

2026 1st QTR BOD Saw Program Committee Report

Changes to the BCHW Sawyer Program

Dear Backcountry Horsemen of Washington Members,

The USFS is undergoing significant changes focused on standardizing processes, improving interagency operability, and strengthening fiscal accountability. As part of this effort, the Forest Service has adopted the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) chainsaw training program and Position Task Book (PTB) process, which changes how sawyers become certified.

All sawyers will now complete a blended training program that includes both online and instructor-led components. The 4–6 hour self-paced online course, offered through the Wildland Fire Learning Portal, must be completed prior to attending in-person classroom and field sessions. Upon completion of the online course, participants will receive a Certificate of Completion. This certificate will be used to build rosters for instructor-led training opportunities and must be presented to the Lead Evaluator at the in-person session before participation is permitted.

After successfully completing the in-person training, sawyers will be issued an NWCG Position Task Book (PTB). The PTB documents on-the-job mentoring and evaluation conducted by sawyer instructors qualified at the appropriate level. It must be carried whenever performing chainsaw or crosscut saw work in the field and serves as a “learner’s permit” until the individual becomes fully qualified at a given certification level. Once all required tasks are completed and evaluated, the sawyer may be recommended for final qualification.

The Saw Program Chair requests that all individuals seeking certification visit the Wildland Fire Learning Portal and establish a profile. Profiles are simple to create using an email address and password and are required to access the online training. This system will enhance training quality, improve data accuracy, and streamline recordkeeping once certifications are entered into the National USFS database. These improvements will benefit BCHW, the USFS, and our volunteer saw program instructors alike.

As part of this streamlined approach—and to improve sustainability for our volunteer Sawyer Evaluators—BCHW will implement a revised annual training schedule. Approximately six regional trainings will be offered each year, primarily during the winter and spring months. Additional training opportunities outside this window will be evaluated

on a case-by-case basis. A coordinated team of qualified Evaluators will travel throughout the state to meet the training needs of BCHW volunteers and partner organizations.

Funding Changes

As demand for sawyer training continues to grow while federal funding declines, strategic adjustments are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program. Training requires significant time, coordination, equipment, and volunteer commitment. Additionally, some individuals complete training but do not go on to contribute to BCHW's mission, creating an imbalance between program investment and volunteer return.

To address this funding gap and promote program accountability, BCHW will begin charging a nominal certification fee, including for members. These fees will help provide stable financial support for the Saw Program while also encouraging commitment from participants who register for training. This modest investment helps ensure students follow through with attendance and recognize the value of the time and expertise contributed by our volunteer Evaluators.

More info on the amount we will start charging will be out soon as we are still working on the details.

Sincerely,

Tony Karniss
Saw Program Manager
Back Country Horsemen of Washington