



Recipients of the 2025 Wildland Fire Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Awards Announced

NWCG announces the recipients of the 2025 Wildland Fire EMS Awards. The NWCG Emergency Medical Committee (EMC) annually recognizes individuals and groups who have demonstrated outstanding actions or accomplishments that are above and beyond the expectation of one's normal mission or job duties. The awards were very competitive this year with many individuals doing outstanding EMS work.

Brooke Wright, Redding Air Attack

Outstanding Wildland Fire EMS Individual of the Year

Brooke joined the Forest Service with an extensive background in EMS and trauma care, having served as a 911 and hospital EMT in South Los Angeles. During the 2023 fire season, she was a member of the Redding Hotshots and played a key role in updating the crew's medical program, which remains in use today.

Brooke has a gift for teaching EMS skills in a practical and memorable way. When a gap in training emerged, she volunteered to deliver medical instruction for multiple modules at the Northern California Operations Center, including the Redding Hotshots, Redding Smokejumpers, the helicopter crew, and the airtanker base. Her passion for EMS is evident as she continues to attend paramedic school to further contribute to the community.

Brooke provided specialized wildland fire medical training using both equipment and animal organs to create realistic, hands-on learning experiences. Although this was a collateral duty, the training she developed was exceptionally well designed and executed.

Malheur Rappel Program

Outstanding Wildland Fire EMS Crew of the Year

In early July, the crew responded to a request from the Grand County Sheriff's Office for helicopter assistance in a remote part of the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness. A hiker had fallen down a steep slope and sustained a head injury. With swift Forest Supervisor approval, the crew reconfigured their Type 3 helicopter and departed using the rough coordinates provided. After an aerial search, they located the hikers several hundred feet down a snow-covered ridge. The helicopter found a landing spot farther down the ridge, and after landing, EMT Sarah Welsh exited and proceeded toward the hikers.

An Air Life helicopter arrived shortly after. Once the Type 3 helicopter lifted, the Air Life helicopter landed in the same location. Sarah reached the patient, serving as both EMT and ICT4. The patient had slipped on the snowy ridge, slid approximately 200 feet downhill, and struck her head on a rock, causing a laceration. She was conscious but dizzy and unable to hike out of the steep terrain. With numerous thunderstorms moving in at 7,000 feet in the early evening, Sarah determined the patient could not safely hike into the existing landing zone and received approval to cut a closer helispot in the wilderness.

The Prairie City Handcrew, already mobilized to the trailhead, hiked in, quickly reached the scene, and began cutting the helispot. Air Life pilots assessed the new landing zone and relocated their

helicopter. The crew and Sarah moved the patient to the helicopter, transferred her to Air Life personnel, and the aircraft departed with the patient. Sarah, the rest of the crew, Sherriff's officers, and the second hiker hiked out to the trailhead at dark.

Later in July, the crew responded to another request from the Grant County Sherriff's Office — this time for a medical emergency and extraction involving a man in his 70s in cardiac arrest on the Onion Creek Trail. A medical load with the rappellers was placed in the Malheur helicopter, and the ship launched toward the coordinates while local engines, along with the Sherif, were dispatched to the trailhead and began clearing the trail.

The crew quickly located the hikers and identified a landing area within a few hundred feet of the patient. On arrival, bystanders had already begun CPR. Two EMTs from the crew immediately took over compressions and breathing support, rapidly packaged the patient, and loaded him into the Type 2 helicopter. The aircraft transported him to the helibase, where a local ambulance was waiting. From landing on scene to arriving back at the airport, the entire response likely took under 30 minutes.

These incidents were unprecedented for the forest, and the supervisor noted, "I foresee more of these events happening in the future and reliance on our employees and resources to provide public assistance to our cooperators, partners, and community." Fire resources from both districts and dispatch participated in these operations, which were handled with exceptional professionalism.

Robert Ehrlich, USDA Forest Service EMS Program

Outstanding Wildland Fire EMS Distinguished Service

Robert (Bob) Ehrlich joined the U.S. Forest Service in 2020 as Program Manager of the Emergency Medical Services Program. From the beginning, Bob has worked to strengthen the existing program and ensure that EMS providers across the Forest Service receive consistent support. His leadership style — centered on trust, cooperation, teamwork, and active listening — has helped build strong relationships both within the agency and across interagency partners.

Bob takes the time to engage with everyone from field EMTs to senior leadership. He advocates effectively for EMS providers, welcomes feedback from the field, and works both independently and in teams to address the challenges brought forward. Some solutions have been implemented quickly, others required more time, and some are planned for future execution. When requests cannot be supported, Bob ensures that the reasoning behind the decision is communicated clearly.

His support for EMS providers extends beyond fire to include personnel in non-FAM positions, such as Law Enforcement & Investigations and trail crews. Through his efforts, program processes and provider support have steadily improved.

Bob is a strong advocate for biannual or annual robust EMS training, including medical lectures and hands-on practice. He helped create a pathway for EMS providers to gain real-world experience with local EMS agencies and emergency rooms. In addition, he participates in multiple interagency committees and teams to improve EMS preparedness and response.

