

How to Get a Job with the Forest Service & FAQ's



Updated 9/8/20 amber.kamps@usda.gov

Step 1: Get An Idea Of What Kinds Of Jobs & Careers The Forest Service Offers

We offer a variety of employment opportunities (both paid and unpaid) ranging from student programs to volunteer programs, and full time and temporary employment for people with skills in several hundred areas.

Here are several great websites to learn more about working with the Forest Service

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us> and careers with the Forest Service

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/jobs>

Step 2: Learn What Jobs Are Available – Use the Outreach Database

The best way to know about a particular job/location is to keep current with the outreach database.

The Forest Service uses a pre-announcement or “outreach” process first before we formally advertise jobs. This is an important step for us as the responses we get help us determine how to advertise the job. At least once a week check the outreach database that houses all the jobs we are outreaching for. If you find an outreach of interest, make sure to fill out the form and send it in to the hiring manager. Each job being outreached will tell you the duty station/location as well as the vacancy announcement number in www.usajobs.gov if it is being currently advertised.

Link to the outreach database: <https://fsoutreach.gdcii.com/Outreach>

If a position is listed in the Outreach Database, does that mean that it is open to the public, or might there be some positions for which Outreach is posted that are only available as promotion?

The outreach database does include jobs that are open to the public and jobs that are for internal candidates only. You will need to read the outreach notice carefully to determine how the position is being considered for filling. If you have questions, call the primary contact listed for the position.

Step 3 – The Only Way To Get A Job Is To Apply on www.usajobs.gov

To apply for any federal job, including Forest Service jobs, you must apply through www.usajobs.gov. To do so, you will need to create an account and this can take some time to set up. Your best bet is to do this ahead of when you think you'll be applying for a job so you'll have plenty of time to set up your profile and get your resume and other attachments ready/uploaded.

A suggestion is to check both the outreach database and usajobs once a week to see what new jobs are coming available. Once you start checking on a weekly basis, using the search parameters of your choosing, it won't take you but a few minutes to get updated on the latest. Set a weekly reminder or appointment in your calendar each week, like Tuesday mornings at 7:30 and check.

Also be aware of hiring events which vary every year by date, type, and jobs offered. Here's a link to the website with more information: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/jobs/events>

Step 4 – Make Sure Your Resume Is The Best It Can Be

A resume suitable for corporate America is vastly different than one that is going to get you hired with the Forest Service. The Forest Service wants to see more detail in your resume regarding job descriptions of past work experience as an example. It's also critical to include your salary or your hourly wage for each job you have held in the past. For more information on what to include in your resume, see https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3829782.pdf as well as <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/jobs/how-to-apply> and <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/faq/application/documents/resume/what-to-include/>

Concerning resumes, should resumes be kept to one page — is there a limit or rule of thumb for federal resumes on www.usajobs.gov?

For a recent college graduate, it is much easier to keep your resume to one page. However, if you've been in the workforce for 10-20 years it is almost impossible. Generally speaking, the Forest Service is more accepting of multiple page resumes for persons with a longer job history. And, you most certainly do not want to cheat yourself out of including all your relevant work experience as well as knowledge, skills, and abilities by being too brief. A two-three page resume is quite acceptable to most hiring managers if you have the professional work experience to justify the length.

How can you make yourself stand out among all the other applicants? Could you cover any specific advice you have regarding the experience, coursework, and qualifications that the FS looks for in Botanist position applicants?

Call the Hiring Manager! This is likely the single most important thing you need to do when applying for a Forest Service job. Hiring manager's contact information is found on the outreach for each job (see above). The Federal application process is highly centralized and we can receive upwards of 200-400 applicants per job. If you don't stand out, you won't. Do not simply submit an application and hope for the best. Hiring decisions are still made at the local level and influenced greatly by the local hiring manager. You need to call or better yet, stop by and visit, with the hiring manager. Be prepared to ask questions about the job, the location, housing, specific skill sets they are looking for, etc. Also be prepared to tell them about yourself, why you want the job, what your future goals are, etc. Hiring managers are also great people to ask questions about usajobs.gov

It's also important for your resume to speak to the knowledge, skills, and abilities asked of the job. Look at the major duties section of the job advertisement and tailor your resume to address each area you have experience in. Also, if the job includes supervision – make sure to include your experience in supervising. It is also good to be brief, but inclusive so to not over-generalize your experience. Don't just state that you've been a supervisor for 8 years. For example, state that you supervised 5 employees over the last 8 years that included taking disciplinary action, conducting performance reviews, evaluated for promotions, etc.

