

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

**Forest Service Handbook 6109.13 – Performance, Training, and Awards Handbook
Chapter 30 - Incentive Awards**

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Approved by: F. Dale Robertson, Chief

Date approved:

Responsible Staff:

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Superseded Document(s): 30 thru 35.2

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

30: Makes minor editorial and format changes, adds cross-references, and incorporates direction on spot awards throughout chapter 30, Incentive Awards.

31: In this section on Types of Awards, revises paragraph 3 to allow the payment of spot awards from the imprest fund.

31.12a - 31.12b: Adds sections 31.12a, Eligibility, and 31.12b, Documentation, to clarify direction on quality step increases.

31.14a - 31.14b: Adds sections 31.14a, Approved Award Categories, and 31.14b, Proposed Award Categories, to clarify direction on established or new awards.

31.18: Adds new section on spot awards.

33.2 - Exhibits 01: Revises the tangible benefits award scales.

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30.3 - Policy

It is Forest Service policy to use incentive awards as an integral part of supervision and management (FSM 6144).

31 - Types Of Awards

Incentive awards include various kinds of monetary and honorary recognition of individual and group performance. Most cash awards require specific levels of performance or special unique service. Some cash awards are restricted to certain categories of employees. Exhibit 01 shows which awards are available to recognize certain performance and who may receive each type of award.

Certificates and cash are the only forms of recognition authorized by the Department for quality increases and performance awards. An employee meeting the high performance standards required for an outstanding rating meets the standards of performance for a quality step increase or a cash award. Other forms of recognition, such as plaques, are limited to continuing awards programs.

Pertinent rules affecting cash awards include the following:

1. Withhold Federal income tax from all cash awards.
2. Do not raise award amounts to offset the deduction for income taxes.
3. Do not pay cash awards, other than spot awards, from the imprest fund (FSH 6109.41 - DPM 451; and FSH 6509.13b, sec. 701).

31 - EXHIBIT 01 IS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT.

31.1 - Requirements and Restrictions

31.11 - Superior Accomplishment Awards (Special Acts, Suggestions, and Inventions)

These are for a one-time singular contribution that is relatively easy to identify, such as superior performance on a singular short-term assignment, an act of heroism, scientific achievement, service on a task force, or other similar nonrecurring achievement. All employees are eligible for superior accomplishment awards, but special justification is needed for Senior Executive Service (SES) and Performance Management and Recognition System employees. SES employees are ineligible for Spot Awards. Cash awards for SES members must be approved by the Secretary of Agriculture. Superior accomplishment awards should be granted immediately after accomplishment when possible.

31.12 - Quality Step Increases

A quality step increase (QSI) is an extra within-grade increase. It is a pay raise appropriate when the employee's performance has been at a high level long enough for that level to be considered characteristic continuing performance. One year is recommended as a prerequisite. A QSI requires certification that the employee's performance substantially exceeds the normal requirements of the job, and, on the basis of the employee's past performance, it is likely that this high-quality performance will be sustained. Therefore, a QSI is not appropriate for an employee who is being promoted, changing positions, or has been on detail. The employee must be expected to remain in the same or similar position at the same grade for at least 60 days after the effective date of the increase.

Do not grant more than one quality step increase or sustained superior performance award to the same employee in any period of 52 weeks.

31.12a - Eligibility

A QSI may be granted only to an employee who:

1. Has been in the job at least 6 months,
2. Receives a rating of record of Outstanding,
3. Is at or below step nine of their grade, and
4. Has not received a QSI or sustained superior performance award in the preceding 52 calendar weeks.

31.12b - Documentation

The following documentation is necessary:

1. Form AD-287-2, Recommendation and Approval of Cash Award or Quality Increase.
2. A copy of a recent performance rating (Forms AD-435, Performance Appraisal; AD-435A, Performance Appraisal Worksheet; and AD-435B, Performance Appraisal Worksheet Continuation). If the performance appraisal is more than 60 days old, the appraisal must be accompanied by a statement giving reasons why the performance warrants the award.

The immediate supervisor is responsible for initiating written recommendations for quality step increases.

If there is any discrepancy between form requirements and Forest Service direction, follow Forest Service direction.

31.13 - Performance Awards

31.13a - Performance Management and Recognition System Performance Awards

The Performance Management and Recognition System (PMRS) performance award is based on the performance rating and is paid as a lump sum amount that is not added to base salary.

The Forest Service uses the USDA optional award system described in FSH 6109.41-DPM 540, subchapter 2, appendix A, to distribute performance awards.

Performance award amounts for the Forest Service are based each year on statutory and regulatory requirements, the budget, and the aggregate PMRS payroll. Performance awards are paid between October 1 and December 31 of the same year as the performance appraisal.

All Forest Service PMRS employees shall have the same factors considered in distributing the performance awards.

