

**Forest Service Handbook
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**Forest Service Handbook 6109.15 – Position Classification Handbook
Chapter 10 - Forest Service Classification Principles, Practices, and Techniques**

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Responsible Staff:

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

6109.15: Revises Handbook in its entirety.

Zero Code: Updates the zero code and incorporates applicable direction from FSM 6151.

6109.15_10: Combines Chapter 10, Forest Service Classification Principles, Practices, and Techniques, and Forest Service Manual 6151, Position Classification and Job Evaluation, and revises in their entirety.

6109.15_20: Combines Chapters 20, Position Description Preparation and Requirements, and Chapter 40, Standard Position Description System, and revises in their entirety.

6109.15_30: Updates Chapter 30, Classification of Positions under the Scientist Career Plan, to reflect changes in the Research Grade Evaluation Guide which was revised by the United States Office of Personnel Management in September 2006.

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6109.15_40: Removes Chapter 40, Standard Position Description System, and recodes applicable direction to Chapter 20, Position Description Preparation and Requirements.

6109.15_50: Removes Chapter 50, Classification of Positions Using “Impact-of-the-Person-on-the-Job” Concept, and incorporates applicable direction in Chapter 10, Section 13, Reclassification of Encumbered Positions.

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11 - Principles, Practices, and Techniques

11.1 - Interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinary classification facilitates the ability of the classification program to respond to the recruitment needs of many Forest Service programs whose professional qualification requirements extend beyond a single series. Interdisciplinary positions are professional in nature and, for recruitment purposes, require qualifications in recognized academic disciplines such as natural resources management and biological sciences, social sciences, physical sciences, and engineering. The interdisciplinary classification of a position is appropriate in situations where there is a clear link between work identified in the position description and the various professional series to which it is classified.

Interdisciplinary classification of a single position description should be limited to no more than three professional series. If a function is not comparable in emphasis with the other functions, it should not be included in the interdisciplinary classification.

Examples of positions appropriate for interdisciplinary classification include:

1. A range, fish, and wildlife staff officer requiring professional knowledge characteristic of General Schedule (GS)-454, Rangeland Management; GS-482, Fish Biology; or GS-486, Wildlife Biology series. Such positions involve the performance of a combination of duties characteristic of all three professions.
2. A resource and land management planning position requiring knowledge of human uses and socio-economic values of forest lands; natural resources management; or minerals and geology management. This type of position may be classified as interdisciplinary in such series as GS-101, Social Science; GS-401, General Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences; or GS-1301, General Physical Science. Duties are substantially identical and characteristic of all of the three series.
3. Mathematical, engineering, or research positions whose duties and responsibilities closely relate to more than one professional occupation.

Classification of individual positions in more than three series must be justified and approved by the Human Resources Officer (HRO).

11.2 - Supervisory and Leader Responsibility

11.21 - Supervisory Career Ladders

Career ladders may be established for positions designated as supervisory under the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) or 5 U.S.C. 7103(a) (10), when all of the following criteria are met:

1. There is an insufficient candidate pool for the target grade or an expanded candidate pool is desirable;
2. The supervisor of the position is available during the developmental period to provide guidance and instruction necessary for the incumbent to assume the full range of supervisory or managerial responsibilities when promoted to the target grade;
3. The developmental grade is no lower than one level below the target grade; no lower than the highest grade supervised; and no lower than the first full performance level for two-grade interval occupations or GS-09;
4. Both levels of the career ladder are properly classified by reference to the GSSG; and
5. Both levels of the career ladder are properly designated as supervisory Code 2 under GSSG or supervisory Code 4 under 5 U.S.C. 7103(a)(10), and are not combined with other supervisory codes including Code 8 (Other).

11.22 - Leader Positions

Leader positions may occasionally be used in hierarchical or team-based organizations when the organizational objective includes delayering, streamlining, and economy of operations. Establishment of leader positions should be based on consideration of all position management factors including potential impact on supervisory positions, level of independence of positions led, and relative cost/benefit in meeting the needs of the organization. Managers and classifiers should identify and address any possible negative effects on other positions before establishing any new leader positions classified using the OPM General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide (GSLGEG).

Establishing very small units or teams (for example, three or four members) can adversely affect the grades of team members by reducing their level of responsibility. Unit members cannot generally receive higher levels of grade credit in situations where both supervisors and leaders are available for assistance, even if such assistance is not routinely solicited. This is an especially important consideration where units are composed of higher-graded employees (for example, GS-12 and above). Positions must meet minimum requirements of the GSLGEG to be classified as leaders.

Career ladders for leader positions may be established under circumstances similar to those described in 11.21, provided the developmental grade is no lower than one level below the target grade; no lower than the highest grade led; no lower than the first full performance level for two-grade interval occupations or GS-09; and is properly classified by reference to the GSLGEG.

