

Partner survey shows steep cost for Wildland Firefighters' loved ones

November 16, 2022



A [survey of the partners and spouses](#) of federal wildland firefighters was conducted in the summer of 2021 by Grassroots Wildland Firefighters (GRWFF), an advocacy group of current and former federal wildland firefighters. The survey results clearly demonstrated the toll this demanding job takes on the partners and families of wildland firefighters.

Over 1,900 partners, spouses, and firefighters completed the survey, sharing personal information, opinions, and stories about how the job has affected them, their marriages/partnerships, and their home lives. The work of a wildland firefighter is stressful, dangerous, and seemingly never-ending. Through the smoke and flames, with the urgency of a nonstop emergency at work, it can be easy to lose sight of those who remain at home managing the bills, house, kids, and pets— all while staying ready to catch their firefighters when they return. The results of this survey revealed that the pressures are near-universal within our community.

Because their base pay is often unequal to their cost of living, firefighters feel pressure to work overtime whenever they can, leaving them exhausted and depleted when they get home. The survey showed that spouses and partners often feel abandoned, overly burdened, and disconnected from their partners throughout the fire season.

“Wildland firefighting is as much of a commitment for family members as it is for the actual wildland firefighter.” –Partner Survey Respondent, 2021

Additionally, the survey results found that:

- 43.4% (795) of partners/spouses feel that they are left to operate without a partner for 7+ months out of the year
- 59.9% (1084) of respondents feel they are often/regularly secondary to the commitments of their partner’s job
- 73.1% (1328) of respondents often/regularly worry about the possibility of a tragic accident on the fireline impacting them
- 78.1% (1414) often/regularly feel stress due to their partner's absence during fire season

The bipartisan bill known as [Tim’s Act](#) (H.R. 5631), named in honor of late smokejumper Tim Hart, aims to support families by creating long-term pay solutions and offering mental health services for both firefighters and their family units. Tim’s Act also provides housing stipends, gives temporary employees access to retirement benefits and health insurance, and offers tuition assistance for full-time employees. We hope that this legislation will relieve stress on partners, spouses, and families of wildland firefighters and set them up for success in the future.

“For the love of God, if this job requires putting my marriage on ice for half of the year, pay [them] what [they] deserve for us to survive.” – Partner Survey Respondent, 2021

The results of the survey help to clarify what is needed to support wildland firefighters and their families: better pay, mental and physical health care, housing stipends, and more. Visit GRWFF’s website and click “Get Involved” to support our wildland firefighters.

GRWFF would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all partners of Federal Wildland Firefighters. Many thanks to the survey respondents for their willingness to share their experiences and insights about living with, caring for, and supporting a wildland firefighter. May your voices continue to be heard in this fight to support the families of those who protect our forests, homes, and communities.

View the Partners Survey results [HERE](#)

View the Partners Survey Video, “The Other Half of the Story,” [HERE](#).

View a partner's firsthand experience via storytelling [HERE](#)

Read Tim's Act bill text [HERE](#).

View Tim's Act fact sheet [HERE](#).

For more information please visit our website at www.GrassrootsWildlandFirefighters.com