



Memorandum

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Director

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Subject: Job Family and Category Review of Wildland Fire and Resource Technicians I - V

Introduction:

Pursuant to Article 17.02 of the General Government Unit collective bargaining agreement, ASEA's requests for FY2015 included a concern over inequities involving the Wildland Fire and Resource Technician series. This inequity was believed to originate from the choice of job family which was not perceived to be adequate for the wildland firefighting work. In addition, ASEA was critical of the Clerical/Technical/Paraprofessional categorization of the series in the State's Classification Outline. The union provided recommendations for a different job family and class outline category. A review was undertaken by Classification to exclusively re-examine the appropriateness of the existing Natural Resources and Forestry job family, as well as the designation as "technical" work.

Scope of the Review:

The job classes affected by the review are the Wildland Fire and Resource Technicians I, II, III, IV, and V. These consist of the entry/trainee, developmental, journey, lead, and advanced job classes. The 105 positions currently allocated to the series are almost exclusively seasonal full-time positions in the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry.

It should be noted that this was requested and conducted as a *limited review* – as opposed to a comprehensive Classification study. It *excludes* new data gathering, the drafting or revision of class specifications, allocation of positions, and salary analysis. This review was carried out by examining

the known nature of the work – as described in the existing class specifications and archived study documents.

Job Family Review:

The State's Classification Outline¹ is the hierarchy by which various job classes and class series are sorted into occupational groups and job families. Occupational groups consist of job families that encompass relatively broad occupations, professions, or activities. Each job family gathers together classes and class series that are related as to the nature of the work performed, which may be shown by such elements as the subject matter, profession, or occupation. Typically, for all job classes in a job family, initial preparation for employment is similar and the classes exhibit a logical relationship for career progression. This allows job classes within a job family to be treated similarly for purposes of personnel administration.

Job Family Options:

The Wildland Fire and Resource Technician series is currently in the PH Biological Sciences occupational group. This group includes families of classes that advise on, administer, supervise or perform research, development, management, conservation, protection, inspection, or related work concerned with life organisms and their environment. The PH occupational group includes the PH01 Fish and Wildlife, PH02 Agriculture, PH03 Natural Resources and Forestry, and PH04 Parks job families.

The **PH03 Natural Resources and Forestry** is the existing job family placement of the Wildland Fire and Resource Technicians. This job family description articulates inclusion of:

"[...] classes of positions that advise on, administer, supervise or perform work related to land, forest and natural resource management, leasing, development, production, conservation, and protection. Initial preparation for employment is typically through advanced education in natural resource management with subsequent career progression based on progressively responsible experience."

In addition to the Wildland Fire Resource Technicians I through V, the PH03 job family also includes series such as the Natural Resource Technicians I-III, Natural Resource Specialists I-V, Natural Resource Managers I-III, Foresters I-V, and the Wildland Fire Support Services I-V.

ASEA recommended that the Wildland Fire and Resource Technicians be placed in the **PJ02 Fire Fighting and Inspection** job family instead. This family is part of the PJ Police, Fire Fighters, and Corrections occupational group, which is defined as a group of families of classes that advise on, administer, supervise or perform law enforcement, firefighting, public protection, corrections, or probation or parole work. It consists of the PJ01 Law Enforcement, PJ02 Fire Fighting and Inspection, PJ03 Corrections, and PJ04 Probation and Parole job families.

¹ The most recent Classification Outline is available at:
<http://doa.alaska.gov/dop/fileadmin/Classification/pdf/ClassOutline.pdf>

PJ02 is defined as a job family that includes:

“[...] classes of positions that advise on, administer, supervise or perform work involved in fighting fires and maintaining firefighting equipment; inspecting for fire hazards; and developing plans, procedures, and standards concerned with fire prevention. Initial preparation for employment is typically through specialized training in firefighting with subsequent career progression based on progressively responsible experience.”