When submitting a resume, would it be helpful to list related coursework? Such as, "Limnology" for a job in water management?

If you have a degree and/or or currently working on your degree, listing this coursework in your resume is not necessary. You can and should attach your transcripts to your application in www.usajobs.gov which is where your coursework can be found to determine if you qualify for a position and/or make you more competitive.

Could you send us an example of a resume?

Here are two websites with great tips and examples: <http://www.federaljobs.net/resume.htm> and <http://www.archives.gov/careers/jobs/forms/resume-guide.pdf>

Do you recommend including a cover letter for a position?

Cover letters are not required by the Forest Service. Some hiring managers like to see them. It doesn't hurt to include a cover letter and it can be a great way to accomplish a few things. First, you can reference the phone call you had with the hiring manager reminding them of who you are and your conversation. Second, it allows you a simple way to mention why you want this specific job and/or what it means to you. And lastly, it also allows you a simple way to mention something personal about yourself and/or family. Keeping the cover letter brief is a great idea and most definitely limited to one page.

The Forest Service offers jobs that are both professional, requiring a degree, and technical, that do not require a degree, in various natural resource fields. Having a bachelor's degree does make you more competitive for a technician position, but is not required. Technician positions are typically more field based, particularly in gather data and monitoring. Professional positions also include field work, but are generally more management positions and require more journey level knowledge.

Step 5 – What To Do After You Apply

There are several processes the Forest Service goes through from the time you apply. The first hoop you will jump through is for a Human Resource Specialist in Albuquerque, NM to review your application and determine if you meet the minimum requirements for the job. You will be notified if you do and be told that your application has been referred to the hiring manager. This is called “making the cert” or certificate. A certificate is a list of all the qualified candidates the hiring manager can select from. If you didn’t meet the minimum requirements, you will be notified of such as well.

After “making the cert” your name is on a list that goes to the hiring manger, who is likely the supervisor of the job. This is the person who will be reviewing/rating your application in detail which may include calling your previous employers for reference checks and possibly setting up an interview with you.

You will get another notification if you did not get the job and of course, you’ll also know if you get the job too.

What do I do if I didn’t “make the cert” or get the job?

Call the hiring manager and ask questions about how to improve your resume, your application package, your experience, your education, your interview, and any other suggestions. You are also welcome to contact Amber Kamps to discuss as well. See contact info at the end of this document.

Can I call the hiring manager after I apply?

Yes, you are welcome and encouraged to. It’s okay to find out where things are in the hiring process, introduce yourself and tell them why you are applying for the job, ask questions about the job, and find out more information.

Step 6 – Read Through These FAQ’s For More Critical Information

What do the different GS levels represent? How do I know when searching for a position, which level to should start on?

General Schedule or GS is the pay scale in the Forest Service. More information can be found here:

http://www.federaljobs.net/salarybase.htm#SALARY_TABLE_2015-GS

Here is a website that specifically speaks to a job series and qualifications for a particular GS level:

<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-standards/>

How are interviews done for applicants that are out of state?

Interviews for all applicants are generally done over the phone. Very rarely are interviews done in person.

If a job position says entry level, does that mean you don't need any experience in that field?

Not necessarily. If you take a look at this website, you can determine the generalized experience, specialized experience, and the education that is required to qualify for a position and grade level.

<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-standards/#url=Group-Standards>

Very few positions start out at a GS-1, which is the lowest graded position and does not require any experience or education. Most entry level positions in the Forest Service are GS-4 or 5, both of which require specialized experience and potentially an educational requirement above a high school diploma.

Should I apply for a job even if I don't meet the minimum requirements?

If you don't meet the minimum requirements and you are absolutely sure of this, don't waste your time applying. Unlike private sector jobs, the Forest Service cannot consider individuals for jobs unless they meet the minimum requirements.

If you are unsure if you meet the minimums or not, call and visit with the hiring manager or call and visit with Amber Kamps at the contact listed below.

For more information or questions, please contact:



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<https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r1/jobs>