



USFS National Saw program: Frequently Asked Questions

Version 3-20-2023

Forest Service Saw Program and Policy

1. What is the Forest Service saw program?

The National Forest Saw Program was developed to facilitate the safe use of chain saws and crosscut saws. The program provides direction to sawyers conducting saw operations on National Forest System (NFS) lands and provides nationally consistent application of the Forest Service National Saw Policy (FSM 2358).

2. Who does the Forest Service saw policy apply to?

FSM 2358 applies to all certified users of chain saw and crosscut saws on National Forest System lands. The policy does not apply to other Federal, State, Tribal, local govt agencies or those working under interagency fire management cooperative agreements, or contractors.

3. I understand FSM 2358 is being updated. When will the new policy become effective?

The updated policy was effective March 8th, 2023.

4. Who administers the Forest Service saw program?

The Forest Service saw program is administered by the National Saw Program Manager and Regional Saw Program Managers, who collectively make up the Saw Program Technical Advisory Group (SPTAG).

5. What is the difference between a volunteer group and a cooperator group?

For the purposes of the saw program, a volunteer or volunteer group is any person or group who has signed an OF 301A volunteer service agreement. The Forest Service is responsible for tort and worker's compensation claims for these individuals.

For the purposes of the saw program, a cooperator group is an organization with paid employees working under agreement with the Forest Service to do work on National Forest System lands. The organization is responsible for tort and workman's compensation claims for their members.

6. Does the saw policy apply to contractors?

The saw policy does not apply to contractors, special use permittees, or a contractor of a partnering organization. This includes contractors working for a cooperator who has a stewardship agreement with the Forest Service. Contractors and permittees are required to abide by OSHA regulation 29 CFR 1910.266 – Logging Standard.

7. Are hand saws covered under this policy?

Bow saws, pruning saws, brush saws, pole saws, and other hand saws are not covered in this policy, unless they are used for cutting material larger than 5".

8. Are battery powered saws covered under this policy?

Battery powered saws are covered under this policy and must be equipped with the same safety components as a gasoline powered saw, apart from a spark arrestor and vibration dampening.

9. What are the different levels of sawyer certifications?

There are three types of certifications for each type of saw (crosscut or chain saw).

A level sawyers may cut in the least complex situations.

B level sawyers may cut in moderately complex situations.

C level sawyers may cut complex situations.

There is also a C sawyer evaluator level. These are highly qualified sawyers who have demonstrated they have the knowledge and skill to instruct and evaluate at the C sawyer level. They must maintain proficiency as a C level sawyer.

10. How do the National Wildfire Coordination Group positions of FAL1/2/3 relate to the Forest Service qualifications of Sawyer level A/B/C?

The positions of FAL1/2/3 are used by NWCG to identify sawyers mobilized to wildland fire and other emergency incidents. These sawyers are qualified to fell and buck.

FAL1 is equivalent to Sawyer level C, felling and bucking. FAL2 is equivalent to Sawyer level B, felling and bucking. FAL3 is equivalent to Sawyer level A, felling and bucking.

Bucking-only certifications are not valid for fireline operations.

For the FS, FAL1/2/3 designations are used on Fireline Qualifications cards and in Incident Qualifications and Certification System (IQCS) for the purposes of mobilization.

11. Is it possible to be certified for Bucking-only?

Sawyers may be certified as bucking-only at any level and for both chain saws and crosscut saws.

Bucking-only certifications are not valid for fireline operations.

12. How long will my saw certification card be valid under the new policy?

Sawyer certifications are valid for three years from date of issuance and are valid on all National Forest System (NFS) lands.

13. Is first aid and CPR required for all sawyers?

All saw operators must maintain a current first aid and CPR certification except for crosscut saw trainees who are operating under the supervision of another sawyer.

14. What is the minimum age for sawyers?

Chain saw operators must be at least 18 years of age. Crosscut sawyers must be at least 16 years of age.

Training and Evaluation

15. Who needs to be trained?

All saw users must be trained and certified. Instruction must be accomplished through an approved training curriculum led by a qualified instructor.

16. Where do I get training?

Sawyer trainings normally take place in the early spring, prior to field season. Contact your local saw coordinator with questions on when and where training sessions will take place.

17. When will the new training curriculum become available?

The new training curriculum was available starting in March 2023.
An equivalency for S-212 will be granted for Firefighters who take Modules 1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 5.

18. Will there be a grace period to allow instructors time to familiarize themselves with the new curriculum?

Yes. Regions are encouraged to use the new curriculum but will have until April 2024 to transition. During this time, the Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC) Chain Saw and Crosscut Saw course, the Game of Logging course, and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) S-212 course will continue to be accepted.

19. Will the new training be able to be taught remotely online?

The new training curriculum is designed to be taught in person, with a combination of interactive classroom training and field based hands on instruction. The Saw Program Technical Advisory Group will be exploring opportunities to provide online options as updates to the curriculum are made in the future.

