

**Forest Service Manual  
National Headquarters - Washington Office  
Washington, DC**

**Forest Service Manual 6200 – Office Management  
Chapter 6220 - Correspondence**

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**Digest:** Following is an explanation of the changes throughout the directive by section.

**6220:** Revises chapter in its entirety with extensive edits throughout.

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## **6220.1 - Authority**

1. The Federal Records Act of 1950 and the Records Disposal Act of 1943, as amended, (44 U.S.C., Chapters 21, 29, 31, and 33), set the policies, procedures, and controls for creating, maintaining, and disposing of the Federal government's records.  
(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/collectionUSCode.action?collectionCodeUSCODE>)
2. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1966, 5 U.S.C. 552, amended in 1974, provides that any person has a right, enforceable in court, to obtain access to Federal agency records, except to the extent that such records (or portions of them) are protected from public disclosure by one of nine exemptions or by one of three special law enforcement record exclusions. A FOIA request can be made for any agency record.
3. The Privacy Act of 1974, as amended at 5 U.S.C. 552a, protects records that can be retrieved from a system of records by personal identifiers such as a name, social security number, or other identifying number or symbol. The Privacy Act prohibits disclosure of these records without written individual consent, unless one of the twelve disclosure exceptions enumerated in the Act applies. A notice of any such Privacy Act system of records is published in the Federal Register. These notices identify the legal authority for collecting and storing the records, individuals about whom records will be collected, what kinds of information will be collected, and how the records will be used.
4. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. 794d), as amended by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Pub. L. 105-220), August 7, 1998, mandates that when developing, procuring, maintaining, or using electronic and information technology, each Federal department or agency shall ensure, unless an undue burden would be imposed on the department or agency, that the technology allows individuals with disabilities to have access and use that is comparable to the access and use provided to individuals without disabilities. (<http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?fuseAction1998Amend>)
5. The Plain Writing Act of 2010, improves the effectiveness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear government communication that the public can understand and use. (<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/plLaw/index.cfm>)
6. Executive Order 13556, Controlled Unclassified Information, establishes uniform government-wide procedures for the handling of information that is unclassified but that requires safeguarding or dissemination control. (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2010-11-09/pdf/2010-28360.pdf>)
7. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Departmental Regulation (DR) 3060-001, Correspondence Management, describes the processing, management, and response policy for all correspondence received by the Department.  
(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR3060-001.htm>)

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8. USDA DR 3060-002, Secretarially Signed Documents, describes the process for transmitting official documents to the Immediate Office of the Secretary for final review and signature by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.  
(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR3060-002.htm>)
9. USDA DR 3080-001, Records Management, sets forth and summarizes the policies, responsibilities, and procedures for the creation, maintenance, use, and disposition of all records and other documentary materials throughout USDA.  
(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR3080-001.htm>)
10. USDA DR 3090-001, Litigation Retention Policy for Documentary Materials including Electronically Stored Information, prescribes Department-wide enterprise policies and responsibilities related to the retention of record and non-record documentary materials, including Electronically Stored Information, for discovery or other litigation-related purposes.  
(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR3090-001.htm>)
11. USDA DM 3440-001, USDA Classified National Security Information Program Manual, prescribes Departmental roles and responsibilities for the classification, declassification, and safeguarding of classified national security information.  
(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DM3440-001.htm>)
12. USDA DR 3440-001, USDA Classified National Security Information Program Regulation, prescribes Departmental roles and responsibilities for the classification, declassification, and safeguarding of classified national security information.  
(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR3440-001.htm>)
13. USDA DR 3440-002, Control and Protection of Sensitive Security Information, establishes USDA procedures for identifying unclassified but sensitive information and safeguarding it against unauthorized use or disclosure.  
(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR3440-002.htm>)
14. USDA DM 3550-002, Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) Information Protection, outlines USDA requirements for handling and protection of sensitive but unclassified information. (<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DM3550-000.htm> and <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DM3550-002.htm>)
15. USDA DR 4070-735-001, Employee Responsibilities and Conduct, sets forth policies, procedures, and standards on employee responsibilities and conduct (see specifically section 17 on personally identifiable information).  
(<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR4070-735-001.htm>)
16. Forest Service Manual (FSM) 6230, Records Creation, Maintenance, and Disposition, sets out and summarizes Forest Service policies and responsibilities for creation, maintenance, use, and disposition of records and other documentary materials;

