

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

**Forest Service Handbook 6209.11 – Records Management Handbook  
Chapter 20 - Records Creation and Maintenance**

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**Approved by:** J. Lenise Lago, Deputy Chief for Business Operations

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**Responsible Staff:**

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**Superseded Document(s):** 6209.11, 20 Contents, Amendment 6209.11-96-1, July 19, 1996;  
6209.11, 20, Amendment 6209.11-96-1, July 19, 1996

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

**20:** Renames chapter from “Records Maintenance” to “Records Creation and Maintenance” and revises chapter in its entirety.

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This chapter incorporates by reference all authorities, policies, and definitions set forth in FSM 6230, Records Management.

### **20.1 - Authorities**

See FSM 6230

### **20.2 - Objectives**

See FSM 6230

### **20.3 - Policy**

1. Use the Forest Service records system as the basis for management and control of storage, retrieval, and disposal of Agency records. Follow legal authorities for retention and disposal of record material throughout the organization.
2. Manage the records system to ensure all official records are stored and retrieved efficiently and in a timely way in compliance with the procedures in this handbook.
3. Follow instructions for records retention to ensure adequate standardization of records management practices throughout the Forest Service.
4. Use only the records management designations found in chapter 40 of this handbook for filing. Field units cannot publish different file designations (or retention periods) in supplements to the directive system. Changes to the records management designations are coordinated through the Washington Office (WO), Business Operations, Office of Regulatory Management Systems (ORMS).
5. Record status of copies. The determination as to whether a particular document is a record does not depend upon whether it contains unique information. Multiple copies of the same document and documents containing duplicative information may each have record status depending on how they are used in conducting Agency business. (36 CFR § 1220.18).
6. All official files must:
  - a. Have an identified Records Manager, Records Liaison and/or records custodian (as appropriate).
  - b. Be managed according to direction found in 36 CFR XII, Subchapter B - Records Management, which is incorporated into FSM 6230 and FSH 6209.11.
  - c. Be stored in agency approved records repositories (hardcopy and electronic) or identified file centers or stations.

## **20.4 - Responsibility**

The following responsibilities are in addition to those set forth in FSM 6230 and elsewhere in FSH 6209.11.

### **20.41 - Records Managers and Liaisons**

Records Managers and liaisons (as defined in FSM 6230.5) are responsible for the:

1. Systematic and orderly maintenance of agency official records retained in official hard copy filing stations or within the Agency's electronic records management system.
2. Maintenance of documentation regarding the location of all official filing stations.
3. Other duties as set forth in FSM 6230.41g and 41h.

### **20.42 - Employees**

1. Employees maintaining official records outside of identified official hard copy filing stations or outside of the Agency's electronic records management system are responsible for maintaining the records according to agency direction. Such employees shall coordinate records management activities with assigned records personnel.
2. An employee's responsibilities for agency records (as set forth in FSM 6230 and FSH 6209.11) must be followed regardless of work location. Additional guidance can be found at:
  - a. FSM 6160, Attendance, Leave, and Telework, section 6161, Telework, Subsection 6161.74, Government Information Including Official Agency Records.
  - b. FSM 6230.3, item 18, Policy regarding retention of records containing protected information.
  - c. FSH 6209.11, sections 25 and 26 of this chapter - requirements associated with use of official records storage facilities.
3. All employees shall create and retain documentation of telephone calls, meetings, instant messages, and electronic mail that include substantive information about Agency policies, procedures, and activities by:
  - a. Telephone calls and voice messages: Create a textual memo to document significant telephone calls and voice messages, and place in official files. Retain all voice messages pertaining to subjects under litigation hold until the hold is officially lifted.

b. Instant messages (including text messages sent from devices):

(1) Messages sent via agency intranet (such as Skype): As of the date of this directive, instant messages created and sent via the Forest Service intranet are not retained by default. All substantive instant messages sent via the Agency intranet should be retained by copying the discussion to a text document and saving as an official record.