11.3 - GS-340 Program Management Series

The GS-340 Program Management Series recognizes executive knowledge and ability as the paramount qualification requirement for line management positions. Use of the GS-340 series in the Forest Service is reserved for line officers and executive positions which manage or direct programs in a line capacity. This includes but may not be limited to:

1. District Ranger and Deputy District Ranger.
2. Forest Supervisor and Deputy Forest Supervisor.
3. Grasslands Supervisor and Deputy Grasslands Supervisor.
4. Regional Forester and Deputy Regional Forester.
5. Station Director and Assistant Station Director.
6. Job Corps National Director and Assistant National Director.
7. Job Corps Center Director and Deputy Center Director.
8. Area Manager and Assistant Area Manager.

Use of the GS-340 series for positions other than line management positions listed requires Human Resources Officer (HRO) approval and Forest Service Executive Leadership Team (ELT) concurrence.

11.4 - Identical Additional Positions

The filling of identical additional (IA) positions is appropriate when workload requirements warrant filling multiple positions performing identical work; or an additional position is required to perform work identical to work performed by an existing position. Supervisory, leader and incumbency based positions are generally not appropriate for IA action. However, the following situations may warrant temporary establishment of an IA position for such positions:

1. When pending separation, retirement, or transfer of an employee necessitates immediate appointment of a replacement.
2. When an employee is on extended absence or leave and another employee is assigned to perform the duties until the person returns.

12 - Grade Stacking

Grade stacking occurs when a subordinate position is established at the same grade of the supervisor and is inconsistent with sound classification and position management principles unless classification of subordinate positions is based on the OPM *Research Grade Evaluation Guide* (RGEG). Under rare circumstances, grade stacking may be acceptable in a non-research organization when a non-supervisory subordinate position is highly individualized, receives only administrative supervision from the supervisor, and clearly represents the only practical organizational arrangement available within an administrative unit. Grade stacking situations shall be documented in an evaluation statement which includes:

1. Explanation of the nature and background of the proposed action.
2. Impact on other positions in the unit such as working relationships or grades.

3. Analysis of organizational alternatives.
4. Evaluation of position management implications.
5. Explanation of the basis for assignment of pay plan, title, series, and grade level in comparison to applicable position classification standards, guides, and other available guidance.

The grade of a research scientist is based on a high degree of technical independence, personal creativity, professional recognition, and contribution. Therefore, a research scientist may be properly classified at the same or higher grade than the grade of the supervisor.

Grade stacking may occur at the highest levels of an organization where, for example, properly classified Assistant Directors may be graded at the same level as a Deputy Director.

Human Resources Officers (HRO) are delegated authority to approve grade stacking situations within their level of delegated classification authority. This authority may not be further re-delegated.

13 - Reclassification of Encumbered Positions

Encumbered positions may be reclassified based on:

1. Accretion of Duties: An accretion occurs when a qualified employee has been performing grade-controlling duties classified at a higher grade level for an extended period of time (normally 12 months) and will continue to perform the grade-controlling duties on a regular and recurring basis. If the action is supported by a classification determination, in accordance with the “Master Agreement between Forest Service and National Federation of Federal Employees” (dated December 6, 2016), Article 14 Section 5, management may elect to noncompetitively promote the employee into the reclassified position if all the following conditions have been met:

- a. All the following criteria must be met:

- (1) The major duties and basic functions of the current position must be absorbed into the new position;
- (2) The current position must be abolished;
- (3) The new position must not have any known promotion potential beyond its accreted grade level;
- (4) The addition of higher level duties and responsibilities must not result in the abolishment of another position, reduce the known promotion potential of another position, or adversely impact another occupied position;
- (5) No other employee(s) in the same organizational unit may be performing similar duties prior to the addition of the new duties and responsibilities which

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precipitated a promotion based on accretion of duties (organizational unit means a “supervisory unit,” which is typically the lowest level of an organizational unit where like work is performed); and

(6) The employee meets time-in-grade and qualification standards.

b. The following actions will not be considered for a promotion based on an accretion of duties:

(1) Promotion from one-grade interval position to a two-grade interval position, for example, GS-5/6/7 to GS-9/11.

(2) Promotion from one occupational series to another occupational series, for example GS-685 to GS-1101.

(3) Movement to a vacant, higher level position.

(4) Promotion from an identical additional position within the same organization.

(5) Promotion from a non-supervisory position to a supervisory position.

(6) Promotion from a non-leader position to a leader position.

(7) Accretion of duties across organizational lines.