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establishes records management responsibilities of Agency personnel; and maintains an active program for the economical and efficient management of Agency records.

(<http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/dughtml/fsm6000.html>)

17. Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 6209.11, Records Management, provides guidelines for Forest Service personnel in records creation, maintenance, and disposition.

(<http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/dughtml/fsh6000.html>)

18. Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1230, Delegations of Authority and Responsibility, sets out and summarizes Forest Service authorities and responsibilities, including signature authority for formal and informal correspondence.

(<http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/dughtml/fsm1000.html>)

## **6220.2 - Objectives**

Provide direction to:

1. Produce high-quality and timely Forest Service correspondence.
2. Prepare, review, approve, release, retrieve, and track Forest Service correspondence, while minimizing the time and cost involved.

## **6220.3 - Policy**

All employees who create or process correspondence shall follow the procedures in the Forest Service Correspondence Manual and Handbook.

1. All correspondence must conform to government-wide and USDA regulations and standards, as well as principles and standards of effective writing (see FSH 6209.12, ch. 40).
2. All correspondence, whether initiated or responding, internal or external, must be processed in a timely, accurate, and cost-effective manner.
3. Forest Service staffs must adhere to Forest Service records management policy (see FSM 6230, Records Creation, Maintenance, and Disposition, and FSH 6209.11, Records Management Handbook).
4. Correspondence must be entered and updated in the electronic correspondence management system so that employees will have easy access to prepare, review, and track correspondence related to Forest Service programs and activities.
  - a. Administrative units must use the official electronic correspondence management system and comply with Chief Information Office (CIO) and Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS) direction in usage.

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- b. Copies of uncontrolled (general) correspondence must be kept in the official record file maintained by the Correspondence Manager of the issuing staff or field unit, using the electronic correspondence management system.
  - c. Copies of Washington Office controlled correspondence and tracking records must be kept in the official record file maintained by the Correspondence Manager of the originating staff.
  - d. Copies of field office controlled correspondence must be kept in the official record file maintained by the Correspondence Manager of the issuing staff at the regional office, Station, Area, International Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF), National Forest, or Ranger District.
5. Correspondence containing any sensitive or personally identifiable information pertaining to employees, contractors, or members of the public must be safeguarded and protected from unauthorized disclosure.

**6220.4 - Responsibility**

**6220.41 - Chief of the Forest Service**

1. The USDA Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) delegates to the Chief of the Forest Service the following correspondence authorities:
  - a. Assign, review, approve, and sign uncontrolled (general) correspondence and Forest Service controlled correspondence.
  - b. Assign, review, and approve controlled correspondence designated for signature by the Secretary of Agriculture, the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, or the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment.
2. The Chief of the Forest Service reserves the authority to:
  - a. Make decisions and sign documents related to important, controversial, sensitive, or broad policy matters for the Agency as a whole, for the Department, or for the President (see FSM 1235.1).
  - b. Revoke, modify, or issue delegations of general and signatory authority (as they relate to correspondence; see FSM 1231) to the Chief of Staff, Deputy Chiefs, Regional Foresters, Stations, Areas, the International Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF), or Washington Office Staff Directors.

#### **6220.42 - Chief of Staff**

The Chief of Staff has the responsibility to:

1. Provide information and/or review and approve internal and external correspondence in a timely manner for the Chief's Office.
2. Review, revise, and approve internal and external controlled correspondence intended for the Chief's review and/or signature.
3. Review and approve controlled correspondence in a timely manner for the Law Enforcement and Investigations and International Programs offices.

