



FireGeneration
Collaborative

Policy Recommendations

- **Section 1: A High-Performing and Inclusive Fire Workforce**
- **Section 2: Involvement, Education, and Training of the Next Generation**

Section 1: A High-Performing and Inclusive Fire Workforce

1) Support Indigenous Rights to Revitalize Cultural Management Practices In and Beyond Workforce Frameworks

Indigenous people across tribes and cultures have stewarded the landscapes and bioregions called the United States since time before memory, and are facing [highly disproportionate](#) health and cultural impacts as a result of the fire management crisis.

Current management systems and workforce requirements [obstruct the eco-cultural stewardship roles](#) that have developed over thousands of years across tribes and nations; managed by Indigenous women, elders, youth, and families. This inhibits the ability of high-risk communities to efficiently protect themselves and retain land through the use of fire, and disrupts the generational transfer of tradition and knowledge.

Therefore, structural barriers not only exacerbate the existential threat that modern ecological crises pose to tribal cultures which often are intertwined with ecosystems, but these barriers further hold back Traditional Ecological Knowledge systems and Indigenous Science from the critical roles they can play in fire management and community safety solutions for all people.

It is a basic responsibility for Congress and Federal Agencies to respond to these disproportionate impacts, to further develop accountability to Indigenous peoples, and to unlock vital tools and expertise to solve the crisis at hand.

Recommendations

To remove systemic barriers for Indigenous communities in the fire management workforce, Congress should direct Federal Land Management Agencies and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group to:

- **Develop pathways** that allow cultural and prescribed burning experience and knowledge to be applied towards fire management certifications and qualifications, on parity with fire suppression experience.
- **Partner with Indigenous cultural fire practitioners** to reevaluate what physical fitness requirements and qualifications should be necessary to participate in various kinds of prescribed and cultural fire activities, and what additional access, roles and qualifications can be developed to overcome barriers that structurally discriminate against youth and family intergenerational involvement and the leadership of women and elders.
- **Establish a new Indigenous Management Committee** under the list of NWCG committees to oversee the evolution of these relevant pathways.
 - Ensure Indigenous community members have leadership in this committee.

To ensure that existing workforce programs incorporate Indigenous knowledge, Congress should direct the National Wildfire Coordinating Group and member agencies to:

- Identify curricula where **historical and ecological contexts for fire management** can be incorporated, examples may include but not limited to NWCG's S-130 Firefighter Training and the RT-130 Wildland Fire Safety Training Annual Refresher Intent.
- **Jointly develop curricula** concerning historical and ecological context for fire management **with Indigenous Cultural Fire Practitioners**, focusing on ecological aspects of fire, legacies of Indigenous fire stewardship, consequences of fire exclusion, and how ancestral sites can be protected during suppression.
 - Congress and participating agencies should ensure that funds are allocated to compensate Cultural Fire Practitioners for their contributions to these efforts.
- Ensure that the new curriculum describes **how members of the wildland fire workforce can support Indigenous management** as well as implement ecological principles into current practices.

2) Remove Barriers to a High-Performing Workforce that is Inclusive of Women and Underrepresented Communities

Women [face barriers to full inclusion and advancement](#) in land management, including the male-dominated wildland fire workforce. A [Forest Service survey](#) found that three in four women report having “felt out of place at work because of their gender” and that women in

leadership roles “face challenges finding respect.” In the workforce, chronic gender discrimination and harassment is [well-documented](#).

[Reports](#) on demographics and barriers in the wildland fire show that the workforce has a long way to go to be representative of the country, in both ethnicity and gender makeup, and could address capacity issues by engaging people and communities that it isn’t currently. Needed progress includes both demographics and also workplace culture. A third of [surveyed Forest Service employees](#) believed that personal characteristics hindered career advancement in wildland fire.

These systemic barriers must be overcome to create pathways for a more inclusive fire management workforce that respects and takes advantage of the diversity of talent, knowledge, and experience that America has to offer.

To remove systemic barriers for women and underrepresented communities in the fire management workforce, Congress should direct Federal Agencies and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group to:

- **Address sexism, racism, harassment, and homophobia in the workforce** by incorporating elements addressing each of these into the [NWCG L-180 Human Factors in the Wildland Fire Service](#) training, and ensure that this curriculum is received by all contract crews and other fire camp employees who may not receive similar agency training.
- **Set expectations** that all supervisors across agencies and contract crews communicate **clear zero-tolerance policies** for harassment or behavior related to sexism, racism, and homophobia, and establish secure systems for reporting misconduct with no fear of job or other reprisal.
- Create a subcommittee under the NWCG Training Delivery Committee that is titled the **“Equitable and Inclusive Training” subcommittee**
 - Ensure this subcommittee is open to leadership and input from non-agency community members in wildland fire.
 - Ensure the committee has a designated focus on leveraging training to equip workforce members with the knowledge and responsibility to foster a positive, inclusive workplace that addresses interpersonal harms experienced by people of underrepresented backgrounds in wildland fire.

Section 2:

Involvement, Education, and Training of the Next Generation

1) Invest in Intergenerational Decision Making as a Strategic Asset for Sustainable and Collaborative Results

Intergenerational decision-making is not just a moral imperative for modern leadership, but is also a strategic asset in the fire and land management space.

Younger generations will bear the long-term consequences of intensifying climate and fire disasters, making it critical to include their perspectives in shaping policies that affect their future. Decision-making access is a [core principle of environmental justice](#), and younger generations have long been excluded from these spaces.