20. Who can instruct?

Any C level sawyer or a B level sawyer who has a letter of designation from the unit saw coordinator can instruct A and B level sawyers.

Instructors must have at least the same level of certification that they are instructing (in other words, an instructor with a “bucking only” certification may only instruct in bucking).

21. Can volunteers and cooperators instruct?

A volunteer or cooperator sawyer may instruct based on their level of qualification.

22. What is the difference between training and evaluation?

Training is when a trainee sawyer is given the knowledge and techniques needed to accomplish a saw operation. They are then given the opportunity to practice and become proficient in those skills.

Evaluation is when a trainee sawyer demonstrates their knowledge, skill, and ability with a saw to accomplish a certain objective. Based on their performance, which is compared to a standard, they are awarded a sawyer qualification level.

23. Who can evaluate?

The certification level of the evaluator must be current to the level at which they are evaluating (in other words, an evaluator with a bucking only certification may only evaluate in bucking scenarios).

A level sawyers must be evaluated by either a B level sawyer who has a letter of designation from the unit saw coordinator or be a C level sawyer. An approved training consultant may also evaluate at the A level.

B level sawyers must be evaluated by a C level sawyer or an approved training consultant.

C level sawyers must be evaluated by two C level sawyers, one of whom must be qualified at the C evaluator level. The second can either be a C level sawyer or a training consultant.

To become a C sawyer evaluator, a candidate must participate in a C sawyer evaluation as an evaluator. In addition, they must be evaluated by two current C sawyer evaluators, one of whom will be the Regional Saw Program Manager or a current C sawyer evaluator designee of the same.

24. Can volunteers and cooperators evaluate?

A qualified volunteer or cooperator sawyer may evaluate other sawyers.

25. How does a cooperator group get authorized to conduct sawyer trainings and evaluations?

Cooperator groups who want to conduct trainings and evaluations should work with their local saw coordinator to fill out Form FS-2300-0060 (REV.01/2023). Once approved, they will be authorized to train and evaluate their members, as well as members of other cooperator organizations and Forest Service employees and volunteers.

Certification

26. What does certification mean?

The certification (signing) of a Sawyer Certification Card validates the correct training and evaluation has been completed per FSM 2358.

27. Who can certify a National Sawyer Certification Card?

Only Forest Service line officers or Forest service employees with the appropriate delegation may sign sawyer certification cards for employees and volunteers (individuals operating under a Of-301 A/B agreement). The certifying official does not need to be qualified as a sawyer. By signing the card, they are validating that the process defined in FSM 2358 for required sawyer training and evaluation was followed. The certifying official is following the recommendation of the evaluator(s) and the saw program coordinator.

Forest Service volunteers (individuals utilizing OF-301 A/B agreements) are not authorized to sign sawyer certification cards for any individual.

Forest Service employees will not sign cards for members of a cooperator organizations.

Cooperators (paid employees of an organization working under agreement on NFS lands) are only authorized to sign sawyer qualification cards for employees of the same organization.

Per FSM 2358, Sawyer Certification cards should be signed and issued within 14 days of evaluation.

28. How does a Cooperator group get authorized to certify a National Sawyer certification card?

Cooperator groups who wish to certify Forest Service sawyer certification cards for their members should fill out Form FS-2300-0060 (REV.01/2023). Once approved, they will be authorized to certify the saw cards for their members.

Sawyer Database

29. What is the National Sawyer Qualification Tracking Database?

Developed to track Agency, volunteer, and cooperator sawyers.

Stores information about the sawyers Region, Forest or Grassland, District or organization and qualification level.

Stores the sawyers training certificate and evaluation form.

Generates a national sawyer certification card and enable its electronic certification by the authorized certifying official.

Signed cards can be emailed to the sawyer and their supervisor.

30. Who will have access to the database?

Each saw coordinator for each unit (Region/Forest or Grassland/District/program area/partner group/cooperator group) can access to the database.

Each unit can designate up to two database user IDs—one primary and secondary administrator.

31. How does a partner or cooperator organization request access to the database?

Organizations who would like access to the database should fill out Form FS-2300-0060 (REV.01/2023). Once approved, they will be given access to the database and instruction on how to use it.

32. What is needed to log into the Database?

Forest Service employees will need a LincPass (PIV) card for authentication.

Non-Forest Service employees will have sign-in using login.gov.

Once granted access to the database, users will be given a password (which can be changed).

33. Who will grant access to the database?

Regional Saw Program Managers can grant permissions to users within their respective regions.

34. When will the Database be available?

The database has been available since January 2023.

35. How will the Forest Service ensure saw cards are processed within 14 days?

Certifiers will be notified by email of cards needing certification. The local unit saw coordinators should make the certifying official aware of the training prior to the evaluation and the need to certify the cards.