Regional Foresters, Station and Area Directors, and Washington Office Deputy Chiefs are designated PMRS appraisal managers. They are responsible for ensuring the consistency of performance standards, elements, and ratings, and for reviewing performance awards determinations.

All PMRS employees who have an Outstanding performance rating shall receive a performance award of not less than 2 percent but not more than 10 percent of base pay, unless the Secretary of Agriculture approves an award up to 20 percent of base pay for unusually outstanding performance.

Categories for unusually outstanding achievement are in FSH 6109.41-DPM 540, subchapter 2, section 2-4 (1).

All PMRS employees who have a Superior rating may receive an award that is 10 percent or less of the employee's base pay.

Award amounts for individuals in the same grade and unit must be greater for higher ratings than for lower ratings.

Failure to be paid a performance award is not appealable.

The PMRS performance awards and special act awards (as described in FSH 6109.41-FPM/DPM 451) are not mutually exclusive. Employees who have already received a performance award are not prohibited from receiving a special act award for any unique or nonrecurring employee or group contribution that is highly exceptional and unusually outstanding and that is beyond job responsibilities and performance standards. However, special act justifications must contain justification separate and distinct from the information in the performance standards, elements, or accomplishments.

31.13b - Performance Awards for GS and Prevailing Rate Employees (Sustained Superior Performance Awards)

A sustained superior performance is defined as the performance of assigned tasks in a manner substantially exceeding normal requirements over a sustained period of 6 months or more. The latest performance rating must be above Fully Successful.

The nominating official may recommend an award by attaching to Forms AD-287-2, Recommendation and Approval of Cash Award or Quality Increase, a copy of the most recent performance rating (Form AD-435, Performance Appraisal; AD-435A, Performance Appraisal Worksheet; and AD-435B, Performance Appraisal Worksheet (continuation)). This rating must have been made within the prior 6 months and must be for the current position. If a performance appraisal is more than 60 days old, accompany the appraisal with a statement giving reasons why performance warrants the award. Also attach a brief explanation of the amount chosen (it may range up to 10 percent of the employee's annual salary).

The higher percentages in the range would be appropriate for summary ratings of Superior or Outstanding.

31.14 - Forest Service Awards

Groups, individuals, or organizational entities may be recognized annually in specific categories, such as safety, land stewardship, or outstanding manager of the year. Such awards must be in recognition of specific individual, group, or organizational accomplishments.

The Washington Office or field units may establish award categories and procure suitable plaques or tangible award items, within the guidelines in this section. Awards are normally presented on an annual or other periodic basis, depending on circumstances. Cash may be given as part of a Forest Service award, but not in a predetermined fixed amount. The amount of cash must be determined in terms of the specific accomplishment being recognized at the time, and as determined by use of the tangible or intangible awards scales (sec. 33.2, ex. 01 and 02).

Service-wide awards shall be approved by Chief and Staff. Region, Station, Area, or local unit awards shall be approved by Regional Forester, Station Director, Area Director, or local manager, as may be delegated.

31.14a - Approved Award Categories

The following Forest Service awards have been approved:

1. Smokejumper Award,
2. Smokey Bear Award,
3. Award for Outstanding Service in Fire Management,

4. Land Stewardship Award,
5. Forest Service Engineer of the Year,
6. Mineral Management,
7. Accountant of the Year,
8. Associate Chief's Award for Outstanding Internal Communications,
9. Chief's 6-point Agenda Award,
10. Chief's Distinguished and Superior Science Award,
11. Chief's Award for Excellence in Technology Transfer,
12. Chief's Stewardship Award,
13. Rural Development Award,
14. Research Deputy Chief's Award for Workforce Diversity,
15. Volunteers Program National Award.

31.14b - Proposed Award Categories

Additional similar awards may be established by Washington Office or field unit managers to recognize specific accomplishments on an annual or recurrent basis. In establishing such awards, managers shall address the following:

1. Name of award.
2. A brief clear description of purpose: what the award is to recognize.
3. Frequency of the award; for example, annual, semi-annual, intermittent, and so forth.
4. Who is eligible for nomination: whether it will be an individual, group, or an organizational entity.
5. Process by which selections will be made, including who will make final selections.
6. What documentation constitutes a complete nomination.
7. Where to send nominations, and by what date.
8. What the award will consist of; for example, plaque.

Once a new award category has been established by a unit manager, that unit, as the sponsor, should announce the award by letter or other means that covers as a minimum the above criteria. A permanent award file must be maintained by the sponsoring unit.

31.15 - Department Honor Awards

The Secretary of Agriculture honors Department employees through the distinguished service award and the superior service award. Full details concerning the basis for nomination, eligibility, and nomination procedures are found in FSH 6109.41 - DPM 451, appendix H. Nominations are due in the Personnel Management Staff, Washington Office, when announced each year.