Further, land management agencies and the fire workforce face continued challenges of staying relevant, meeting capacity needs, transferring institutional knowledge, and implementing long-term solutions. Intergenerational decision-making fosters innovative, future-focused thinking from young leaders, and connects decision-making with the workforce and the rising management who are depended on to implement solutions.

There is [local](#), [regional](#), and [federal precedent](#) for establishing intergenerational decision-making in climate, disaster-response, and environmental management areas. Supporting this implementation in Federal Land Management Agencies and Committees is a realization of the mission embedded in the agencies' very DNA; meeting the needs of present and future generations, by engaging with the young people who stand in both worlds.

Recommendations

To implement intergenerational decision making in relevant fire management bodies and processes, Congress should:

- Direct the Department of Interior and the US Forest Service to **set up National Youth Commissions**, and allocate appropriate funds to facilitate their operation.
 - Commissions shall be involved in agency decision-making where young and future generations face disproportionate impacts.
 - Commissions shall be involved in shaping agency strategies to expand capacity and engage young people in community partnerships and workforces
 - Youth Commissioners serve 1-2 year terms with the designated agencies, are paid for their efforts, and serve in a part-time capacity

- To model the principles, and create effective programs, the design of commissions should take place in equal partnership and consultation with groups that focus on bridging young generations with fire management, particularly the John Freemuth Student Congress on Wildland Fire and the FireGeneration Collaborative
- Congress should direct the USDA and DOI Departments that all **advisory committees or commissions** making recommendations on the future of fire and land management or the development of related workforces must include **representation for young generations** among the designated commission member seats

To ensure workforce trainings remain relevant to the workforces they are targeted to,
Congress should:

- Direct the Federal Land Management Agencies and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) to **create a designated seat for a young person** under the age of 25 on the NWCG Executive Board.

2) Leverage Education as a Floodgate for Needed Cultural and Workforce Development to Live with Fire

Conventional approaches to workforce recruitment and retention issues focus primarily on pay and benefits. This method stops short of reckoning with the lack of adequate pathways into land and fire management, the lack of strong relationships between management organizations and communities, and the growing cultural distance between young generations and the landscapes they live in.

Fire management must tap into the capacity of younger generations and the educational system to be an impetus for change, and to facilitate transformational shifts in the way that future generations live with fire.

Such an approach would help reach the root of workforce recruitment and retention challenges, at costs that are still only a drop in the bucket compared to the [estimated tens to hundreds of billions of dollars](#) that this crisis costs communities every year.

Recommendations

To begin integrating the addressing of the fire management crisis in the education system,
Congress should:

- **Direct the USDA to pilot and fund the establishment of an educational development committee** focused on a fire-prone or fire-adapted state, tasked with creating a plan for how public schools and the educational system in that area can collaborate with land managers and qualification organizations to prepare next generations of students for the climate and wildfire management crises
 - The committee shall consist of members from the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG), parent and student advocacy groups, community program managers, tribal representatives, fire ecology organizations, state or federal land managers, and school administrators
 - The committee's primary objective shall be to develop an implementable plan including educational curriculums and programs that is solution-oriented and flexible to local contexts. This curriculum will educate and engage students at appropriate age levels on the significance of maintaining healthy landscapes, the crises faced by communities and lands, and how young people can effectively contribute to addressing these issues.
 - Curriculum topics shall include fire ecology, forest health, Indigenous management history, Indigenous cultural revitalization, fire exclusion, active forest management, cultural and prescribed burning, and intersections between climate events and wildland fire.
 - Examples of priorities for various age levels include:
 - For elementary and middle school students, a focus on connecting them with local landscapes, community organizations, and land managers. Field trips and age-appropriate exploration of the above topics will be incorporated.
 - For high school and college students, a focus on hands-on experiences and pathways related to forest stewardship, prescribed and cultural burn management, and community and infrastructure resilience. Activities include field trips, guest lectures, and organized career talks.
- By starting with a pilot program on education, Congress can ensure a targeted and iterative approach to expanding education to address wildfire management crises. This phased implementation allows for valuable testing, assessment, and refinement of the curriculum on a smaller scale before considering expansion.

- **Allocate 50 million dollars to the USDA and DOI in funding designated for piloting fire management programs in schools** with five year initial operating budgets, dedicated program leads, and designated regional and national agency coordination staff at high schools, community colleges, and universities in fire-prone and fire-adapted regions around the West.
 - The mission of these programs shall be to prepare and train young people for proactive ecological fire management, community resilience, public education, and fire response work at the scale this crisis demands.
 - These programs can be modeled after the [Clemson Fire Tigers](#), the [Alabama A&M Firedawgs](#), and the [Oregon Conservation Corps](#), which provide young people with practical experience and qualifications in prescribed burning, home hardening, defensible space, fire response, and community resilience.
 - In addition to supporting operational access and coordination with agencies in prescribed fire and fire response operations for program participants, agency coordination staff will be tasked with developing scalable models for implementing these programs at additional schools.
 - Funds shall specifically target marginalized and most-impacted communities, such as schools serving rural and minority populations (i.e., Indigenous and Latinx students), as well as regions deemed of greatest fire risk with low socioeconomic capacity.
 - Programs serving primarily Indigenous students shall prioritize Indigenous staff for program leads, and partner with local tribes to ensure the program reflects not only operational but cultural learning objectives for participants.