

§8901. Forest rangers

1. Appointment. The Director of the Bureau of Forestry shall appoint forest rangers, subject to the Civil Service Law and the State Supervisor of the forest protection unit of the Bureau of Forestry. Rangers assigned to posts at Clayton Lake, St. Pamphile, Estcourt Station, Daaquam, Musquacook Lake, Snare Brook and Baker Lake must be bilingual in French and English.

A. The forest protection unit of the Bureau of Forestry shall employ no fewer than 45 and no more than 50 forest rangers classified as Forest Ranger II to serve as wildfire control specialists and forestry law enforcement officers, and no fewer than 16 forest rangers classified as follows: 3 Regional Rangers, 8 District Rangers, one Forest Fire Prevention Specialist, one Ranger Pilot Supervisor and 3 Ranger Pilots. Each forest ranger and the state supervisor of the forest protection unit of the Bureau of Forestry within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry must meet the training requirements of Title 25, section 2804-L. [PL 2017, c. 456, §1 (AMD).]

B. The state supervisor of the forest protection unit of the Bureau of Forestry, as Chief Forest Ranger, must be appointed from among the forest rangers of the department and must be qualified by training and experience in wildfire protection and law enforcement. In the event that the Chief Forest Ranger is not reappointed, the Chief Forest Ranger has the right to be restored to the position from which the Chief Forest Ranger was promoted or to a position equivalent in salary grade, without impairment of personnel status or the loss of seniority, retirement or other rights to which uninterrupted service in the previous position would have entitled the former Chief Forest Ranger. If service as Chief Forest Ranger is terminated for cause, the right to be restored to that previous or an equivalent position must be determined by the State Civil Service Appeals Board. [PL 2021, c. 34, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 34, §1 (AMD).]

2. Powers and duties. Forest rangers and the state supervisor shall:

A. Subject to supervision of the director, supervise the state wildfire control program, including personnel and facilities of all types; [PL 2013, c. 130, §1 (AMD).]

B. Have the final on-site authority and responsibility for the control of wildfires; [PL 2013, c. 130, §1 (AMD).]

C. Develop and carry out a comprehensive program of wildfire prevention education and training of persons at all levels of command in order to meet supervisory needs during wildfire emergencies; [PL 2013, c. 130, §1 (AMD).]

D. Enforce Title 36, chapter 701 relating to blueberries, all laws relating to forests and forest preservation, laws relating to the Maine Land Use Planning Commission and laws and rules relating to lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Parks and Lands; [PL 2013, c. 130, §1 (AMD); PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §24 (REV).]

E. Investigate and gather evidence regarding the cause of wildfires; [PL 2013, c. 130, §1 (AMD).]

F. Have the authority to set backfires to control wildfires; [PL 2013, c. 130, §1 (AMD).]

G. Carry out such other duties as the director prescribes; and [PL 1989, c. 174, §1 (AMD).]

H. Have rights of access to all lands within the State to carry out the duties they are authorized by law to administer and enforce. Entry into private property under this paragraph is not a trespass. This paragraph does not authorize entry into any building or structure. [PL 1989, c. 174, §2 (NEW).]

Forest rangers and the state supervisor may also exercise the powers in this subsection when appropriate for agricultural and park fires.

[PL 2013, c. 130, §1 (AMD); PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §24 (REV).]

3. Law enforcement powers. In addition to any law enforcement powers expressly provided to forest rangers by another law:

A. Forest rangers and the state supervisor, for the purpose of enforcing Title 36, chapter 701 relating to blueberries, forest and forest preservation laws, laws of the Maine Land Use Planning Commission and laws and rules relating to the lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Parks and Lands, have statewide law enforcement powers equivalent to those of a sheriff, or a sheriff's deputy, in the sheriff's county, including the right to execute or serve criminal and civil violation processes against offenders, make warrantless arrests for crimes, investigate and prosecute offenders, require aid in executing forest ranger duties and deputize temporary aides; [PL 2013, c. 130, §2 (AMD); PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §24 (REV).]

