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For Immediate Release

**FCC PROPOSES LARGEST FINE OF ITS KIND FOR INTERRUPTING
U.S. FOREST SERVICE RADIO COMMUNICATIONS DURING IDAHO
WILDFIRE**

***Ham Radio Operator Apparently Broadcast on Radio Frequency Being Used to
Guide Fire Suppression Aircraft During 2021 ‘Johnson Fire’***

WASHINGTON, June 8, 2022—The Federal Communications Commission today proposed a \$34,000 fine against Jason Frawley for apparently interfering with radio communications that were guiding fire suppression aircraft combating the 2021 “Johnson fire” near Elk River, Idaho. At the time, the U.S. Forest Service and the Idaho Department of Lands were fighting a 1000 acre wildfire located on national forest land. The Communications Act prohibits such interference with authorized radio communications and the Commission takes very seriously any interference with public safety communications.

As firefighting crews from the Forest Service and Idaho Department of Land worked to fight the wildfire, Forest Service radio communications received eight unauthorized transmissions on government frequencies from an individual identifying himself as “comm tech.” The individual interfered with communications between fire suppressant aircraft and ground crews by communicating his observations of hazards near the Elk Butte airstrip, where he and his radio equipment were located.

On July 18, 2021, the second day of the interference, a Forest Service supervisor left the site of the fire and drove to the airstrip. The supervisor identified Mr. Frawley as the individual making the unauthorized communications and advised him to immediately cease such communications. Mr. Frawley admitted to the supervisor to broadcasting on government frequencies as “comm tech.” Mr. Frawley subsequently admitted to his conduct in a taped interview with an agent from the U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations Branch at his residence and in response to an FCC letter of inquiry which followed a Forest Service complaint to the Commission.

Mr. Frawley is the licensee of amateur radio station WA7CQ and the owner/operator of Leader Communications LLC, licensee of eight microwave licenses and one business license. Mr. Frawley has argued to the Commission that he did not mean any harm and only intended to assist the firefighting crews by providing them with specific details regarding Elk Butte. Regardless of the intent, the FCC finds that the apparent willful violations cannot be overlooked as interfering with authorized radio communications – and especially public safety related communications – is a serious violation of the law and can put lives and property at risk.

The proposed action, formally called a Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture, or NAL, contains only allegations that advise a party on how it has apparently violated the law and may

set forth a proposed monetary penalty. The Commission may not impose a greater monetary penalty in this case than the amount proposed in the NAL. Neither the allegations nor the proposed sanctions in the NAL are final Commission actions. The party will be given an opportunity to respond and the Commission will consider the party's submission of evidence and legal arguments before acting further to resolve the matter.

Action by the Commission June 8, 2022 by Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture (FCC 22-43). Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington approving. Chairwoman Rosenworcel issuing a separate statement.

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).