

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

**Forest Service Handbook 6209.11 – Records Management Handbook
Chapter 10 - Scheduling Records**

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

10: Renames chapter from “Records Creation” to “Scheduling Records” and revises chapter in its entirety.

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10 - Scheduling Records

This chapter incorporates by reference all authorities, policies, and definitions set forth in FSM 6230, Records Management. The majority of the Agency's records retention schedules may be found in FSH 6209.11, chapter 40.

10.1 - Authorities

See FSM 6230.

10.2 - Objectives

1. Establish recordkeeping requirements to ensure adequate and proper documentation of agency programs.
2. Create and maintain records schedules that:
 - a. Include record series and systems to document program policies, procedures, functions, activities, and transactions;
 - b. Identify the office responsible for maintaining the record copies of each series and system, and the applicable system administrator responsible for ensuring the authenticity, protection, and ready retrieval of the Agency records;
 - c. Identify related records series and systems, and the relationship between paper and electronic files in the same series; and
 - d. Establish policies, procedures, and strategies for ensuring records are retained long enough to meet programmatic, administrative, fiscal, legal, and historical needs as authorized in a NARA-approved disposition schedule.

10.3 - Policy

1. Ensure that records series and information systems adequately document agency policies, transactions, and activities by:
 - a. Identifying information and documentation that must be included in the records series or information system;
 - b. Arranging each series and records within each records series or information system;
 - c. Identifying the location of the records and the staff responsible for maintaining the records;

- d. Establishing policies and procedures for maintaining documentation of telephone calls, meetings, instant messages, and electronic mail exchanges that include substantive information about agency policies and procedures; and
 - e. Establishing policies and procedures for maintaining records series that consist of different media.
2. Use and application of approved records retention schedules is mandatory except as provided in 36 CFR §§ 1226.16 and 1228.18. Federal records must be retained as specified in the NARA approved records retention schedule to conduct agency business, protect rights, avoid waste, and preserve permanent records for transfer to the National Archives of the United States.
3. Comply with recordkeeping requirements that are imposed government-wide by another agency with jurisdiction over the program or activity being conducted (such as requirements for records concerning hazardous waste). The Agency must include these requirements in appropriate directives and other official issuances prescribing agency functions or activities.
4. Schedule all Federal records, including those created or maintained for the Agency by a contractor. All Federal records must be covered by a NARA-approved agency disposition authority or the NARA General Records Schedules.

10.4 - Responsibility

The following responsibilities are in addition to those set forth in FSM 6230.

10.4a - Washington Office Directors

Upon request from the Agency Records Officer, Washington Office Directors shall review and concur on proposals for new or revised agency-initiated records retention schedules.

10.4b - Program Managers, Subject Matter Experts, and Records Managers

Program Managers, subject matter experts, and Records Managers are authorized to:

- 1. Propose new records retention schedules; and
- 2. Periodically review and propose changes to existing agency-initiated records retention schedules.

10.4c - Agency Records Officer

The Agency Records Officer is responsible for:

- 1. Incorporating General Records Schedules into the Agency's records system.

2. Reviewing and proposing changes to agency-initiated records retention schedules.
3. Overseeing development of the Agency-initiated records schedules, resolving differences, and obtaining concurrences, as appropriate, from Washington Office Directors, Program Managers, and others. The following questions should be asked:
 - a. Are all records pertaining to a specific topic covered?
 - b. Are descriptions clear?
 - c. Are retention periods adequate?
 - d. Are cutoff and transfer instructions clear?
 - e. Are there any non-record materials that should be addressed? If so, what?
4. Coordinating development of schedules between agency proponents and representatives from the National Archives and Records Administration and other Federal entities (as appropriate), such as the Government Accounting Office, the USDA Office of General Counsel, and the Department of the Interior.
5. Ensuring all agency-initiated records schedules comply with Federal, USDA, and Agency regulations and requirements.
6. Approving, signing, and submitting agency-initiated records retention schedules to the Archivist of the United States for approval.
7. Incorporating General Records Schedules and agency-initiated records retention schedules into the Forest Service records schedules as issued in FSH 6209.11, chapter 40.

10.5 - Definitions

The following definitions are in addition to definitions in FSM 6230.5.

Administrative Records. Records relating to housekeeping functions (such as management of facilities, finances, and personnel) and to agreements, contracts, meetings, legal actions, and similar activities.

Appraisal. The process by which the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) determines the value and the final disposition of Federal Records, designating them as either temporary or permanent. (36 CFR § 1220.18).