Achievements that deserve a Department honor award normally deserve a cash award. A cash award for an achievement that qualified for an honor award nomination must be approved prior to submission of the nomination to the Department. A contribution recognized by the Secretary as warranting an honor award may not be used later as a basis for a cash award (FSH 6109.41 - DPM 451, appendix H, para. B(1)(e)).

31.16 - Other Federal Government and Non-Government Awards

Forest Service employees are eligible for other Federal Government and non-Government awards. These are listed in appendix J to FSH 6109.41 - DPM 451.

31.17 - Acceptance of Outside Cash Awards

Employees may accept cash awards and prizes from organizations outside the Federal Government, provided that:

1. The award or prize will not influence in any way the employee's performance of official duties.
2. There is no contractual relationship between the Forest Service and the award grantor.
3. Acceptance of this award would not cause a real or apparent conflict of interest, or create an embarrassment to the Government.
4. The recipient was selected under procedures which were competitive and open to applicable publics.

Such awards are subject to Federal income taxes, except as provided in Section 74 of the Internal Revenue Code.

31.18 - Spot Awards

See the Imprest Fund Payments Handbook, FSH 6509.13b, section 0701, for further direction on payment of spot awards from the imprest fund. See the Department Personnel Manual (FSH

6109.41 - DPM Letter 451-11) for Department-wide direction on spot awards. Following are Forest Service requirements:

1. Eligibility. Immediate monetary recognition for special acts or services that warrant small awards may be given to any Forest Service employee, except SES employees. A cash award may be given to one individual, not a group, for a special act or achievement.

2. Processing and Clearance. Use Form AD-287-2 to process spot awards. See exhibit 01 for a sample. A justification is not needed. The Recommending Official for this award may be any employee who thinks a spot award is appropriate for an individual's service or special act. The Approving Official is the supervisor at the lowest practicable supervisory level. This award does not need a Reviewing Official. Where it is impractical for the immediate supervisor to sign the Form AD-287-2, units may set up a system for obtaining concurrence electronically from the lowest practicable supervisory level or set up a preapproval process.

3. Amounts. An employee is eligible for two spot awards per fiscal year not to exceed \$300 net. The minimum award is \$25 net and the maximum is \$250 net. Funds are dispersed in increments of \$25.

4. Imprest Fund Withdrawal. The Recommending Official, or other person designated by the unit to withdraw funds from imprest, delivers the Form AD-287-2 to the Imprest Fund Cashier, who issues the funds in the authorized amount to the Recommending Official. See FSH 6509.13b, sec. 0701, for the processing procedures the Imprest Fund Cashier must follow.

31.18 - EXHIBIT 01 IS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT.

31.2 - Group Awards

In general, group awards are suitable for unified results and/or an achievement resulting from team effort. If a contribution was made by more than one employee or by an organizational unit, all employees contributing, including supervisors and managers, must be considered as a group. Group awards may be honorary, cash, or a combination.

If a cash award is made, the grant may be in equal shares, or in different amounts depending upon the individual contribution. However, the total amount of the award may not exceed the amount authorized for that type of contribution if it were awarded to an individual.

Group awards should include as few employees as possible to ensure that only those who clearly worked above the requirements of their jobs are included, and that any cash is meaningful.

Cash awards for groups are processed using one Form AD-287-2, Recommendation and Approval of Cash Award or Quality Increase, for the group and including a listing of all participants. The rationale for apportionment of the award should be a part of the documentation. The person

initiating a group award must have approval of the supervisor of any employee not under the nominator's direct or indirect supervision (such as employees from other units).

31.3 - Certificates and Letters

Certificates should be prepared as honorary awards and to accompany cash awards. When a group of employees is recognized, each individual shall receive a certificate.

31.31 - Form AD-69, Certificate of Merit

A Certificate of Merit may be used to express appreciation for (1) an adopted employee suggestion or special achievement granted a cash award, (2) performance meeting a quality step increase, (3) achievement warranting merit pay performance awards, and (4) sustained superior performance awards.

A Certificate of Merit signed by the Chief may be appropriate for acts or services of Service-wide merit not honored at the Department level.

Such a certificate may be requested through the Personnel Management Staff, Washington Office, and presented by the Regional Forester, Station Director, Area Director, or other official at an appropriate ceremony.

31.32 - Form AD-141A; Certificate of Appreciation

A Certificate of Appreciation may be used to express appreciation for the contribution of an employee or group of employees for an adopted suggestion or achievement not meriting a cash award. Certificates of Appreciation may also be used to recognize private citizens and organizations.

31.33 - Letters of Appreciation or Commendation

Any appropriate official may sign letters of appreciation or commendation.

32 - Eligibility for Incentive Awards

Both employees and private citizens may receive honorary incentive awards, but only employees are eligible for cash incentive awards.