PJ02 currently incorporates job classes such as the Airport Police & Fire Officer I-VI, Fire Training Specialist, Deputy Fire Marshal I-II, the Building Plans Examiner I-II, and the TransAlaska Pipeline Fire Safety Specialist. At the time of the Forestry Technician Study the PJ02 job family, in addition, included the Aircraft Rescue & Firefighting Specialists series I-IV, but this series has since been abolished.²

Job Family Analysis:

Any one job class will incorporate a range of work duties, which is why the governing classification principle is that the preponderant duties and responsibilities of a position are the basis for its classification. The work and activities described in the Wildland Fire and Resource Technician specifications indicate more than one subject matter and more than one possible occupation. This is due to the existing specification design and makes for a less obvious choice of job family for the classes.

It was found that the class specifications were written for mixed positions to specifically and flexibly adapt to a body of work that is characteristically seasonal and only present with the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry. The specifications make a distinction in describing duties related to, or in support of, the Fire Management Program or the Forest Resource Management Program. As a result, these had to be examined further:

Fire Management Program work is understood to include duties that are directly related to or in support of fire suppression, preparedness, prevention, and enforcement functions. Duties can include work performed to control and extinguish wildfires; activities that support, maintain, and enhance fire management capabilities and reduce the number of fire incidents; and duties performed to minimize human-caused wildfires primarily through education and enforcing burning regulations.

In the **Forest Resource Program** work is identified as support work directly related to resource management; generally field work performed in support of specific program areas such as forest management, forest practices, forest stewardship, forest health, and community forestry programs and projects. This may involve such duties as collecting and recording forest data, recording forest measurements such as tree heights, diameter, and age, identifying tree species, mapping and planting, and learning and applying timber sale terms and techniques.

² Abolished effective April 2, 2013

The class specifications explicitly clarified that while majority of duties may be found in one of the two programs duty assignments may include work, as described above, in both programs.

Analysis of the specifications showed that the nature of the work that can be allocated to the series can vary considerably. Meanwhile, the specifications offer no indication that duties in one of the two program areas are intended to weigh heavier than duties in the other program area. The most characteristic duties performed by levels I through IV of the series greatly *depend*, based on the program that a particular position is assigned to. This fact is demonstrated by two separate lists of illustrative duties provided in the Examples of Duties section of most levels in the series.³

Similarly, the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) sections in general provide much more detail of the fire suppression and fire behavior subject matter than of the forest resource management field, but ultimately the specifications do define requisite KSAs in both program areas as well.⁴

Overall, the specifications more robustly identify duties and minimum requirements characteristic of the fire management work. However, it was found that a position's program focus can ultimately control some key entry requirements, such as Red Card, a credential attesting to the qualifications needed for involvement during wildland fire incidents managed by the State. An absolute requirement for a Red Card exists only for positions with a fire management focus. This helps confirm that in this class series, the subject matter *varies* with the result that not all positions can be identified by the "wildland firefighting" occupation, which otherwise could help pinpoint the appropriate job family. Consequently, regardless of how any one position's duties are formulated, the job classes are defined to incorporate a spectrum of responsibilities in two different subject areas, hence requiring the job family determination to take into account work performed under both programs.

Review of the last study documentation showed that keeping the work of those in the fire management program and the resource management program combined was a deliberate decision with focus on the commonalities, such as the facets of the nature of the work shared by *all* positions.⁵ It was acknowledged that at the time of the classification study the majority of the Forest Technicians (predecessor title) performed work in the Fire Management Program, but it was likewise stressed that technical forestry work existed in the Resource Program as well. The common ground for all positions was identified as:

³ The Wildland Fire and Resource Technician V is different in that it specifies a distinct focus on fire operations and establishes that all positions allocated at this level are to be part of the Fire Management Program.

⁴ As an example, the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities section of the journey level (WFRT III) calls for "Working knowledge of silviculture, reforestation practices, harvest systems and management objectives" and also "Working knowledge of wildland fire suppression strategy and tactics, and fireline safety practices and procedures."

⁵ Forest Technician Study Memorandum, February 16, 2007

“all [...] provide support to professional Foresters, develop and exercise practical knowledge of forestry management methods and procedures to perform duties, and work in concert with the division’s mission to manage, develop, and protect forest resources[.]”