Comprehensive Schedule. An agency manual or directive containing descriptions of and disposition instructions for documentary materials in all physical forms, record and non-record, created by a Federal agency or major component of an Executive department. Unless taken from the General Records Schedules (GRS) issued by NARA, the

disposition instructions for records must be approved by NARA prior to issuance by the Agency. Disposition instructions for non-record materials are established by the agency and do not require NARA approval. (36 CFR § 1220.18).

Contingent Records. Records whose final disposition is dependent on an action or event, such as sale of property or destruction of a facility, which will take place at some unspecified time in the future. (36 CFR § 1220.18).

Disposition Authority. The legal authorization for the retention and disposal of records. For Federal records, it is found on retention schedules that have been approved by the Archivist of the United States. For non-record materials, the disposition is established by the creating or custodial agency. (36 CFR § 1220.18).

Executive Agency. Any executive department or independent establishment in the Executive branch of the U.S. Government, including any wholly owned Government corporation. (36 CFR § 1220.18).

Federal Agency. Any executive agency or any establishment in the Legislative or Judicial branches of the Government (except the Supreme Court, Senate, the House of Representatives, and the Architect of the Capitol and any activities under the Architect's direction). (44 U.S.C. 2901(14)).

Programmatic Records. Those records documenting the unique, substantive functions for which an agency or office is responsible.

11 - Developing a Records Schedule

Take the following steps to develop an agency records schedule:

1. Review the functions and recordkeeping requirements and practices of the Agency and particular offices for whom the records are being scheduled. Examine pertinent documents, such as laws, regulations, organization charts, and functional statements. Consult with Program Managers, Information Technology Specialists, and records personnel.
2. Inventory records to identify records series, systems, and non-record materials.
 - a. Make a preliminary decision regarding the arrangement of the schedule, whenever possible.
 - b. Determine the appropriate scope of the records schedule items (for example, individual series/system component, work process, group of related work processes, or broad program area).
 - c. Evaluate records as temporary or permanent. Determine the period of time the Agency needs each records series or system based on use, value to agency operations

and oversight agencies, and legal obligations. This should be a data-driven, not subjective determination.

- d. Draft disposition instructions, including file cutoffs, retention periods, and other instructions for all records, along with any necessary instructions pertaining to non-record materials.
 - e. Use the General Records Schedules (GRS) for all administrative documentation. Do not use the GRS for programmatic records unless directed to do so by NARA.
 - f. Read the introduction to each GRS before applying the GRS.
 - g. The GRS does not necessarily cover all types of administrative records.
 - h. NARA may grant exceptions to GRS disposition standards when an agency submits a proposed records retention schedule for the records along with sufficient written justification.
 - i. Identify how long the records are needed by the Agency before transfer to the National Archives, for permanent records.
 - j. Determine whether the proposed disposition should be limited to records in a specific medium. Records schedules are media neutral. This means the disposition instructions apply to the described records in any medium, unless the schedule identifies a specific medium for a specific series or category of records.
3. Assemble the draft schedule and obtain internal clearances, from program offices and other stakeholders such as legal counsel, the Chief Information Officer, electronic systems manager, agency historian, and others.
4. Obtain external approval for the retention schedule.
- a. Obtain necessary approval from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) as set forth in 36 CFR § 1225.20(a), as appropriate.
 - b. The Agency Records Officer submits the draft records schedule for NARA approval using NARA's Electronic Records Archive (ERA) system or its successor.
5. Implement the approved schedule.
- a. Incorporate the schedule into FSH 6209.11, chapter 40, Records Management Handbook using designated agency procedures for amending agency directives.
 - b. Notify impacted staff and offices.
 - c. Provide training as needed.

- d. Apply records schedule to agency records.
- 6. Review and update the schedule as necessary.

12 - Identifying and Scheduling Permanent Records

12.1 - Identifying Permanent Records

Identify potentially permanent records using the following examples that illustrate types of records normally appraised by NARA for permanent, or archival, retention. Use the examples to assist in the identification of permanent records, regardless of physical form or characteristics. Examples of Forest Service records that may be designated for permanent retention include:

- 1. Records on organization and functions
- 2. Formal directives.
- 3. Analytical research studies and periodic reports.
- 4. Agency histories and selected background materials.
- 5. Public relations records.
- 6. Agency publications.
- 7. Selected audiovisual and graphic records.
- 8. Files documenting substantive agency programs.
- 9. Selected case files.
- 10. Selected agency scientific, technical, social, and economic data.

