



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

**FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
OF THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**

In the Matter of Forest Fire Pilot

CSC Docket No. 2026-2358

Reallocation to
Noncompetitive Division

ISSUED: April 29, 2026 (SLD)

The Division of Agency Services (Agency Services) requests the reallocation of the State government title of Forest Fire Pilot to the noncompetitive division of the career service in accordance with *N.J.A.C.* 4A:3-1.2.

As background, the Forest Fire Pilot requires eight years of professional experience in the field of forestry, natural resources, or civil, military, or agricultural aviation and 1,000 hours as a pilot in command of forest fire suppression, forest fire observation, agricultural, military, or civil aircraft.¹ Time can be in a fixed-wing aircraft, helicopter, military rotorcraft, or a combination of both, provided that at least 500 hours are in the aircraft type being used by the position. Applicants will also be required to hold a certification as a commercial pilot for an instrument-rated rotorcraft (helicopter), or a single-engine aircraft, as deemed appropriate by the appointing authority, and a Second-Class Medical Certificate issued by the authority of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in the U.S. Department of Transportation. Additionally, appointees will be required to obtain a Forest Firefighter Certification issued by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and will be required to meet the qualifications for fighting forest fires on an annual basis.

¹ Applicants can also meet the requirement with possession of a Bachelor's degree and four years of the indicated experience, with 30 semester hour credits equal to one year of the relevant experience.

In its request, Agency Services presents that the DEP had requested the title reallocation, explaining that the subject title has remained vacant for more than four years due to limited applicants meeting the above-noted requirements, despite three previous competitive examination cycles. Additionally, the DEP asserted that traditional competitive testing has not adequately measured the unique knowledge, skills and abilities required for such a specialized pilot role. For example, the last eligible list for this title promulgated in 2025, with the names of four eligibles. Once the list was certified, only two eligibles responded as interested, and after interviewing, it was determined that neither candidate had experience related to the type of aircraft it utilizes. Therefore, no appointment could be made, and the position remained vacant. Instead, the DEP maintained that the critical skills, such as low-altitude fire suppression maneuvers and specialized flight experience, are better assessed through federal licensure (FAA certifications) and direct observation during the working test period, rather than a written examination. Further, the DEP emphasized that ranked eligible lists are ineffective given that the position is highly specialized, has very specific knowledge and experience requirements, and has a lower public-sector salary as compared to private aviation.

Additionally, due to its inability to fill the position through the competitive testing process, the DEP indicated that it has had to rely on limited part-time and third-party coverage due to the critical nature of work that has a direct impact on public safety. The DEP explained that this alternative is not sustainable, as many of the contractors that it has relied upon have other full-time employment outside of State government and are therefore not always immediately available when needed. DEP further explained that this alternative comes at a considerable cost to the State, both operationally and financially, and most importantly, has potential negative impacts on public health and safety.

Agency Services notes that there are two active open competitive eligible lists for the subject title.² However, based on the foregoing, Agency Services maintains that reallocating the subject title to the noncompetitive division of the career service would expand the candidate pool, expedite hiring, and stabilize aviation operations. Moreover, Agency Services advises that notice was provided to the appropriate negotiation representative and it had no objections. Rather, it indicated its full support for the reallocation and requested that the change be made as soon as possible. In this regard, it noted that “Forest Fire season began [in March] . . . and it is imperative for our members and the residents of NJ to have this position filled with a full-time employee as soon as possible.” Therefore, Agency Services requests that

² Agency records indicate that the Forest Fire Pilot (S1687D) eligible list promulgated on May 18, 2023, containing the name of one eligible, and expires on May 17, 2026. However, the eligible was removed for failure to respond to the Notice of Certification, and thus, the eligible list is exhausted. The Forest Fire Pilot (S0099F) eligible list promulgated on February 6, 2025, containing the names of four eligibles, and expires on February 5, 2027. The eligible list was certified, and two eligibles were removed for failure to respond to the Notice of Certification. Thus, this eligible list is currently incomplete, as only two eligibles remain.

the Forest Fire Pilot title be reallocated to the noncompetitive division of the career service effective the beginning of the first pay period that follows the Civil Service Commission's approval.

CONCLUSION

N.J.A.C. 4A:3-1.2 provides, in part, that titles may be reallocated from the competitive to the noncompetitive division of the career service when competitive testing is not practicable due to the nature of the knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with the job or when certification procedures based on ranked eligible lists have not or are not likely to meet the needs of appointing authorities due to such factors as salary, geographic location, recruitment problems, and working conditions.

Based on the foregoing, ample reasons exist for the reallocation of the subject title to the noncompetitive division of the career service. As explained above, the title of Forest Fire Pilot requires eight years of specialized experience, multiple certifications, as well as 1,000 hours as a pilot in command of forest fire suppression, forest fire observation, agricultural, military or civil aircraft, with 500 hours in the aircraft type being used by the position. Moreover, it is clear that the competitive testing process has not met the needs of the appointing authority due to this highly specific experience, along with lower salary than private aviation and demonstrated recruitment problems. In this regard, it is noted that from the last two testing cycles, only five applicants were found eligible, and three of those individuals were removed from the eligible list. Further, the remaining two eligibles were determined not to have the required experience in the aircraft being utilized by the DEP. Thus, reallocating these titles to the noncompetitive division of the career service is appropriate.

Therefore, any existing eligible lists for this title and any current announcements for which an examination has not been administered will be cancelled upon completion of the reallocation process. Nevertheless, if the DEP wishes to do so, it may recruit and appoint from the cancelled eligible lists. However, resulting appointments will be recorded as regular appointments in the noncompetitive division (RAN). Appointment types for existing employees in this title as of the effective date will be handled in accordance with *N.J.A.C.* 4A:3-1.2(f), as applicable:

1. Permanent employees as of the effective date shall have their appointment types changed to RAN and shall retain their permanent status in the noncompetitive division.
2. Probationary employees as of the effective date shall continue serving their working test periods and, upon successful completion, attain permanent status in the noncompetitive division.

3. Provisional employees who remain as of the effective date shall receive regular appointments (RAN) and begin serving their working test period on the effective date.

ORDER

Therefore, it is ordered that the Forest Fire Pilot title be reallocated to the noncompetitive division of the career service. This action shall be effective May 2, 2026.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in a judicial forum.

DECISION RENDERED BY THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION ON
THE 29TH DAY OF APRIL, 2026



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