SO YOU WANT TO BE A FIREFIGHTER.....

During firefighting efforts, the wildland firefighter gets a variety of assignments. A firefighter can be a member of an engine crew, a smokejumper crew, a helicopter crew, or an organized handcrew. Firefighters in these positions often do project work- such as thinning, fuels management, and other work- when not on actual fire assignment. Crews often travel to other states and regions to support fire management throughout the United States, and they occasionally receive international assignments.

CREWS:

Engine Crew: The engine crew specializes in initial attack on wildland fires. Engine crews work with specialized firefighting equipment and perform many strenuous activities, including construction of fireline with handtools, hose lays, burnout operations, and mopping up hotspots near the fire's edge.

Handcrew: A handcrew is a 20-person organized team; they build fireline, burn out fire areas, and mop up after the fire using chainsaws and handtools such as Pulaskis and shovels. They are a diverse team of career and temporary agency employees with solid reputations as multi-skilled professional firefighters. Hotshots draw specialized assignments that reflect their higher levels of experience and training, and they are often dispatched nationwide from the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho. These crews are interagency shared resources. Hotshot crews require a high level of professionalism, teamwork, physical fitness, and motivation.

Smokejumpers: These are specialized firefighters who parachute into remote areas for initial attack on wildland fires. Smokejumpers must be self-reliant and work both independently and as an organized team. Smokejumpers must be in outstanding physical condition and have at least one year of prior firefighting experience.

Helicopter Crew: Helicopter (helitack) crewmembers provide quick response to wildland fires in remote areas. Crewmembers often have previous experience working with helicopters, or may be trained to fill those positions if they've had previous firefighting experience. Some crews specialize in rappel operations (exiting a helicopter via ropes to the ground), and helitack firefighters often work in remote areas transporting cargo, personnel, and other supplies to and from fire areas.

TRAINING AND WORKING CONDITIONS:

Training is designed to provide safety for individual crewmembers and the crew. Classroom and hands-on training are provided, and crewmembers are graded on a pass/fail basis. Participation is required prior to dispatch for fire assignments. Fire assignments often require that firefighters work under arduous and stressful conditions- working in heavy smoke and intense heat, climbing steep and rugged terrain, and working long hours with very little sleep or rest. Firefighters work or live in a dirty environment, and must carry packs and equipment weighing between 40 and 120 pounds. Showers and hot meals are not generally available on a daily basis, and firefighters can be away from their homes and official station for 2 weeks or more. They are often required to be on call, and must leave at a moment's notice.

HOURS AND PAY:

Firefighters are paid on a government pay scale based on the grade level at which they are hired. They generally work an 80-hour/2-week pay period with overtime paid at time-and-a-half for any hours over the regular shift. They have two scheduled days off each week, but those two days are not necessarily together or on a weekend. During fire emergencies, days off may be cancelled. Extended work shifts of 12 or more hours are common.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS:

Wildland firefighting can be extremely arduous, and firefighters must report to work in good physical condition. Anyone assigned to a firefighter position must pass a physical examination, a pre-employment drug screen, and the Pack Test: the employee must walk 3 miles on flat ground in 45 minutes or less carrying a 45-pound pack. Some jobs (Smokejumpers, Helitack, and Hotshots, for example) require higher standards of physical fitness. Because morale is an important part of the job, keeping fit through exercise and maintaining a good mental outlook helps; it benefits the entire crew when high-stress conditions occur on a fire. Most agencies require firefighters to perform physical fitness training daily when not assigned to a fire.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

Firefighters must report to work on time with the proper equipment. They must be ready, willing, and able to work. They are responsible for supplying personal articles of clothing for work, including several pairs of good quality boot socks, towels, t-shirts, a warm jacket or sweatshirt, and personal items including sunscreen, toothpaste, and long underwear. Leather boots- at least eight inches high with a lug sole and without steel toes- are mandatory. Firefighters must be able to carry everything they bring. When they report to work, they are issued fire gear ranging from protective clothing and backpacks to individual fireline equipment. Keeping assigned equipment in working order during the fire season is a firefighter's personal responsibility.

WHERE DO I SIGN UP?

It is best to inquire about seasonal positions in December and January. Contact your local BLM office for further information. You can also access information about fire jobs with the Bureau of Land Management around the nation through the internet at the site www.nifc.gov. Currently all applications for temporary fire jobs with the BLM must be submitted using the BLM's on-line application process known as Quickhire. Links to this site may also be found at the website given above.

Bureau of
Land Management
Nevada

Opportunities in Fire Management

Wildland firefighting is an exciting occupation. While it involves specialized training, hard work, long hours under adverse and hazardous conditions, it can also be the most rewarding career possible for the right person. Firefighters constantly travel to other areas of the country to fight fire, and spend their office time outdoors with a group of co-workers that work very hard and have a level of commitment uncommon to most other professions. If you are a hard worker, in good physical shape, and are willing to work long hours and travel for extended periods of time, here are some things to help you "get your foot in the door":

There are several ways to get involved in fire management in Nevada or other states. If you are interested in fighting fire on an engine crew, Helitack crew, or Hotshot/handcrew, there are several options:

- For the Federal Government, seasonal employees are hired February through March for that year's fire season. To apply, access the website **www.nc.blm.gov/jobs.** This is the **Quickhire** site- complete the on-line application, and apply for the jobs you are interested in. Most application periods are only open mid-November through mid-January.
- -On-call work as a firefighter- Most agencies are in need of firefighters on an on-call basis. The Bureau of Indian Affairs recruits in the spring for firefighters, and other agencies also have the option to use on-call firefighters. Contact your local BLM or BIA office for assistance.
- For the Nevada Division of Forestry, obtain an application from the Employment Security office nearest you. Specify "seasonal firefighter" on the application and submit it to the Employment Security office or NDF office nearest to you by March 15th.