(2) Messages sent via electronic devices outside of the Agency intranet system: Forwards a complete copy of the record to his or her official electronic messaging account no later than 20 days after the original creation or transmission. This can be done by including the sender's agency email account address as a recipient.

c. As required by the National Archives and Records Administration, email in all agency accounts is saved in the master email repository at USDA as follows:

(1) Forest Service email for all employees, contractors, volunteers and political appointees with an agency-issued email account is retained for seven years.

(2) The electronic mail of designated high-level Forest Service officials shall be retained permanently by USDA and is eventually transferred to the ownership and custody of the National Archives.

d. In addition to the aforementioned requirements, all users with Forest Service email accounts are required to file emails that contain information significant to programs or projects in the official program or project file outside of the email system. This is done by either printing/filing or saving electronically in the Agency approved electronic records management system.

e. Follow additional guidance on retention of emails found in FSM 6230.3, item 26.

4. Retention of Official Correspondence:

The final signed copy of correspondence and all accompanying materials that make up a complete record must be retained and maintained as an official record within the Agency's correspondence system.

For letters signed in hardcopy: The letter must be scanned and uploaded into the correspondence system using Optical Character Recognition software, if possible, to ensure the scanned electronic document can be read by assistive technology.

In addition to the official record copy retained within the correspondence system, a second copy of signed correspondence and the associated documents (including attachments and a copy of the Mercury work package properties page) must be retained outside of the system in program or project files as designated by FSH 6209.11,

chapter 40, section 42, 1000-7000 series. The work package properties page includes the package history and comments.

5. When Forest Service employees collaborate with another Federal agency on a project or initiative, the participants shall establish and agree to recordkeeping responsibilities and manage all records. This also applies to multi-agency endeavors that include private organizations, state, local, Tribal, or foreign governments. (36 CFR 1224.10 (g)).

## 20.5 - Definitions

The following definitions are in addition to those found in FSM 6230.5 and elsewhere in this handbook, which are hereby incorporated by reference.

Agency Records Center. An Agency records center is (see definition of “records center” below) run by a Federal agency. The term “agency records center” excludes agency staging or holding areas with a capacity for containing less than 25,000 cubic feet of records. (36 CFR § 1234.3).

Alteration. The unauthorized annotation, addition, or deletion to a record. (36 CFR § 1230.3).

Auxiliary Spaces. Non-records storage areas such as offices, research rooms, other work and general storage areas, but excluding boiler rooms or rooms containing equipment operating with a fuel supply such as generator rooms. Free-standing external storage containers and self-storage rental units are not considered auxiliary spaces. (36 CFR § 1230.3).

Box List. Also referred to as records index or records manifest. A detailed list of the records transferred to a FRC or the National Archives. Depending on the records to be transferred (temporary and permanent), a more detailed list identifying specific documents in the transfer may be preferred (particularly if some of the documents have significant historic value).

Case Files. Contain record documents relating to specific actions, transactions, person, project(s), or event(s). Often contain a large volume of supporting records. Document a series of transactions from beginning to end. The file is usually cut off when a specific action occurs, such as:

1. Termination or completion of a project,
2. Conclusion of an event,
3. Final payment of a contract,
4. Separation of personnel, or

5. A predetermined point identified in FSH 6209.11, chapter 40.

Centralized Filing. A form of file management that aggregates the storage of official hardcopy records in one location. This type of central archive can be placed under the control of specialized personnel for added control and security.

Commercial Records Storage Facility. A private sector commercial facility that offers records storage, retrieval, and disposition services. Requires NARA approval prior to contracting for such services or facilities. (36 CFR § 1220.18).

Cutoff Date. The date a file is closed and declared inactive.

Decentralized Filing. This is a form of file management that disperses the storage of official hardcopy records into several locations.

Deface. To obliterate, mar, or spoil the appearance or surface of a record that impairs the usefulness or value of the record. (36 CFR § 1230.3).

Disposition Date. The date that final action on the file is taken. It is the date on which temporary records are eligible for destruction and permanent records are eligible for transfer to the custody and ownership of the National Archives and Records Administration. It is not to be confused with the “cutoff” date, which is the date that a file is closed and declared inactive.