2. “Impact of the Person on the Job” provided that:

a. The noncompetitive action is supported by a desk audit and the job changes that distinguish the position from other positions are recorded in an evaluation statement, and documented in the position description.

b. The unique or special knowledge, skills, abilities, talents, or achievements of an individual clearly broaden the nature or scope and effect of work performed.

c. Job duties that distinguish the position from other positions are recognized and endorsed by management, and the work environment allows for continuing performance at a different level.

d. The position which has been impacted by an individual reverts to its original classification when vacated.

e. Additional guidance is provided in OPM’s *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* and *The Classifier’s Handbook*.

Classification of positions based on accretion of duties or impact of the person on the job shall be based on appropriate application of OPM position classification standards and functional guides, and internal Forest Service classification direction. The classification determination must be

supported by a desk audit and a written evaluation statement must clearly explain the basis for the classification determination.

14 - Implementation of New Classification Standards

New classification standards shall be applied within 12 months of date of issuance by Office of Personnel Management (OPM). This includes all changes to standards, such as new job family standards or evaluation criteria, new series coverage, and new titling instructions. Upon receipt of new Factor Evaluation System (FES) standards, all positions in the specific series should be reviewed and revised in FES factor format. Human Resources Service Teams (HRST) must implement new standards or guides no later than the date prescribed by OPM for each standard.

Positions impacted by the application of new standards (downgrade or upgrade) should be reclassified within six pay periods, or employee reassigned to a position properly classified at the employee's current grade.

15 - Classification Reviews and Appeals

15.1 - Forest Service Classification Review

Any General Schedule (GS) or Federal Wage System (FWS) employee whose current position was classified by a Human Resources Service Team (HRST) may request a review of the classification by a different classifier. The request shall be submitted to the Human Resources Officer (HRO) through employee's supervisor. The HRO will make arrangements for review by a different classifier within the HRST or by a classifier from a different HRST. The reviewing office must notify the appellant of its decision in writing.

The Human Resources Management Director (HRMD) will issue the final agency decision, as required. The decision is appealable to USDA and/or OPM.

The position shall be reviewed and classified on the basis of duties and responsibilities actually assigned by management and performed by the employee rather than simply on the basis of the written position description.

Bargaining unit employees should follow procedures in applicable collective bargaining agreements.

15.2 - Classification Appeals

Any GS or FWS employee in the Forest Service may appeal the classification of the position to which the employee is currently assigned at any time. An appeal may be made directly to the USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) or OPM.

An appellant may file personally or through a designated representative of choice. The agency may disallow an employee's representative when the individual's activities as a representative would cause a conflict of interest or position.

15.21 - Appeals to USDA

An employee may file a classification appeal directly with the OHRM. The USDA will notify the appellant of its decision in writing. If the appellant is dissatisfied with the USDA decision, an appeal may be filed with OPM. Classification appeals to OHRM should be submitted in writing to the following address:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of Human Resources Management
Human Resources Policy Division
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Jamie L. Whitten Building, Room 32-W
Washington, D.C. 20250

15.22 - Appeals to OPM

A GS employee may file an appeal directly with OPM at any time without first appealing to the USDA.

FWS employees must first utilize the USDA Job Grading Appeal System and may file an appeal with OPM only after the USDA has issued a decision.

OPM will notify the appellant of its decision in writing. This decision is final and not subject to further appeal.

The [OPM Website](#) provides additional information about the classification appeal process. Appeals should be submitted in writing to the following address:

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Classification Appeals and FLSA Claims Program Manager
1900 E. ST NW Room 6484
Washington, DC 20415

Upon receipt of USDA or OPM notification of a classification appeal, the HRST with jurisdiction over the appealed position will furnish documents requested by USDA or OPM within timeframes requested.

If a USDA or OPM appeal decision changes the pay plan, title, series, or grade of the position, the HRMD and Classification Policy staff will confer with the HRST prior to implementing the classification certificate to determine if Forest Service will request reconsideration of the decision.

15.23 - Effective Date of Appeals

Appeal decisions must be implemented no earlier than the date of the decision and no later than the beginning of the second pay period following that date, unless a later date is specified in the decision.

A classification appeal decision can only be made retroactive if it corrects a classification action that resulted in a wrongful demotion. For a decision to be made retroactive, the employee must appeal the classification to either USDA or OPM within 15 calendar days after the effective date of the reclassification action, based on the duties and responsibilities performed at the time of demotion.

15.3 - Notice and Documentation of Appeals

15.31 - Individual Notice of Appeal Rights

Whenever a classification action results in actual loss of grade or pay (demotion), the HRST shall notify the incumbent in writing of appeal rights, including time limits for filing, at least 30 days prior to the effective date of the action.

15.32 - Documentation of Appeal Decisions

When an appeal decision is issued, the HRST shall note the date and number of the OPM decision on the PD cover sheet; and that classification determination resulted from an OPM classification appeal certificate.