12.2 - Scheduling Permanent Records

- 1. Include the following information in all proposed permanent records retention schedules submitted to NARA for approval:
 - a. Descriptive title of the records schedule. The descriptive title must be meaningful to Forest Service personnel.
 - b. Level of Agency schedule applies to: Agency-wide, region, research station, and so forth.

- c. Complete description of the records, including a detailed description of each records schedule item, including how records are arranged, access restrictions, and similar information.
 - (1) Do not include non-record material in the proposed records retention schedule.
 - (2) Do not include records retained under a General Records Schedule (GRS) item unless seeking exemption to the identified GRS.
 - d. State whether internal agency concurrences will be provided.
 - e. General background information on topic and any supporting documentation that would assist NARA with the records appraisal process.
 - f. Include documentation of GAO approval, if required.
 - g. Include reference to all records schedules the proposed schedule will completely replace, as applicable. If the proposed schedule only applies to a specific set of records under an existing records schedule (and does not apply to all records under that schedule) do not include this information, as it will entirely negate the pre-existing schedule.
2. By item indicate:
- a. Whether the item is media neutral, hardcopy, electronic, and so forth.
 - b. Cutoff instructions.
 - c. When records may be transferred to inactive storage.
 - d. Instructions for transferring records to the National Archives, including timeframes.
 - e. First year of records accumulation.
 - f. End year of records accumulation or whether records are still being accumulated.
 - g. Date span of initial transfer of records to the National Archives.
 - h. How frequently the Agency will transfer records to the National Archives. If the records series or system is nonrecurring, (which means no additional records will be created or acquired) the Agency must propose either that the records immediately be transferred to the National Archives or set transfer for a specific date or timeframe in the future.
 - i. Additional remarks.

3. NARA will appraise the records to determine if they have sufficient value to warrant archival permanent preservation. If NARA determines either that records are not permanent or that the transfer instructions are not appropriate:

- a. NARA will notify the Agency and negotiate an appropriate disposition prior to approving the records schedule.
- b. If NARA and the Agency cannot agree on the disposition instructions for an item(s), the item(s) will be withdrawn.
- c. Any unscheduled records must be treated as permanent until a new schedule is approved.

13 - Scheduling Temporary Records

1. Include the following information in all proposed temporary records retention schedules submitted to NARA for approval:

- a. Descriptive title of the records schedule.
 - b. Level of Agency schedule applies to (agency-wide, Region, Research Station, National Forest or grassland, and so forth).
 - c. Complete description of the records, including a detailed description of each records schedule item, including how records are arranged, access restrictions, and similar information.
- (1) Do not include non-record material in the proposed records retention schedule.
- (2) Do not include records retained under a GRS item unless seeking exemption to the identified GRS.
- d. Whether internal agency concurrences will be provided.
 - e. General background information on topic and any supporting documentation that would assist NARA with the records appraisal process.
 - f. If required, include documentation of GAO approval.
 - g. As applicable, include reference to all records schedules the proposed schedule will completely replace. If the proposed schedule only applies to a specific set of records under an existing records schedule (and does not apply to all records under that schedule) do not include this information, as it will entirely negate the pre-existing schedule.

2. By item indicate:
 - a. Whether the item is media neutral, hardcopy, electronic, and so forth.
 - b. Cut-off instructions.
 - c. When records may be transferred to inactive storage.
 - d. Enter retention period, which is the length of time the records must be retained before authorized for destruction.
 - e. First year of records accumulation.
 - f. End year of records accumulation or whether records are still being accumulated.
 - g. Date span of initial transfer of records to the National Archives.
 - h. How frequently the Agency will transfer records to the National Archives. If the records series or system is nonrecurring, (which means no additional records will be created or acquired) the Agency must propose either that the records be immediately transferred to the National Archives or set transfer for a specific date or timeframe in the future.
 - i. Additional remarks
3. NARA will appraise the records to determine if the proposed retention period and disposition is consistent with the value of the records and will notify the Agency if changes need to be made.
 - a. NARA will notify the Agency and negotiate an appropriate disposition prior to approving the records schedule.
 - b. If NARA and the Agency cannot agree on the disposition instructions for an item(s), the item(s) will be withdrawn.
 - c. Any unscheduled records must be treated as permanent until a retention schedule is approved by NARA.

14 - General Records Schedules

1. Agency sponsored records retention schedules submitted to NARA should not include any GRS items unless the Agency is proposing to deviate from a GRS or the GRS requires the Agency to independently schedule the records.
2. In any conflict between a GRS retention schedule and FS-initiated retention schedule, the GRS retention period shall prevail unless an exception has been granted by NARA.