#### **6220.43 - Deputy Chiefs, Washington Office Staff Directors, Regional Foresters, Regional Staff Directors, Area Directors, Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF) Director, Station Directors, Forest Supervisors, and District Rangers**

Deputy Chiefs, Washington Office Staff Directors, Regional Foresters, Regional Staff Directors, Area Directors, Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF) Director, Station Directors, Forest Supervisors, and District Rangers have the responsibility to:

1. Designate a Correspondence Manager for each unit.
2. Ensure that the Correspondence Manager adheres to correspondence policy and procedures.
3. Ensure that the Correspondence Manager receives appropriate correspondence and records management training.
4. Comply with review and concurrence responsibilities in accordance with established deadlines.
5. Ensure that time and considerations are given to subject matter experts who provide support and information to Correspondence Managers preparing, reviewing, approving, signing, and releasing official Forest Service correspondence.

#### **6220.44 - Director, Chief Information Office (CIO)**

In addition to the responsibilities in FSM 6220.43, the Director of the Chief Information Office (CIO) has responsibility to support the management of the official Forest Service electronic correspondence management system (FSM 6230.4).

The CIO has the responsibility to:

1. Ensure that electronic correspondence management is an Agency capability that is included as part of Enterprise Architecture planning.

2. Provide user support in the event of Enterprise Architecture technical problems pertaining to the electronic correspondence management system.

#### **6220.45 - Director, Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS)**

In addition to the responsibilities in FSM 6220.43, the Director of the Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS) has the responsibility to:

1. Provide service-wide advice and direction on correspondence procedures, authorities, and responsibilities.
2. Ensure that electronic correspondence management system training and access are provided to all Forest Service employees who handle correspondence.
3. Provide leadership in the systematic creation, maintenance, use, retention, transfer, and disposition (inventorying, appraising, scheduling, and retiring) of Forest Service correspondence records for all organizational levels.

#### **6220.46 - Assistant Director, Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS)**

The Assistant Director in the Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS) manages correspondence for the Washington Office.

The Assistant Director has the responsibility to:

1. Provide leadership, guidance, and training in the production and processing of correspondence.
2. Provide guidance and training for Washington Office staff in the use of the electronic correspondence management system.
3. Provide direction and manage the Washington Office controlled correspondence process through adherence to the controlled correspondence processes and coding system used by the Forest Service, as determined by the Department (see FSH 6209.12, ch. 20).

#### **6220.47 - Law Enforcement and Investigations**

In addition to the responsibilities in FSM 6220.43 Law Enforcement and Investigations Officers and Correspondence Managers have the responsibility to:

1. Answer all letters referencing criminal matters or violations, or any other Law Enforcement and Investigations subject matter.
2. Respond to all issues addressed and/or questions asked in letters pertaining to Law Enforcement and Investigations concerns, within the prescribed response period, with appropriate handling of sensitive or confidential information.



#### **6220.48 - All Employees**

All employees shall comply with Forest Service policy for the handling of Forest Service correspondence.

All employees have the responsibility to:

1. Consult and adhere to the Correspondence Manual and Handbook in carrying out correspondence assignments.
2. Provide timely information and support in response to requests from Correspondence Managers who are preparing and reviewing Forest Service correspondence.
3. Use the electronic correspondence management system in preparing, reviewing, and tracking Forest Service correspondence, unless privacy or confidentiality concerns prevent its inclusion.
4. Ensure that correspondence containing any personally identifiable information of employees, contractors, or members of the public is safeguarded and protected from unauthorized disclosure.

#### **6220.48a - Correspondence Managers**

Correspondence Managers serve at all levels of the Forest Service to facilitate the preparation, review, and tracking of both uncontrolled (general) and controlled correspondence.