Having a clearer understanding of the specification design and decisions behind them provides perspective in the differences between the two job family options, essentially, the breadth of scope of work that can be placed under each family. The PH03 Natural Resources and Forestry job family focus on “[...] land, forest and natural resource management,[...], development, production, conservation, and protection” closely resembles the Division of Forestry’s mission “to develop, conserve, and enhance Alaska's forests to provide a sustainable supply of forest resources for Alaskans”. Hence, the PH03 job family definition is focused on the work from a resource management perspective. As such, it is able to incorporate firefighting work as part of the efforts needed to accomplish the Division’s mission.

As part of the occupational group for Police, Fire Fighters, and Corrections, PJ02 Fire Fighting and Inspection is more restrictively defined than PH03. The PJ02 job family definition emphasizes the firefighting aspect. All job classes assigned to this family are defined with a primary public safety purpose. The job classes are often highly specialized and this is typically reflected in the entry requirements of each job class. The job classes are either part of the Department of Public Safety or operate under Alaska Police Standards Council certification requirements (e.g. Airport Police and Fire Officer series are part of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities but hold APSC certification requirements). As a result, job classes assigned to the PJ02 job family serve with such a narrowly defined purpose that regular and recurring duties demanding the use of a vastly different subject matter, beyond the field of fire prevention, are naturally precluded.

Career Progression Alternatives

In addition to determining the job family based on the class specification subject matter, a job family typically exhibits a logical relationship for career progression. Consequently, alternative career paths were explored in the respective PH03 and PJ02 job families that could be based solely on Wildland Fire and Resource Technician experience.

Detailed analysis of all of the class series’ minimum requirements in each of the job families revealed that experience in the Wildland Fire and Resource Technician job classes could not be shown to provide a straightforward avenue for career progression within the PJ02 job family. The experience gained in the series (in either the Fire Management or Resource Management program) does not, on its own merits, help someone qualify for advancement into other class series in PJ02, largely due to the high level of specialization of most job classes in the Fire Fighting and Inspection job family. In stark contrast, several of the class series in PH03 expressly recognize the Wildland Fire and Resource Technician work (or the precursor Forest Technician job title) as either fully or partially valid, qualifying experience. Therefore, the PH03 job family offers Wildland Fire and Resource

Technicians several avenues for career advancement and progression into other class series, including into professional series, such as the Foresters.

Changes Require Due Deference

Lastly, a point might be argued that a significant portion of the work performed by some Wildland Fire and Resource Technicians as part of the Fire Management Program is strictly or exclusively wildland firefighting. True as that may be, decisions made through comprehensive classification studies must be given due deference and decisions must be based on the class specifications.

To overturn the 2007 Forestry Study decision (that placed the class series in the current job family) and move the class series under another job family would require establishing that placement under a different job family results in an improvement that more accurately characterizes *all* of the nature of the work, as defined in the class specifications. Instead, it has been established that a portion of the work described in the specifications could potentially be better placed under a different job family - if the primary purpose of the job classes and definitions in the specifications supported that. It has also been established that another portion of the work is not appropriate for placement under the PJ02 job family. If wildland firefighting existed for the sake of public safety only and this body of work was exclusively reflected in the specifications, placement under the PJ02 Fire Fighting job family might be a valid option. This is not the case at the moment of this writing. Analysis proved that these job classes were formulated with a much broader range of work in mind. A title change from Forestry Technicians (precursor title) to a title that accentuates work in both program areas – Wildland Fire *and* Resource Technicians – is another way this was demonstrated in the most recent study.

Given the deliberate action to keep the work combined to incorporate technical support to the Foresters in the Forestry Resource Program and better serve the Division's mission, it is not feasible to move the series to the Fire Fighting and Inspection job family without simultaneously excluding a portion of the work described in the specifications. Instead, the Natural Resources and Forestry job family definition continues to be ample enough for all of the work described under the existing class specifications, leading to the conclusion that the PH03 job family is the only appropriate job family at this time.

Class Outline Category

The Classification Outline Categories are an internal tool used for personnel administration purposes and are designated by A, B, C, or D in the Classification Outline.