32.1 - Employees

Use special act or service awards for employees who do not receive periodic performance ratings. Former employees or the estate of a deceased employee may be eligible for awards for performance while the employee was in Government service.

32.2 - Senior Community Service (Older American) Employment Program

Senior Community Service (Older Americans program) enrollees are not Federal employees; however, they can be awarded up to \$100 under special Department of Labor guidelines. Awards are from Department of Labor funds and are separate from the Forest Service awards program.

32.3 - Awards to Private Citizens

One-time honorary awards, such as letters of commendation or certificates of appreciation, may be given to private citizens or organizations for beneficial contributions to the public service. Cash awards cannot be given to private citizens.

Volunteers, cooperators, and enrollees in hosted programs, such as the Youth Conservation Corps, may be given honorary recognition only.

33 - Procedures to Implement Awards

33.1 - Nomination and Justification

After determining that an award is merited, the recommending official should prepare a nomination. The recommending official can be the immediate supervisor, or any other official in or outside of the immediate unit.

The nominator proposing the award must have the approval of the supervisor of any employee not under their direct or indirect supervision (for example, detailers or task force members from other units).

Cash awards for all except PMRS and Senior Executive Service employees must be prepared on Form AD-287-2, Recommendation and Approval of Cash Award or Quality Increase. Attach documentation needed to properly describe the accomplishment and the amount of the award to Form AD-287-2. Spot awards do not require a justification statement.

In any instance that Form AD-287-2 direction differs from Forest Service direction, follow Forest Service direction.

33.2 - Determining Cash Award Amounts

Base the amount of the incentive award upon tangible or intangible benefit scales (ex. 01 and 02). See the Department Personnel Manual (FSH 6109.41 - DPM ch. 451) for special situations such as large, tangible long-term benefits versus high, one-time implementation costs, supplemental benefits, or hard-to-estimate intangible benefits.

33.2 - Exhibit 01

Scale 1 - Tangible Benefits Award Scale

<u>Tangible Benefit</u>	<u>Award</u>
Up to \$10,000	10 percent of the tangible benefits
\$10,001 - \$100,000	\$1,000 for the first \$10,000 in benefits plus 3 percent of benefits over \$10,000
\$100,001 or more	\$3,700 for the first \$100,000 in benefits plus .005 (one-half of 1 percent) of benefits over \$100,000

33.2 - EXHIBIT 02 IS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT.

33.3 - Approval

Except for spot awards, approval of awards must be granted at one level higher than the immediate supervisor. For spot awards approval, see section 31.18.

33.31 - Signing of Certificates

Certificates or letters may be signed by the official approving the award or by a higher authority.

33.4 - Presentation of Awards

Spot awards are given in cash, using the imprest fund (sec. 33.18 and FSH 6509.13b, sec. 0701.15). Checks for other cash awards are mailed as directed on the Form AD-287-2, Recommendation and Approval of Cash Award or Quality Increase, furnished to the payrolling office. The check or certificate may be sent either to the awardee or to a designated individual for presentation to the awardee. The recipient of each cash award should receive an appropriate letter or certificate.

34 - Records and Reports

34.1 - Records

Each organizational level authorized to approve suggestions and awards shall maintain a file of all approved Forms AD-287-2, with attached documentation. This documentation provides controls against making duplicate awards for the same contribution and serve as the basis for reports.

34.2 - Reports

Each Region, Station, and Area shall submit an annual report, FS-6100-B, Incentive Awards Program Annual Report, and other data described in an annual notice to the Personnel Management Staff, Washington Office.

35 - Stimulating Participation

35.03 - Policy

The incentive awards program shall be made known to employees. Work supervisors should be well informed about the plan and established standards. At least annually, each employing office shall publicize the criteria for current awards, who received the awards, and the reasons for granting each award processed.

35.1 - Publicity

Field units may include in their regular administrative issuances appropriate information about

awards granted to their employees. Routine data for promotion and publicity purposes, such as name, grade, organization location, photograph of awardee, type and amount of award, and description of contribution is considered public information and therefore not subject to the provisions of the Privacy Act. Personal information, such as date of birth, home address, professional affiliations, and private employment history, may not be publicized without prior permission from the employee.

Information necessary for reporting and processing incentive awards may be furnished to other agencies, the Office of Personnel Management, and external organizations that sponsor awards for Federal personnel. However, the employee's prior permission is required to release personal information to external organizations.

35.11 - Publications

Regions, Stations, Area, and the Washington Office may issue their own publications devoted exclusively to awards.

35.2 - Necessary Expenses

A reception may be provided for recipients of awards under a continuing awards program or for a yearly presentation of regular awards. Expenses to the Government for the reception shall not exceed a reasonable and prudent amount for the circumstances. For further direction on allowable expenses for receptions, see FSM 6510.