In addition to the responsibilities in FSM 6220.48, Correspondence Managers have the responsibility to:

1. Serve as the primary contact within respective staffs to facilitate the processing of all correspondence.
2. Check the electronic correspondence management system inbox, as well as any hard copy correspondence inbox, at least every day.
3. Analyze the content of incoming correspondence and assign to the appropriate subject matter expert for preparation of a response.
  - a. Coordinate assignments with the staff Supervisor.
  - b. Refer any correspondence concerning law enforcement to the Correspondence Manager in the Law Enforcement and Investigations office for response.
  - c. Immediately notify the ORMS correspondence team if a piece of controlled correspondence is assigned to the wrong staff, so that it can be reassigned.

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4. For uncontrolled (general) correspondence, record the date of the incoming correspondence and assign the due date, the date by which a signed response must be mailed. Responses must be sent within 30 days from the date the incoming correspondence was stamped received.
5. For controlled correspondence, facilitate compliance with the due date assigned by USDA or ORMS.
6. Deliver new, incoming correspondence immediately to the subject matter expert so that critical deadlines will not be missed.
7. If not using the electronic correspondence management system to track correspondence (due to privacy or confidentiality concerns), develop and maintain an internal tracking system to identify the status and location of assigned correspondence at all times.
8. Maintain an accessible collection of responses previously prepared by subject matter experts and approved for use. Material from these preapproved responses may be used to answer correspondence of a repetitive nature or correspondence featuring similar requests, questions, issues, or concerns. (Care must be taken to ensure that responses are current, including up-to-date signing authority, when using preapproved material).
9. Maintain the official record file, including enclosures or other supporting material, in accordance with Forest Service records management policy (see FSM 6230 and FSH 6209.11).
10. Check format, grammar, and style (see FSH 6209.12, ch. 10 for additional instructions for uncontrolled (general) correspondence; see FSH 6209.12, ch. 20 for additional instructions for controlled correspondence; see FSH 6209.12, ch. 30 for specific formatting guidelines; see FSH 6209.12, ch. 40 for tips and writing mechanics).
11. Obtain necessary concurrences; assemble, review, make minor changes, and clear assigned letters; check that the signature matches the appropriate delegation of authority.
12. Send correspondence to recipient(s) (see FSH 6209.12, ch. 50 for additional instructions).
13. For controlled correspondence, ensure that a copy of the signed response is sent to the appropriate Office of Regulatory and Management Services Writer-Editor.

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**6220.48b - Authors**

In addition to the responsibilities in FSM 6220.48, authors (subject matter experts) who prepare responses have the responsibility to:

1. Facilitate, with the Correspondence Manager, the preparation, review, revision, concurrence, and approval of assigned correspondence.
2. Complete assignments in accordance with established deadlines to allow time for final approvals, signatures, and mailing.

**6220.5 - Definitions**

Agency-Initiated Correspondence. Correspondence initiated by the Forest Service that is designated for signature by the Secretary of Agriculture. Agency-initiated correspondence includes reports to Congress, budget requests, letters of appointment or condolence, statements of policy, and routine correspondence appropriate for the Secretary's or Under Secretary's signature. (See FSH 6209.12, ch. 20).

Controlled Correspondence. Priority executive correspondence designated for special handling and review. It is formally received, tracked, and managed using an electronic correspondence management system in accordance with established deadlines. Correspondence may be designated "controlled" by the White House, USDA Office of the Executive Secretariat, USDA Office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, or by the Office of Regulatory and Management Services.

Correspondence. Refers to all official written communications. Correspondence may be internal or external in nature, and it may be transmitted in person, via postal mail, or electronically.

Correspondence Manager. Staff area employee assigned to manage controlled or uncontrolled (general) correspondence for that staff.

Decision Memorandum. Provides information to a higher level Agency or Department official when a decision or approval on an issue is required.

Electronic Correspondence Management System. The official system used by the Forest Service to produce and manage correspondence. This system is used to prepare correspondence, forward correspondence for review and clearance, and file correspondence for retrieval and future reference.

