fire Support Assistant Vivian Bifelt and Miles Bond, former North Star Fire Crew superintendent.



# **Important Points of Army Security Screening**

- BLM AFS is a tenant of the Fort Wainwright Garrison and is subject to Department of Defense guidelines required for personnel to gain access to the military installation.
- Individuals conducting business at BLM AFS facilities, including Alaska Division of Forestry and BLM AFS Emergency Firefighter (EFF)/Administrative Determined (AD), personnel must undergo background screening by post security prior to gaining access on Fort Wainwright.
- Fort Wainwright Garrison Security recently informed BLM AFS that it has not been in compliance with the security screening for training and mobilizations of EFF/AD crews going to the Lower 48.
- Individuals with a criminal history of assault or sexual misconduct convictions may be denied access to Fort Wainwright. If the individual lists certain convictions they will be given an explanatory cover letter and a copy of the Fort Wainwright access waiver request.
- This Post Access Denial Waiver Application requires supporting court documentation and could take up to 30 days to process.
- Fort Wainwright security will review each waiver and grant access on a case-by-case basis.
- Persons granted a waiver will be able to access Fort Wainwright for the fire season unless another disqualifying conviction occurs.
- Fort Wainwright security may also outright deny access based on more severe criminal convictions.
- EFF/AD choosing not to fill out the waiver application will not be hired by BLM AFS.
- BLM AFS will use the AFS/DOF job application filled out by EFF/AD at refresher training and Work Capacity Text (WCT/pack test) in the spring. The form asks whether the potential hire has any felony or misdemeanor convictions.
- This would give BLM AFS a way of detecting advanced screening requirements well ahead of fire season and give EFF/AD more time to apply for a waiver.
- Once cleared, individuals can access for Fort Wainwright by presenting a federally recognized identification card such tribal identification card.
- If it is discovered through a subsequent background screening that an EFF/AD did not initially disclose their criminal convictions on the annual job application they will be permanently dropped from the program.

# **Important Points of Health Screening Questionnaire**

- BLM Alaska Fire Service Emergency Firefighters/Administratively Determined (EFF/AD) wildland firefighters must need to complete the new Department of Interior Medical Standards Program Health Screening Questionnaire and get medically cleared before they can do the Work Capacity Test (WCT/pack test) at the light, moderate, or arduous levels this spring.
- Questionnaires submitted to AFS either by fax, email, or mail cannot be postmarked later than March 5.
- Medical examinations are required for Department of Interior and U.S. Forest Service wildland firefighters performing arduous duties in accordance. BLM AFS was granted a waiver excluding EFF/AD firefighters from this requirement.
- The requirement was implemented to reduce injury and illness while doing WCTs and while working on wildfires.
- Next year all federal EFF/AD performing arduous duties may be required to pass a medical examination.
- BLM AFS personnel will review completed HSQs and determine clearances required in order to participate in the WCT. If the person is cleared, no further action is necessary and they will receive a "Certificate of Clearance for Work Capacity Test" in the mail prior to the scheduled WCT.
- This certificate is required in order to participate in the WCT.
- For EFF/AD firefighters not cleared through the screening questionnaire, BLM AFS personnel will work with the applicant to schedule a medical exam.
- The physician administering the exam will make the final determination whether the individual is cleared for the pack test that is required in order to work as a wildland firefighter.
- There is a waiver process if someone is not cleared by the physician.
- The BLM AFS is working on contracts with medical facilities in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kotzebue, Nome and Bethel to provide exams.
- BLM AFS will not cover transportation costs for the physicals.
- BLM AFS will not issue red cards for individuals if they have not met DOI Medical Standards Program requirements.



# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR Proposed Region