File Code Category. A file code category consists of a four-digit file code, heading, and subheading (for example: 6230, Records Management, General). Each official agency unstructured record is assigned one or more file code categories. An abbreviated version of the file code category, consisting of the file code and subheading, may also be used.

File Plan. See FSM 6230.5, File Plan.

Filing Center (aka Filing Station). Location of official agency files on a unit.

Inactive Records. Records no longer required to conduct current business.

Inventory. See ‘records inventory’.

Official File Station. The location where official hardcopy record copies are maintained. It may be a centralized file unit or an individual office file. It contains record copies of correspondence, reports, forms, microfilm, audiovisual, computer tapes, and so forth.

Official Files. Accumulation of official records (hardcopy and electronic) documenting an action or providing valuable information. Official files include the originals of incoming and outgoing, internal and external correspondence; original copies of reports; completed forms; maps; photographs; video and audio recordings; data residing in relational databases; and other documents.

Off-site Storage. A facility other than an agency's normal place of business where records are kept until eligible for final disposition. Vital records may be kept at NARA-approved off-site storage to ensure they are not damaged or destroyed should an emergency occur in an agency's normal place of business. (36 CFR § 1223.2).

Records Center. An establishment maintained and operated by the Archivist (NARA Federal Records Center) or by another Federal agency primarily for the storage, servicing, security and processing of records which need to be preserved for varying periods of time and need not be retained in office equipment or space. See also records storage facility. (44 U.S.C. 2901(6)).

Records Inventory. A detailed listing of the volume, scope, and complexity of an organization's records, often compiled for the purpose of creating a records schedule (*A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*, Society of American Archivists: Chicago, 1992, p. 19) or to provide information regarding records maintain and retained on a specific site. The results of this survey can be used to analyze the records for various purposes including retention and protection.

Records Series. File units or documents arranged according to a filing or classification system or kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific kind of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, or use, such as restrictions on access and use.

Records Storage Area. The area intended for long-term storage of records that is enclosed by four fire barrier walls, the floor, and the ceiling.

Records Storage Facility. A records center or a commercial records storage facility (approved by NARA) used by a Federal agency to store records. The facility may be operated by the Agency, NARA, another Federal agency, or a private commercial entity. (36 CFR § 1220.18).

Removal. Selling, donating, loaning, transferring, stealing, or otherwise allowing a record to leave the custody of a Federal agency without the permission of the Archivist of the United States. (36 CFR § 1230.3).

Retention period. The length of time that records must be kept. (36 CFR § 1220.18).

Series. See 'Records Series'.

Subject Files. These files relate to general matters involving Agency programs and administrative functions. Contain general information on a specific topic. Contain more than correspondence. Usually do not have a natural end point such as end of project or end of contract. Most subject files are closed annually at the end of the fiscal year.



Suspense Files. Files that look forward and may include copies of official files or informational events. Such files chronicle events in the future, are often arranged chronologically by date of future actions, and may contain random notes about pending projects.

Transfer. Transfer refers to moving records into the physical custody of a NARA Federal Records Center. The transferring agency retains the legal custody of transferred records until final disposition.

Transitory Files. Transitory files look backward and contain copies of official files or informal notes that document events in the recent past. Transitory files enable quick reconstruction of recent business and are often called reading or chronological files.

Unlawful, Unauthorized, or Accidental Destruction. Disposal of an unscheduled or permanent record; disposal prior to the end of the NARA-approved retention period of a temporary record (other than court-ordered disposal under 36 CFR § 1226.14(2)); and disposal of a record subject to a FOIA request, litigation hold, or any other hold requirement to retain the records. (36 CFR § 1230.3).

## **21 - Forest Service Filing System**

All official Agency records are to be maintained per NARA approved records retention schedules and direction set forth in FSH 6209.11, chapter 40.

Retain temporary records until expiration of their NARA-approved retention period and no longer, except as specified in FSH 6209.11, chapter 30, section 34.

Transfer permanent records to the National Archives of the United States as specified in FSH 6209.11, chapter 30, section 32.

