

At a Glance

S. 2272, Wildland Firefighter Paycheck Protection Act of 2023

As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs on July 19, 2023

By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2023	2023-2028	2023-2033
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	0	0

Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	0	2,290	not estimated
---	---	-------	---------------

Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2034?	No	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	No
		Mandate Effects	
Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2034?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No

The bill would

- Permanently increase the pay scale for federal wildland firefighters
- Establish premium pay for workers that respond to wildfire incidents
- Require the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to develop and implement policies concerning rest and recuperation for federal wildfire responders

Estimated budgetary effects would mainly stem from

- Increased pay for federal wildland firefighters
- Premium pay for wildfire incident response

Areas of significant uncertainty include

- Identifying the number and length of wildland fire incidents that would result in premium pay for responders

Detailed estimate begins on the next page.



Bill Summary

S. 2272 would permanently increase the pay scale for federal wildland firefighters under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service (within the Department of Agriculture) or the Department of the Interior (DOI) and would authorize a daily supplemental payment (referred to as premium pay) for wildland federal firefighters and related employees who respond to wildland fires in specific circumstances. The new pay scales and supplemental payments would take effect on October 1, 2023. Salaries for wildland firefighters were temporarily increased during fiscal year 2023 under provisions of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

S. 2272 also would require the Forest Service and DOI to jointly develop and implement policies for maximum length of deployment, maximum hours worked, and minimum periods of rest between deployments.

In addition, following completion of the first year under the increased pay scale, the bill would require the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to assess and report to the Congress on the difference between the average total compensation paid to wildland firefighters in fiscal years 2023 and 2024. After completing the assessment, the Secretaries would be authorized to administratively adjust compensation to be more consistent with total compensation paid to wildland firefighters in 2023. If any such adjustments are made, the Secretaries would be required to report those adjustments to the Congress.

Estimated Federal Cost

The estimated budgetary effect of S. 2272 is shown in Table 1. The costs of the legislation fall within budget function 300 (natural resources and environment).

Table 1. Estimated Increases in Spending Subject to Appropriation Under S. 2272							
	By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars						2023-2028
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
Permanently Increased Pay Scale							
Estimated Authorization	0	317	332	345	357	369	1,720
Estimated Outlays	0	253	329	342	355	367	1,646
Premium Pay for Wildland Fire Incident Response							
Estimated Authorization	0	124	130	135	140	143	672
Estimated Outlays	0	99	129	134	139	143	644
Total Changes							
Estimated Authorization	0	441	462	480	497	512	2,392
Estimated Outlays	0	352	458	476	494	510	2,290



Basis of Estimate

For this estimate, CBO assumes that S. 2272 will be enacted near the end of fiscal year 2023 and that implementation timelines generally follow the requirements specified in the bill, which would take effect on October 1, 2023. Outlay estimates are based on historical spending patterns for similar activities, and any spending would be subject to appropriations.

Spending Subject to Appropriation

CBO estimates that the bill would cost about \$2.3 billion over the 2024-2028 period (see Table 1).

Permanently Increased Pay Scale. S. 2272 would permanently increase base pay for federal wildland firefighters under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service and DOI. Increases to the pay scale for workers under the General Schedule (GS) would be set at specific percentages varying by grade (GS-1 would receive the largest increase at 42 percent and GS-15 would receive the smallest at 1.5 percent). Pay increases for wildland firefighters outside the GS system would be calculated by annualizing their current pay and applying an equivalent increase for a similar GS grade. Those pay increases would be capped at the annual rate for the Executive Schedule level IV, currently \$183,500.

Using information from the Forest Service and DOI, CBO expects that almost 13,000 firefighters in the Forest Service and about 4,500 DOI firefighters would receive a permanent increase in their base rate of pay. CBO estimates that the total cost of those increases (including pay increases and associated increases in employee benefits) would be about \$1.6 billion over the 2024-2028 period.

Premium Pay for Wildland Fire Incident Response. S. 2272 also would establish a daily pay premium of 4.5 times the regular hourly rate for Forest Service and DOI wildland firefighters and related employees responding to certain wildfires. The premium pay would be allotted by those agencies to responders deployed for long-duration wildfires, working on prescribed fires, or deployed away from their duty station to pre-position in an area at high risk of fire. Such payments would be capped at about \$160 per day, or \$9,000 annually.

Using information from the agencies, CBO estimates that about 20,000 firefighters in the Forest Service and more than 8,000 responders with DOI would receive the premium pay and associated benefits in any year, at a total cost of \$644 million over the 2024-2028 period.

Transfer Authority. S. 2272 also would authorize the transfer of up to \$5 million from amounts appropriated to the Forest Service under title VI of division J of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and make those funds available to DOI for wildland fire management activities. (That act designated those amounts as an emergency requirement.) CBO expects that the transferred funds would be spent at the same rate as they would be under current law; thus, CBO estimates that the transfer would have no net effect on the federal budget.



Reporting and Administrative Requirements. S. 2272 would require the Forest Service and DOI to jointly develop and implement policies related to firefighters' length of deployment, hours worked, and periods of rest between deployments. The bill also would require the agencies to report to the Congress on their assessment of the difference between the average total compensation paid to wildland firefighters in fiscal years 2023 and 2024.

Using information on the costs of similar activities, CBO estimates that the cost of meeting those requirements would be less than \$500,000 over the 2024-2028 period.

Uncertainty

The budgetary effects of the bill's premium pay for wildfire incident response would depend on accurately predicting the number and length of qualifying incidents that would occur in any year. Costs of S. 2272 could be moderately larger or smaller than this estimate if the number of qualifying wildfire incidents is more or less, respectively, in future years than CBO estimates.

Pay-As-You-Go Considerations: None.

Increase in Long-Term Net Direct Spending and Deficits: None.

Mandates: None.

Estimate Prepared By

Federal Costs: Lilia Ledezma

Mandates: Andrew Laughlin

Estimate Reviewed By

Robert Reese

Principal Analyst, Natural and Physical Resources Cost Estimates Unit

Kathleen FitzGerald

Chief, Public and Private Mandates Unit

Christina Hawley Anthony

Deputy Director of Budget Analysis

Estimate Approved By

Phillip L. Swagel

Director, Congressional Budget Office