B. The Director of the Bureau of Forestry, at the director's discretion, may authorize forest rangers and the state supervisor while on duty to arrest without a warrant a person who has committed or is committing in the ranger's or supervisor's presence any crime involving the use or threatened use of physical force against a person.

For the purposes of this paragraph, criminal conduct has been committed or is being committed in the presence of a law enforcement officer when one or more of the officer's senses afford that officer personal knowledge of facts that are sufficient to warrant a prudent and cautious law enforcement officer's belief that a crime involving the use or threatened use of physical force against a person is being or has just been committed and that the person arrested has committed or is committing that crime. An arrest made pursuant to this paragraph must be made at the time of the commission of the criminal conduct, or some part thereof, or within a reasonable time thereafter or upon fresh pursuit; and [PL 1999, c. 352, §1 (NEW); PL 2011, c. 657, Pt. W, §7 (REV); PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §23 (REV).]

C. Forest rangers and the state supervisor while on or off duty are authorized to provide assistance in a life-threatening emergency consistent with agency policies and within the scope of individual training. [PL 1999, c. 351, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2013, c. 130, §2 (AMD); PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §§23, 24 (REV).]

3-A. Liability. When a forest ranger or the state supervisor provides assistance under subsection 3, paragraph C, the forest ranger or the state supervisor has the same immunity from tort liability and all the pension, relief, disability, workers' compensation and insurance benefits and any other benefits the forest ranger or the state supervisor enjoys while performing duties under subsection 3, paragraphs A and B.

[PL 1999, c. 352, §2 (NEW).]

4. Definitions. As used in this section, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

A. "Escaped prescribed fire" means an uncontrolled fire on wildland caused by a prescribed fire that escaped control efforts and burned unintended land area. [PL 2013, c. 130, §3 (NEW).]

B. "Escaped wildland fire use" means an out of control fire caused by a wildland fire use that escaped control efforts and burned unintended land area. [PL 2013, c. 130, §3 (NEW).]

C. "Prescribed fire" means a forest or land management practice using fire, applied in a knowledgeable manner to naturally occurring fuels on a specific land area under selected weather conditions to accomplish predetermined, well-defined management objectives. [PL 2013, c. 130, §3 (NEW).]

D. "Wildfire" means an unplanned, unwanted wildland fire including an unauthorized human-caused fire, an escaped wildland fire use, an escaped prescribed fire and any other wildland fire with respect to which the Director of the Bureau of Forestry has determined that the objective is to put the fire out. [PL 2013, c. 130, §3 (NEW); PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §23 (REV).]

E. "Wildland" means an area in which development is essentially nonexistent, except for roads, railroads, powerlines and similar transportation facilities, and structures, if any, are widely scattered. [PL 2013, c. 130, §3 (NEW).]

F. "Wildland fire use" means a management practice using a naturally occurring fire burning forest fuels on wildland that is not immediately controlled. The fire is allowed to burn within a predetermined area and is used to promote certain wilderness or management objectives. [PL 2013, c. 130, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2013, c. 130, §3 (NEW); PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §23 (REV).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1979, c. 545, §3 (NEW). PL 1985, c. 108, §2 (AMD). PL 1985, c. 785, §B76 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 69, §1 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 349, §H11 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 769, §A51 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 816, §§KK14, KK15 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 174, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 652, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 1995, c. 502, §E30 (AMD). PL 1999, c. 155, §A4 (AMD). PL 1999, c. 352, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 2011, c. 657, Pt. W, §7 (REV). PL 2011, c. 657, Pt. X, §7 (AMD). PL 2011, c. 682, §38 (REV). PL 2013, c. 130, §§1-3 (AMD). PL 2013, c. 405, Pt. A, §§23, 24 (REV). PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. Z, §1 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. SS, §1 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 456, §1 (AMD). PL 2021, c. 34, §1 (AMD).

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