### **21.1 - Hardcopy and Unstructured Electronic Records**

1. The Forest Service uses numbers, headings, and subheadings for file designations (for example: 6230, Records Management, General).
2. The numbers directly correspond to Forest Service Manual chapter number. The headings directly correspond to Forest Service Manual chapter titles. The subheadings denote specific subjects or categories pertinent to the main topic denoted by the file code and heading.
3. Organize all Forest Service records according to the Forest Service national file plan in FSH 6209.11, chapter 40.
  - a. The first or primary level of filing is a four-digit code and heading corresponding closely with a specific Forest Service manual. Retention periods are not assigned at this level.

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- b. The second level of filing (a subdivision of the first level) consists of a subheading. Retention periods are assigned at this level. Each subheading category includes:
  - (1) A description of the records covered by the category;
  - (2) The NARA-approved retention period for the category; and
  - (3) The cited official retention authority authorizing the retention period assigned to the records.
- 4. Using the Forest Service File Plan for Hardcopy and Unstructured Electronic Records
  - a. File designations consisting of the file code, heading (optional), and subheading shall be used to classify hardcopy and unstructured electronic records into file code categories Service-wide. No offices or organizational levels have exclusive use of any file designation. Follow the file plan when filing general, administrative, and programmatic hardcopy and unstructured electronic records.
  - b. To ensure standardization in the organization of official records, the Washington Office and field units shall arrange hardcopy records according to the file plan for that subject area; and shall use standardized metadata and filing structures based on the file plan as needed to ensure appropriate organization and categorization of hardcopy and unstructured electronic records.
  - c. Retention periods apply to all levels of the organization.
  - d. The office originating the record has primary responsibility for records retention. In addition, other offices may be required to retain an official copy in the following circumstances:
    - (1) When the records schedule specifically denotes an office of responsibility, in such cases the designated office has primary responsibility for retention of the official record.
    - (2) When a copy of the original record is required to document official actions or is retained as part of an official case file.
    - (3) When the receiving Agency office takes specific, documented action based on the original record, that office should retain a copy of the initiating record as part of the official file. For example, if a unit is basing a decision on a specific Forest Service directive, a copy of the directive should be retained as part of the official record. This will ensure that the information is available if needed in the future for litigation or other reasons.
- 5. File Codes on Correspondence: See FSH 6209.12, Correspondence, section 11.3.

## **21.2 - Filing Hardcopy Records**

The purpose of the Forest Service filing system is efficient storage and retrieval of information. To provide uniformity throughout the Forest Service, comply with the following standards when filing hardcopy records.

### **21.2a - Filing Centers and Filing Stations**

Filing centers and filing stations enhance control and supervision of records; facilitate coordination of programs and activities; assure uniformity in filing and retrieval of records; and assist in preventing mixing of records and non-record material.

Official hardcopy record filing centers/filing stations must be clearly identified on file cabinets and office floor plans. All filing centers and stations will have a designated records custodian. Retain information regarding filing centers and designated custodians under '6230, Records Management, General' and in desk guides.

### **21.2b - Centralized and Decentralized Filing Systems**

Hardcopy records are generally maintained in one of two ways: Centralized and decentralized filing.

1. Centralized files are recommended in the following situations:
  - a. More than one work unit has a need for the same record;
  - b. Units are near the central file location for prompt service;
  - c. Security of classified materials requires central filing; and/or
  - d. Management determines it is in the best interest of the unit.
2. Decentralized files are used in the following situations:
  - a. The records are of interest to only one staff or unit;
  - b. Centralized filing is too distant for efficient service;
  - c. The official records must be immediately available to the originator;
  - d. Constant reference is made to the records by a particular organizational unit; and/or
  - e. Management determines it is in the best interest of the unit.

### **21.2c - Hardcopy Records Maintained in Agency-controlled Private Offices and Cubicles by Employees**

1. Official records retained in private offices and cubicles are subject to the same rules as records maintained in common space.
2. Private offices and cubicles:
  - a. Are considered auxiliary spaces.
  - b. Make access to official files difficult.
  - c. Should not regularly be used as official filing centers or filing stations.
  - d. May result in records being mistaken for personal property.
3. Maintaining official records in private offices and cubicles:
  - a. Should be the exception rather than the rule.
  - b. Should be noted and identified on file and floor plans as a filing center.
  - c. Should be done for valid reasons and approved by the unit line or program staff officer.