Executive Correspondence. Correspondence prepared for signature by senior government officials to communicate with the public, Members of Congress, government officials, leaders of interest groups, and others.

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Foreign Correspondence. Correspondence to and from individuals, firms, or institutions in foreign countries.

Forest Service-Initiated Controlled Correspondence. See Agency-Initiated Correspondence.

General Correspondence. See Uncontrolled Correspondence.

Informational Memorandum. Accompanies an Agency-initiated letter submitted to a higher level Agency or Department official for signature, explaining the need for the initiated correspondence and providing any pertinent information or history.

Legend Line. Encodes a summary history of the response, indicating whether the correspondence is draft, final, rewrite, or correction, as well as the Agency, originating unit, author, author's phone number, ORMS Writer-Editor, date, priority code, and control number. It must be included on all draft responses sent for signature to USDA.

Metadata. Data about data, often attached to an electronic file or document to convey information about its format, content, and history.

National Security Classified Correspondence. Correspondence that is subject to special restrictions and limitations prescribed by the national security laws and regulations of the United States. Procedures for marking and safeguarding national security information are included in FSM 6230 and Departmental Manual (DM) 3440-1.

Priority Correspondence. Includes all correspondence received from elected or appointed Federal, State, local, foreign, or Tribal officials, Members of Congress, or Governors, that is received by the Office of the Secretary, senior USDA officials, or the Forest Service. It may also, at the discretion of the addressee, be expanded to include other categories of important correspondence, such as correspondence received from major trade associations, academic institutions, or international organizations. All Priority Correspondence will be controlled correspondence.

Protected Information. This term refers to all information designated as classified, sensitive, or personally identifiable. Distribution and disclosure of protected information within correspondence is subject to additional regulations.

Restricted Correspondence. Controlled correspondence involving sensitive situations that require limited handling. May be designated "For Official Use Only," "Personal Attention," or "National Security Classified." (See also FSH 6209.12, ch. 20).

Secretarial Correspondence. Correspondence addressed to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary. All Secretarial Correspondence is controlled correspondence.

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Special Correspondence. A subset of correspondence that includes restricted correspondence, controlled correspondence, and legally prepared and issued correspondence by Law Enforcement and Investigations.

Subject Matter Expert. Individual who composes the response to incoming correspondence.

Uncontrolled Correspondence. Uncontrolled correspondence is received with no controlling priority number and is not classified as special. This type of correspondence may be forwarded by the Department without a control number, or it may arrive directly in the Forest Service mailroom addressed to individuals or staffs in the Forest Service. (Also referred to as general correspondence).

## **6220.6 - Training**

### **6220.61 - Correspondence Managers**

Besides the training in FSM 6220.62, Correspondence Managers should receive training in:

1. Writing, editing, and composition.
2. Using the electronic correspondence management system.
3. Records management practices for controlled and uncontrolled (general) correspondence.

### **6220.62 - All Employees**

All employees involved in the preparation of correspondence should receive basic training in handling, processing, and responding to correspondence. All new employees should receive a short course in correspondence during orientation.

Line Officers and Staff Directors at the Washington Office, Regional offices, Area, International Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF), Stations, National Forests, and Ranger Districts are responsible for providing this training to employees.

Employees should receive periodic training on the electronic correspondence management system so that they can:

1. Create, review, revise, and issue official Forest Service correspondence.
2. Track formal correspondence.
3. Correctly use official electronic templates in preparing and mailing correspondence.

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**6220.7 - References**

Federal Plain Language Guidelines.

(<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/TOC.cfm>)

Federal Plain Language Guidelines - Writing Effective Letters Supplement.

(<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/index.cfm>)

The Gregg Reference Manual, William Sabin, 2010.

Official Congressional Directory.

USDA Secretarial Correspondence and Documents Manual, Office of the Executive Secretariat, Version 1.0, August 2010.

U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual, 2008. (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/stylemanual/>)