

# Priority Trainee Program Revision

USDA Forest Service  
Northeastern Area  
State and Private Forestry



**Description:** Working within the Interagency Fire Community served by the Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry (NA), the Eastern Area Coordinating Group's Training Working Team (EACG-TWT) is redirecting traditional practices in managing its Priority Trainee (PT) program.

For the last 10 years, agency wildfire programs have offered an open invitation to nominate individuals needing experience assignments to complete performance task books. Nominees were ranked according to an individual scoring design tied to local agency priorities, and then listed according to this ranking on a document provided to the Eastern Area Coordination Center (EACC) and other dispatch points around NA in late winter of each year. Availability of those on the listing was monitored throughout the year, with updated availability routed to all these dispatch centers on an ever shortening cycle, as the local and national incident activity intensified.

With 2,492 individual trainees in the Eastern Area (EA) wildfire workforce, including many with multiple trainee qualifications, it seemed important to assign system priorities within the ranking process, in order to address regional and national position shortfalls. Effective management of the PT program needed linkage to EACG's initiative to strengthen Type 2 Incident Management Teams (IMT) within the EA, that include Minnesota Interagency Incident Command System Teams A, B and C; Bonefeld's T2 Fire Use Team; Fire Department of New York's All-Hazard Type 2; State of Maine Type 2; and the Northeast Compact Type 2.

## Key Issues:

- Members of the EA interagency wildfire community are establishing Priority Trainee rankings that do not align with key shortage positions at either the geographic or national level within the fire workforce.
- EACG-TWT needs to work with Eastern Area Type 2 IMT's to identify present and future shortages, and to identify critical training and qualification goals required for full performance.
- EACG-TWT will analyze the existing data sets of trainees in the EA fire workforce to establish operational strategies to guide future PT selection, and then work to fully qualify these individuals.

## Accomplishments:

- The 2008 invitation to nominate PTs provided for identifying those that are members of EA IMTs. As a result, seven of the 127 nominees for 2008 are members of IMT's.
- With preliminary analysis of EA data showing serious shortages in the logistics and finance sections of existing IMT's, plans have been made to schedule training to address these specific IMT skill shortfalls, and thus improve the functionality of these teams.
- Software modification is being discussed to enable data entry and then sorting on IMT membership from within both the State (IQS) and Federal fire workforce (IQCS) data sets. These software changes will allow IMT leadership and the supervisors of team members to support individual training planning that aligns with needs of the teams, rather than simple pursuit of individual goals.
- In the global view, the entire PT program is moving to establish performance measures, that provide an "outcome focus" to the training management process.

**Future Direction:**

Once the structured approach to workforce training and qualification for the Type 2 Incident Management Teams, has resolved key position shortfalls for trainees, we will be able to direct the same structured workforce management processes to the Type 1 (CIMC) teams and Type 3 local wildfire response teams, and other definable workforce components across NA.

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