Beyond his program management duties, Bob is a paramedic who volunteers with his county EMS agency during off-duty hours. His passion, experience, and dedication to EMS are reflected in the ongoing positive growth of the Forest Service EMS Program.

Joshua Nichols, Huron-Manistee National Forest, Engine 612

Jane Jedlink, Coconino NF FAM-Red Rock Ranger District Engine 661

Jessica Westrup, Coconino NF FAM-Red Rock Ranger District Engine 661

Zach Dugan, Truckee Hotshots

Award of Excellence in Wildland Fire EMS/Rescue

This year there were many outstanding individuals who exemplified “excellence,” so much so the committee decided to give several awards in this category

Joshua Nichols

Joshua Nichols has been a driving force behind the development of the Huron-Manistee National Forests’ EMS program. He has worked diligently to understand program requirements, gather accurate information, and present it effectively to leadership — efforts that contributed significantly to the program being formally adopted for the forest.

As the HMNF EMS Coordinator, Josh supports all program requirements, including training, timely and accurate documentation, and maintaining current knowledge of EMS standards. He collaborates closely with other EMTs to ensure consistent information is shared across the program. He frequently provides CPR, First Aid, and AED training to employees, ensuring they receive proper instruction and that all associated documentation is completed correctly.

While serving as an EMT on the forest, he has provided crucial care during work capacity tests in several higher-priority situations, conducting on-site evaluations and offering professional recommendations aligned with program guidelines. Josh’s professionalism and commitment to the EMS program go well beyond his normal job duties. His efforts have played a key role in the program’s success and have clearly demonstrated the value of having it in place.

Jane Jedlink

An incident involving a utility terrain vehicle (UTV) accident occurred on the Billy Fire on Friday, August 8, at 2:20 p.m. The accident took place along Forest Service Road 487. Billy Fire medical resources responded, and five firefighters were transported to hospitals via helicopter. Despite being injured in the accident herself, Jane returned to the scene multiple times to render aid to fellow crewmembers. Her quick actions and effective communication with the Incident Management Team ensured a lifesaving medical response.

Jane’s actions reflected great credit upon herself, the Coconino National Forest, the Fire and Aviation Management Program, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Jessica Westrup

While assigned to the Billy Fire, Jessica Westrup was involved in the same UTV accident that resulted in multiple injuries and required extensive medical response. Despite being injured herself, Jessica provided lifesaving medical aid to fellow crewmembers. She remained calm, rendered appropriate care, ensured scene safety, and assisted with extrication efforts for several patients who required treatment and helicopter transport.

Jessica’s actions reflected great credit upon herself, the Coconino National Forest, the Fire and Aviation Management Program, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Zach Dugan

Zach’s first year on the Truckee Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) was 2022. After that season, he took a two-year break to focus on outdoor guiding, ski patrol, obtaining his Advanced EMT

certification, and sharpening his backcountry medical skills. He returned to Truckee IHC for the 2025 season.

During critical training for the crew, Zach led several extraction and patient-care scenarios. His leadership during training and his continued willingness to teach others played a key role in preparing the crew for real-world incidents. That preparation proved essential during the Orleans Complex, when Zach responded to an incident involving a tree strike that injured three firefighters from another hotshot crew.

Zach quickly triaged the three patients and immediately focused on the most critical one. After assessing the injuries, he directed others on the equipment needed and initiated patient care. Trauma medical gear from Truckee IHC and a paramedic from Alpine IHC arrived shortly afterward. Zach and the paramedic worked together to start an IV and package the patient. A Rapid Extraction Module Support (REMS) team arrived on scene 10-15 minutes later. Thanks to the rapid actions by Zach, the Alpine IHC paramedic, the REMS team, and the coordinated efforts of three hotshot crews, all three patients were extracted quickly and efficiently.

Debra Anderson, Region 6 IMS

Janette Peterson Lifetime Achievement in Wildland Fire EMS

Deb Anderson has spent decades supporting wildland fire EMS, particularly through her long-standing work in the Region 6 Incident Medical Specialist (IMS) Program. She served as Co-Chair of the Region 6 IMS Program for more than 15 years and dedicated countless hours to ensuring high-quality annual training and daily program support — all while holding non-fire positions within the agency.

Throughout her time at the Region 6 Regional Office, and later at the Washington Office as an Administrative Review Specialist, Deb consistently made time for the IMS Program. She navigated numerous challenges, including leadership changes, shifting job responsibilities, budget cuts, hiring difficulties, the development of the National EMS Program, government shutdowns, and maintaining critical training during COVID. Her leadership and commitment were instrumental in keeping the program strong and operational during periods of uncertainty.

Deb has been a champion for Region 6 IMS and for wildland fire EMS nationwide. Having recently retired, she plans to continue contributing to the program she helped sustain and advance. Her decades of dedication, effort, and resilience make her highly deserving of this recognition — not only for maintaining the program, but for elevating it.

Congratulations to all the awardees and nominees. Through leadership and initiative, they have made significant contributions to the safety of the wildland fire community. These awards are well deserved. More information about the awards program and how to nominate an individual or crew can be found on the NWCG EMC webpage, <https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/emergency-medical-committee>.