

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

**Forest Service Handbook 6109.15 – Position Classification Handbook  
Zero Code**

**Amendment:** 6109.15-2017-1

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**Approved by:** Robert Velasco, II, Acting Deputy Chief, Ops

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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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## 01 - Authority

The Forest Service position classification program is administered under delegated authority received from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The primary laws and policies governing position classification are as follows:

1. Classification Act of 1949, as amended and codified at 5 U.S.C. §5101-5115 and §5346. This Act and associated code is the primary legal authority for the classification of General Schedule (GS) and Federal Wage System (FWS) positions. This law assigns Government-wide authority for position classification to Executive Heads of Departments.
2. Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations:
  - a. Part 511. This Part covers the regulations for classification of GS positions.
  - b. Part 532. This Part covers the regulations for classification of FWS positions.

This handbook covers all GS and FWS positions in grades 1 through 15. These guidelines do not cover Senior Executive Service (SES), Senior Level (SL), Scientific and Technical (ST), Senior Scientific and Technology Service (SSTS), or Administratively Determined (AD) positions.

## 03 - Policy

Every position in the Forest Service shall have a written position description (PD) that serves as the official record of the classification of the job. In addition to documenting assigned duties and responsibilities of a position, the PD serves as the basic document to establish rate of pay; to determine skill and knowledge requirements and selection criteria for recruitment; and to establish performance standards.

Forest Service is responsible for properly classifying all positions in accordance with OPM regulations for position classification including 5 CFR, Part 511 for GS Positions; 5 CFR, Part 532 for FWS Positions; *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*; *Introduction to the Federal Wage System Job Grading System*; and *The Classifier's Handbook*. Additionally, positions shall be classified consistent with any supplemental classification direction provided by USDA and Forest Service. Positions should be reviewed annually to ensure classification accuracy of positions and soundness of organizational structures.

Standard Position Descriptions (SPD) are mandatory if an adequate one exists. An SPD is considered adequate when it describes 80 percent of the work; includes all major duties and responsibilities; and is classified in the proper pay plan, title, series, and grade. 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 (sec. 15 of this handbook).

## **04 - Responsibility**

### **04.1 - Director of USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM)**

The Director of USDA OHRM is responsible for oversight and evaluation of the position classification program throughout USDA under delegated authority received from OPM.

### **04.2 - Forest Service Human Resources Management Director (HRMD)**

It is the responsibility of the Forest Service HRMD to:

1. Administer the position classification program for all GS and FWS positions in grades 1 through 15 under delegated authority received from the USDA OHRM.
2. Approve classification actions at the GS-14 and GS-15 levels.
3. Establish position classification and position management policy for Forest Service.
4. Monitor compliance with law, OPM regulations, and USDA and Forest Service policies and procedures.
5. Develop internal classification direction to aid in the classification of positions specific to Forest Service.
6. Issue final Agency decision for classification review requests received through the Forest Service classification review process, and requests for review received through negotiated agreements between recognized bargaining units and the Forest Service. This applies to all GS and all FWS positions.
7. Resolve classification issues referred from Human Resources Service Teams (HRST).
8. Administer and maintain the Standard Position Description System (sec. 22 of this handbook).
9. Approve the use of contractors to perform position classification services.

### **04.3 - Human Resources Officer (HRO)**

It is the responsibility of the HRO to:

1. Exercise delegated authority to classify GS positions through the GS-13 level and all FWS positions grades 1 through 15.
2. Recommend classification of GS-14 and GS-15 level positions to the HRMD.
3. Ensure classification accuracy and adherence to OPM, USDA, and Forest Service requirements.

4. Provide advice and consultation to management officials on sound application of position classification and position management principles at all levels within service area.
5. Consult with the HRMD on proposed classification actions with potential impact on series or grade levels of similar or related positions throughout the Forest Service.
6. Promote use of SPDs and ensure SPD selected accurately reflects work assigned.
7. Maintain official classification records including current PDs, evaluation statements, and related organizational information.