If you would like to help with the firefighting effort, but aren't interested in line positions, there are several other options. You may contact your local BLM or USFS office for more information. Positions of this nature include warehouse worker, dispatcher, driver, fire camp help, or lookout to name a few. Most positions of this type are also on-call.

If you are interested in making wildland firefighting your career, here are some suggestions to give you an edge:

- College courses: several colleges and universities offer courses and even degrees in wildland firefighting or related fields. University of Nevada-Reno offers a Fire Science degree, as does Truckee Meadows Community College among others. If you just want basic courses to help you get started, classes to look for should include S-110/S-130/S-190. This is commonly referred to as "rookie" training, or "Basic Wildland Firefighter" training.
- Explore all options with all agencies: some agencies may not offer you a full-time job, but may be able to provide you with the opportunity to attend rookie training. Sometimes just working in a non-firefighting position with the fire management program will also help.
- Get involved with your local Volunteer Fire Department: In addition to serving as a structural fire department, many VFD's also are heavily involved with wildland firefighting. Most will provide training and on-the-job experience that will provide a step up on your competition.

Good luck- competition for firefighting jobs is fierce; however, agencies are always on the lookout for strong, hard-working individuals.

About Elko, Nevada

The Elko District encompasses 12.5 million acres, and has fire suppression responsibility on 7.5 million acres. Assistance is also provided to numerous cooperating agencies such as the Nevada Division of Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and numerous county, tribal and municipal governments. Within its borders lie several ranger districts of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, including the Ruby Mountains Wilderness and the Jarbidge Wilderness, as well as the Ruby Marshes National Wildlife Refuge that is home to over 200 different species of birds. The BLM also administers 10 Wilderness Study Areas for a total of over 272,000 acres.

The Elko Field Office's fire suppression organization currently employs approximately 40 employees, and consists of four stations (Elko, Carlin, Wells, and Midas), ten 4x4 heavy engines, one water tender, three Fire Operations Supervisors, an Interagency Hotshot crew, and a type 3 helicopter with Helitack crew. In addition to these suppression resources, the Elko Interagency Dispatch Center handles all-risk dispatch duties for five agencies, and an aggressive fuels management program is developing.

The Elko district is considered to be one of the highest fire load Field Offices within the BLM. The District averages 100 fires per season for approximately 40,000 acres, with an average season of June 1- September 15. However, the district has experienced several extreme seasons in a row, averaging 300 fires and 1,000,000 acres burned in 1999 and 2000.

The Elko District has topography typical of the Great Basin high desert, with broad valleys separated by mountain ranges. Elevations range from 4,000 to over 10,000 feet (Nevada is the most mountainous state in the lower 48). Vegetation types range from salt desert shrub communities to sagebrush and perennial grasses, from cheatgrass monoculture to pinyon-juniper woodlands and mixed conifer stands.

Elko County lies in the northeastern corner of Nevada. It's county seat of Elko is a bustling town of about 21,000 people, with an additional 15,000 living in the immediate area. Elko is approximately 230 miles west Of Salt Lake City, Utah, 295 miles northeast of Reno, Nevada, and 255 mile south of Boise, Idaho.

Average precipitation in the area is less than ten inches annually. Average temperatures in the summer are 80-100 degrees, and winter temperatures range from sub-zero to 60 or higher. Snow is common in the winter.

The city of Elko was voted "Best Small Town in America" in 1994. Elko and it's counterpart community of Spring Creek are nestled at the foot of the Ruby Mountains on the Humboldt River. It is home to the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, and lies in the heart of Nevada's cowboy country. Elko and Spring Creek boast 5 pre-schools, 6 elementary schools, 2 junior high schools, 2 high schools, 1 k-12 Christian academy, and hosts Great Basin College a community college offering several 2 and 4 year programs. There are over 60 practicing physicians in the Elko area, and the existing Elko General Hospital will see it's replacement finished in 2001. Elko has a full-service airport with daily flights to numerous cities

Recreational opportunities abound in the Elko area. Hiking, camping, fishing, snowmobiling, mountain biking, rockhounding, and horseback activities are readily available, and the area is home to some of the finest big-game hunting in Nevada. Elk, deer, and antelope hunting are popular, as well as upland and migratory bird hunting. Fifteen minutes from Elko

lies South Fork Reservoir, where fishing and waterskiing are enjoyed each summer.

The local economy is predominantly driven by ranching, gaming, and mining. Elko county is home to the largest gold-producing mines in the nation (in 1997, they produced a combined total of 4.8 million ounces of gold). Elko also has several full-service casinos that offer both excitement and an added bonus to Nevada residents: no state income tax!

Although no government housing is available in Elko, the area is enjoying a "buyers market" situation at the present time. The average price for an 1800 sq. ft. home with three bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and 2-car garage is $125,000, with a broad range of prices and homes available. 3 bedroom apartments rent for approximately $550 per month. Limited government housing is available in Carlin, Midas, and Wells.

Other amenities offered in the community of Elko include numerous city parks, 3 athletic clubs, a municipal indoor/outdoor swimming pool, 6 baseball complexes, 2 golf courses, 8 tennis courts, a skate park, a river walk, a bowling alley, a trap & skeet range, an indoor horse arena, and county fairgrounds.

For more community information, visit the Elko Chamber of Commerce website at www.elkonevada.com. For more information about the Elko Field Office, visit the website at www.nv.blm.gov/elko .