3. NARA removes all GRS items from proposed records retention schedules because GRS items are already approved by the Archivist of the United States.
4. To request a GRS exception for a specific records schedule:
 - a. Identify the Forest Service records schedule item to which the exception will be applied.
 - b. Identify the GRS item for which the exception is being sought.
 - c. Prepare a justification for the exception.
 - d. Follow procedures set forth in §§12 and 13 of this chapter for scheduling permanent and temporary records.
5. The GRS must be applied to Agency records as follows when NARA issues a new or revised GRS:
 - a. If the GRS states the provisions must be followed without exception, then the Agency must follow the disposition instructions regardless of whether or not approved records retention schedules exist.
 - b. If the Agency does not have an existing NARA approved retention schedule for the records, the Agency must follow the disposition instructions of the GRS. If the Agency requires a different retention period, the Agency must submit a proposed records retention schedule and justification for exemption from the GRS.
 - c. If the Agency has an existing schedule and the new or revised GRS permits use of an existing agency-specific records retention schedule, then the Agency may follow the disposition instructions in either the GRS or the agency schedule; but the same instructions must be followed throughout the Agency and employees must be instructed to do so. If the Forest Service chooses to follow its own schedule, then the Agency Records Officer must notify NARA within 120 days of the issuance of the new or revised GRS.
 - d. If the Agency does not create or maintain any of the records addressed by the new or revised GRS, then no action is required.
6. Except as provided in paragraph 5d above, the Agency must incorporate into chapter 40 of FSH 6209.11 or otherwise disseminate new and revised GRS within 6 months after NARA has issued the GRS transmittal.
7. Be aware that NARA may, at its discretion, apply the provisions of the GRS to records in its legal custody, subject to provisions of 36 CFR § 1235.34.

15 - Government Accounting Office (GAO) Approval for Records Schedules

Federal agencies must obtain approval of the Comptroller General for the disposal of the following types of records:

1. Program records less than 3 years old.
2. Deviations from GRS 2 through GRS 10 (or their successors); and
3. This approval must be obtained before NARA will approve the disposition request.

16 - Rescheduling Previously Scheduled Records

16.1 - When to Submit a Revised Schedule

Agencies must submit a new request for records disposition authority to NARA in the following situations:

1. If an inter-agency reorganization reassigns functions to the Forest Service that were not previously assigned to the Agency, the Forest Service must submit a new request for records disposition authority within one year of the reorganization.
2. If the Forest Service assumes functions from an existing department or agency, the Forest Service must schedule records documenting the acquired functions and all other records not covered by the GRS within 2 years.
3. If the Agency needs to:
 - a. Deviate from retention periods in the GRS.
 - b. Change retention periods for records previously appraised as temporary by NARA.
 - c. Change the approved disposition of records from permanent to temporary or vice versa.
 - d. Modify the description of records because of changes in the informational content of the records and/or the function documented by the records.
 - e. Change the scope of the records schedule items to include a greater or lesser aggregation of records.
4. If previous versions of schedules for hardcopy records do not apply to electronic versions because:
 - a. The content and function of the records have changed significantly (for example, the electronic records contain information that is substantially different from the information included in the hard copy records or are used for different purposes).

- b. The previously approved schedule explicitly excludes electronic records.
- c. The electronic records consist of program records maintained on an Agency web site.
- d. The electronic records consist of temporary program records maintained in a format other than a scanned image and the previously approved schedule is not media neutral.

16.2 - Changing a Previously Approved Disposition Authority

To permanently change an approved disposition authority an agency must reschedule the records. Disposition authorities are automatically superseded by NARA approval of a disposition authority for the same records unless the new record schedule specifies an effective date for the new schedule. Records eligible for destruction may be retained until the new schedule is approved.

1. Proposed records retention schedules that are intended to revise previously approved disposition authorities must cite all of the following (as applicable):
 - a. NARA issued identification number for the schedule(s) being superseded;
 - b. The GRS and item numbers that cover the records, if any; and
 - c. The current published records disposition manual and item numbers; or GRS and item numbers that cover the records.
2. Include an explanation and justification for the change with the proposed records retention schedule submitted to NARA for approval.

17 - Implementing NARA-Approved Records Schedules

17.1 - Dissemination of NARA-approved Records Retention Schedules

1. Issue approved records retention disposition authorities through the Forest Service directives system within 6 months of approval by NARA or issuance of GRS to ensure proper distribution and application of the schedule. The directive must cite the legal authority (GRS or NARA approved records schedule and item numbers) for each schedule item covering records.
2. Send, via link or file, an electronic copy of each published agency schedule, directive, or other policy issuance relating to records disposition to NARA at rm.communications@nara.gov when the directive, manual, or policy issuance is posted or distributed. The submission must include the name, title, agency, address, and phone number of the submitter. If the comprehensive records schedule or other policy issuance is posted on a publicly available Web site, provide the full Internet address (URL).