These categories are used to further refine the broader aggregation of the nature of the work found in job families. The category thereby indicates the type of work performed by a job class in each job family based on the primary objective of the job class, as defined in the class specifications. The category codes, names, and descriptions are the following:

A Clerical/Technical/Paraprofessional: Work involving processing data, normally initiated elsewhere, that is subject to verification, revision, correction, and forwarding for action or substantial elements of the work of a professional, scientific, or administrative field, typically performed in a supportive role. The work typically requires contact with the general public, the ability to follow specific procedures, explain, interpret, and apply established policies and procedures, and retrieve records and related information.

B Professional/Managerial: Work involving the exercise of creative, analytical, evaluative, and interpretive ability with discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility for the application of an organized body of knowledge that requires a range and depth of specialized and theoretical knowledge of principles, concepts, and practices that is constantly studied to improve data, materials, and methods or involving the primary responsibility for planning, organizing, directing, and controlling resources and program delivery.

C Skilled Craft/Labor: Work involving repetitive operations using physical skill and energy. The work requires a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of the processes involved which is typically acquired through on-the-job training and experience or through apprenticeship or other formal training program.

D First Responder: Work involving providing for the safety and security of the public and protection from destructive forces. The work requires specialized knowledge and training to enforce laws and respond to situations endangering life or property.

Class Outline Category Analysis:

Reviewing the appropriateness of the selected category revealed the importance of clearly understood concepts. The above definitions are used exclusively for Classification purposes.

It should be noted that the combination of several groupings (such as clerical, technical, and paraprofessional) into each of the first three categories (A, B, and C) makes for broader category descriptions making it necessary to also observe individual definitions closer, such as the term technical. In contrast, even if the total number of positions is large, the responsibilities of the State of Alaska lead to a fairly limited number of job classes being included under category D.

While some overlap exists, a different context can generate a different concept than what is intended for Classification purposes. Varying definitions of the term “technical work” illustrate this. During the 2007 Forest Technician Study the Wildland Fire and Resource Technicians were analyzed and determined to be part of Category A as “technical work” (different from clerical). Review of the 2007 Study Memoranda shows it was explicitly clarified that in this particular context the term “technical” was being used in conformance with the following standard Classification definition:

“Work typically associated with and supportive of a professional or administrative field that involves extensive practical knowledge gained through experience and/or specific training. Work in these occupations

may involve substantial elements of the work of the professional and/or administrative field, but requires less than full knowledge of the field involved. Employees carry out tasks, methods, procedures, and computations that are covered by established precedents or guidelines and often require a high degree of skill, care, and precision.”

Simply stated, “technical work” during the Forest Technician Study was selected, as is needed in a job analysis context, to differentiate this body of work from a professional series. The intent was to highlight the common features of the work performed by *all* Wildland Fire and Resource Technician positions and designate the job classes as a sub-professional class series in the field of forestry, established primarily to provide a support function to the mission of the Division of Forestry and to a central professional class series of that division, the Foresters, which were also requested to be studied.

Similarly, the term “First Responder” is different for job analysis purposes than for other common uses, such as that of the Federal Labor Standards Act (centered on defining overtime eligibility instead). As an internal tool for Classification, the State of Alaska uses the term “First Responder” to differentiate those job classes with an exclusive public safety objective that are directly contacted through the 911 emergency phone lines or in equivalent manner with an immediate response duty.

The outcome is that “First Responders” with the State of Alaska correspond primarily to a police or correctional function. The vast majority of job classes in category D hold Alaska Police Standards Certification or partial commission as a police officer and it is not unusual for most positions in these job classes to be in separate salary schedules as members of specialized bargaining units dedicated to public safety.

Firefighting as a state-provided service has historically been of limited extent. In particular, structural firefighting has typically been the responsibility of municipalities and local city departments. As a result, no job classes have been exclusively defined as ‘firefighters’ in the State of Alaska classified service.