#### **04.4 - Human Resources Specialist (HRS)**

It is the responsibility of the HRS to:

1. Classify GS and FWS positions within level of delegated classification authority.
2. Interpret and apply OPM position classification standards and functional guides, and internal Forest Service classification guidance to determine correct pay plan, occupational series, title, and grade level for positions.
3. Provide advice and counsel to supervisors and managers on position and organizational design, position management, and development of PDs.
4. Conduct position and organizational reviews to ensure accuracy of classification and optimal utilization of positions.
5. Promote use of SPDs and ensure SPD selected accurately reflects work assigned.

#### **04.5 - Manager/Supervisor**

It is the responsibility of the manager/supervisor to:

1. Apply sound principles of position design and position management.
2. Maintain current PDs for subordinate positions and provide PDs to employees. Review PDs annually with employees to ensure accurate and adequate statement of major duties assigned and performed.
3. Participate in the classification process by providing human resources specialists with all information necessary to determine proper classification for all new and modified positions.
4. Maximize use of SPDs and ensure SPD selected accurately reflects work assigned.

## 04.6 - Employee

The employee is responsible for notifying supervisor of any significant differences between the PD of record and actual work performed.

## 05 - Definitions

Appeal. A written request by an employee or group of employees occupying identical positions, asking USDA OHRM or OPM to review the official pay plan, title, series, and/or grade of a position.

Classification Action. Any official action taken under proper delegation of authority to establish a new position or to change an existing position by assignment to the appropriate series and grade under the provisions of 5 U.S.C. §5101-5115 and §5346.

Federal Wage System (FWS). A uniform pay setting system that governs Federal appropriated and non-appropriated trades and labor positions, and ensures those located within the same local wage area and performing the same duties and responsibilities receive the same hourly pay. This includes Wage Grade (WG), Wage Leader (WL), and Wage Supervisor (WS) positions.

General Schedule (GS). A Federal civilian pay system that covers white collar federal professional, technical, administrative, and clerical positions.

## 06 - Minimum Standards for Delegation Of Authority

Minimum standards for delegation of classification authority by the HRO must be satisfied prior to delegation. The HRO must certify that the HRS meets minimum standards, and has adequately demonstrated appropriate skills, knowledge, and abilities to successfully exercise classification authority. Minimum standards for delegation of classification authority by the HRO include:

1. Employee must be at GS-9 or higher in the GS-201 Human Resources Management Series.
2. Employee must have received training in:
  - a. Forest Service programs, policies, and organization.
  - b. Principles, policies, and techniques of human resources management, position management, and position classification. This shall include the OPM basic classification course or equivalent training.
3. The employee must have performed classification work (preparing and documenting analysis of organizations and of individual positions) under direction of a higher graded classification specialist for one year, which provided experience in applying classification principles, policies, and standards to positions in a variety of occupations.

4. The work supervisor recommends delegation of classification authority when employee meets minimum standards, and when work supervisor is satisfied with employee's training, development, and work performance.
5. The HRO delegates authority when work supervisor is satisfied the individual possesses appropriate knowledge and skill.
  - a. Delegation of authority must be in writing.
  - b. A copy must be filed in employee's Official Personnel Folder.
6. An employee who has qualified for delegation of classification authority while employed by another Federal agency and has satisfactorily exercised that authority, shall not be required to re-qualify for delegation of authority upon employment by the Forest Service. However, the employee's work may be subject to review to ensure understanding of Forest Service programs, policies, and organization.
7. Classification authority shall not be delegated to non-Federal employees.

## **07 - Labor Relations**

FSH 6109.15 contains items that have been negotiated between Forest Service and National Federation of Federal Employees-Forest Service Council (NFFE-FSC). It is not to be altered or supplemented below the national level by units covered by NFFE, except as provided in this Guidance and the Master Agreement between the Parties. National level changes must not be made without notice and bargaining between the Parties.

For units represented by other labor organizations that have been granted exclusive representation status under the Federal Labor-Management Relations Statute, the implementation of FSH 6109.15 is contingent upon the completion of appropriate labor relations obligations.