17.2 - Applying NARA-approved Records Retention Schedules

Approved records disposition schedules must be applied to the Agency records as follows:

1. Records described by items marked “disposition not approved” or “withdrawn” may not be destroyed until a specific disposition has been approved by NARA.
2. Disposition authorities on approved records schedules that specify an organizational component for the Agency as the creator or custodian of the records may be applied to the same records after internal reorganization, but only if the nature, content, and functional importance of the records remain the same. Authority approved for items described in a functional format may be applied to any organizational component within the Agency that is responsible for the relevant function.
3. Disposition authorities approved for one agency may not be applied to records of another agency unless authorized by NARA. If the Agency acquires records from another agency, and/or continues to create the same series of records previously created by another agency due to interagency reorganization, the Forest Service must promptly submit a records retention schedule to NARA for approval. Until the new schedule is approved, the records are unscheduled and cannot be destroyed or transferred to NARA.
4. Unless otherwise specified, newly approved records disposition authorities apply retroactively to all existing records as described in the schedule.
5. Court Orders:
 - a. Temporary records: When required by court order (for example, order for expungement or destruction), the Agency may destroy temporary records before the NARA-authorized disposition date.
 - b. Permanent and unscheduled records: In accordance with 36 CFR § 1230.14, the Agency must notify NARA, NWM, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park MD 20740-6001 when permanent or unscheduled records are to be destroyed in response to a court order. If the records have significant historical value, NARA will promptly advise the Agency of any concerns over the destruction.

17.3 - Applying Previously Approved Records Schedules to Electronic Records

Agencies can apply previously approved records retention schedules to electronic records under the following circumstances:

1. The conditions specified in section 16.1, item 4 do not apply.
2. Permanent records. The electronic records system replaces a single series of hard copy permanent records or the electronic records consist of information drawn from multiple previously scheduled permanent series. The Agency National Records Officer

shall notify the National Archives and Records Administration, Modern Records Programs (NWM), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001, phone number (301) 837-1738, in writing of series of records that have been previously scheduled as permanent in hard copy form, including special media records as described in 36 CFR 1235.52. Notification should be submitted within 90 days of when the electronic recordkeeping system becomes operational and must contain the following information:

- a. Name of agency;
 - b. Name of the electronic system;
 - c. Organizational unit(s) or agency programs that the records support;
 - d. Current disposition authority reference; and
 - e. Format of the records (for example: database, scanned images, digital photographs, and so forth).
3. Permanent and Temporary Records. If the electronic records include information drawn from both temporary and permanent hardcopy series, the Agency may either apply a previously approved permanent disposition authority, after submitting the required notification or may submit a new schedule if the Agency believes the electronic records do not warrant permanent retention.
4. Temporary still pictures, sound recordings, motion picture film, and video recordings. The Agency must apply the previously approved schedule to digital versions. If changes to the approved schedule are required, follow the procedures in section 16.1 of this chapter.
5. Scanned images of temporary records, including temporary program records. The Agency must apply the previously approved schedule. If changes in the approved schedule are required, follow the records scheduling procedures set forth in this chapter.
6. Other temporary records maintained in electronic format other than scanned images.
- a. For temporary records that are covered by an item in a GRS (other than those GRS items that exclude electronic master files and databases) or an Agency-specific schedule that pertains to administrative housekeeping activities, apply the previously approved schedule. If the electronic records consist of information drawn from multiple hard copy series, apply the previously approved schedule item with the longest retention period.
 - b. For temporary program records covered by a NARA-approved media neutral schedule item, apply the previously approved schedule if the item appears on a schedule submitted to NARA for approval before December 17, 2007, that is explicitly stated to be media neutral, or it appears on a schedule submitted to NARA

for approval on or after December 17, 2007, that is not explicitly limited to a specific recordkeeping medium.

18 - Withdrawal of Disposition Authority by NARA

When required to ensure the preservation of Government records, or when required by an emergency or to maintain efficiency of Government operations, NARA may withdraw disposal authorizations for approved records retention schedules (44 U.S.C. 2909). This withdrawal may apply to particular items on approved agency records schedules or may apply to all existing authorizations for a specified type of record. To impose and rescind the withdrawal, NARA will notify the Agency in writing, either by letter or NARA bulletin.