In addition, the response and responsibilities assumed of structural firefighters have typically differed from the response and responsibilities of those assigned to fight wildland fires on behalf of the State of Alaska. Wildland fires in Alaska are handled in accordance with four different protection levels: *critical, full, modified, or limited*. According to public documents disseminated by the Division of Forestry⁶, the response level is based on the premise that the cost of the suppression effort be commensurate with the values identified for protection. Accordingly, wildland fire response results in *varying responses* by the Division of Forestry. Certainly, some fires can demand responding with a great deal of urgency and results in saving lives. However, it can also involve monitoring and

⁶ Alaska’s Wildland Fire Guide, p. 3. Issued by the AK Division of Forestry Information Office (2013)
http://forestry.alaska.gov/pdfs/Alaska_Wildland_Fire_Guide_2013.pdf

deciding to respond depending on environmental conditions, or the response may be very limited, consisting of letting a fire function in its ecological role and letting it run its course.

A number of job classes with the State of Alaska are known to play vital roles during emergencies and disasters and can be viewed as responders. However, it is not the participation by incumbents during response efforts that determine if their entire job class is to be viewed as *First* Responders under the Classification Outline. For this objective, it is whether the primary purpose of a job class establishes a responsibility for the safety of the public in such a way that it mandates the job class to serve as *first* responders. As previously stated, the Wildland Fire and Resource Technician job classes were deliberately defined broadly to meet the needs of the agency. As such, the Wildland Fire and Resource Technician job classes combine both wildland fire management *and* resource management. Because of this, the class definitions are centered on the mission of the Division of Forestry, which ultimately is *not* public safety, but the management of a vital resource to the State. This distinction is crucial because it allows two things that are inconsistent with category D First Responders. First, it allows some positions (likely those with a resource-management focus) the option of a less involved role in the wildland fires (exemplified by the lack of a red card requirement). Secondly, it allows the positions involved in wildland fire suppression efforts the option of a pre-planned response in terms of critical, full, modified, or limited protection levels. This means that there is no requirement for *all* positions in these job classes to have a fundamental and immediate responsibility to respond to every incident.

The primary purpose of the existent specifications was not found to support the Wildland Fire and Resource Technicians being categorized as First Responders for the purposes of Classification. The combined work with a varying primary purpose (depending on the program a position supports) and the ability of the Division to pre-plan and vary its responses to incidents is inconsistent with a primary public safety objective. Instead, an overarching goal to support the mission of the Division of Forestry, in a sub-professional capacity that is defined as technical work for Classification purposes, leads the job classes to be appropriately categorized under the class outline category A.

Job Family Effect on Salary Alignment

A potentially inadequate choice of job family and class outline category were perceived to be the reason for concern, as the effect of the existing choices were assumed to have a negative impact on the internal alignment process used for pay range determination.

Examining the job family and class outline category also revealed that the 2007 study addressed the uniqueness of the Wildland Fire and Resource Technician job classes by broadening the internal salary alignment process beyond the job family. As standard practice would dictate, comparisons were drawn to align salaries within the PH03 Natural Resources and Forestry job family first, but to ensure full compensatory consideration and due to a limited number of comparable job classes in this job family the list of comparable classes was expanded to include classes both inside and outside the PH Biological Sciences occupational group. Particular attention was given to the firefighting and

Kate Sheehan, Director
July 10, 2015
Page 10

emergency response aspects of the work. Parallels were ultimately drawn to job classes that existed at the time in both the PD04 Emergency Planning and Response job family and to the PJ02 Fire Fighting and Inspection job families. The Wildland Fire and Resource Technician III job class in the 2007 study was found to be closely aligned with the journey level of the Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Specialist in the PJ02 job family. Both classes were understood to require specific and extensive training, both required significant programmatic knowledge, judgment, and discretion to make sound decisions, and the decisions and actions of incumbents in both job classes often had a high consequence of error.

Ultimately, it should be noted, the current salary ranges for the Wildland Fire and Resource Technicians were established through internal alignment with other job classes in three different job families; the PH03, PD04, and PJ02. This approach counterbalanced different aspects of the nature of the work of the series and minimized the impact of any one job family while providing for internal consistency.

Conclusion:

A limited review was undertaken by Classification to re-examine the existing Wildland Fire and Resource Technician class specifications and the appropriateness of the current job family and of the Classification Outline category.

No changes were found necessary through this review.

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