### **21.2d - Storage of Hardcopy Records in Freestanding Self-Storage Containment Units**

1. Official agency records may not be routinely stored in freestanding external self-storage containment units that are established outside of Agency buildings or structures (such as storage ‘Pods’ or off-site self-storage facilities).
2. Freestanding storage containment units may be used on a case-by-case basis, after obtaining approval from the Agency Records Officer. Application must be made through the designated records manager.
  - a. Applications must include a description of the location where the containment units will be placed, including flood plain information, description of protection and security measures to be used, detailed inventory of records to be stored. Estimated timeframe containment unit will be in used and date records will be removed from the storage unit.
  - b. Records containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) must have a manifest including names of individuals to whom the PII pertains.
3. The Records Officer may authorize storage for no more than 120 days. Any extension must be approved by the Director of the Forest Service, Office of Regulatory and

Management Services in the Washington Office. Extension requests must be made via the Agency Records Officer.

### **21.2e - Arranging and Filing Records**

#### **1. Filing Cabinets:**

- a. Active and closed files may be stored together or separately.
- b. Allow room within cabinets and drawers for expansion, do not overfill drawers.
- c. Use consistent methodology for setting up filing cabinets.

#### **2. Arrangement of File Drawers:**

- a. Arrange file drawers in numeric, sequential order from top to bottom. Begin with the lowest numeric file code designation in the front of the top drawer.
- b. Label each drawer with beginning and ending file designations (codes and titles) and fiscal years.
- c. Use one of the following options to arrange file cabinets and drawers:
  - (1) Option A: Arrange by file code, then fiscal year.
  - (2) Option B: Arrange by fiscal year, then file code.
  - (3) Option C: Separate records into two groups: Active and Inactive (closed). Arrange active records by file code, then fiscal year. Arrange all closed records by file code, then fiscal year. Move records from active group to inactive group as records are closed.

#### **3. Folders:**

- a. It is recommended that offices use brown Kraft folders, straight cut, with or without reinforced tops. Offices may use standard, accordion, or specialty file folders as needed. Records retained in binders must be moved to file folders prior to transfer to official filing stations or Federal Records Center storage.
- b. Within file folders, place the most recent records in the front, oldest records in the back.
- c. Set up file folders at the beginning of the fiscal year or the start of the project, as applicable.

#### 4. Labels:

At a minimum, a file label identifies the most important information about the records in the file folder, the file code, heading, subheading, and date/year of creation. This information is necessary to ensure that the records are properly retained and processed.

a. FY File labels: Units may use the labels found on the Forest Service Agency-wide Records SharePoint site (or its successor). Follow instructions found on the site.

b. Creating File Folder Labels (see exhibit 01).

(1) Use self-adhesive white file labels, large enough to fit at least 2 lines of text and small enough to be unobstructed when placed on the file folder.

(2) Type all information in capital letters. Avoid abbreviations when possible.

(3) The primary (file code) label is always the first label on the folder.

(a) The primary file code label is always placed on the upper left hand corner of the back tab of a file folder, facing front.

(i) On the top line of the label, flush with the left margin, type the file code and heading. On the same line, flush with the right margin, type the fiscal year the file was created. If the file contains more than one fiscal year of records, type the beginning and ending fiscal years.

(ii) On the second line type the subheading in all caps, centered on the line.

(b) If using side tab folders, the primary file code label goes on the top of the file folder facing front. Place side tab folder labels so they can be read from left to right if the file folder is turned 90 degrees counter-clockwise.

(4) Additional file labels can be added to the file folder (using a single tab folder makes this easier). These additional labels are used to provide information on the project or case, date the file was closed, the retention period, the disposition date. Including as much information as possible on the file label will save time in the future.

(5) Bar code and Braille labels may be used in addition to standard labels. If you are using bar code or Braille labels, they can be placed on the file folder as the second or third label on the top or side of the folder or on the outside front of the file folder, at the top.

5. Optional forms and guides:

- a. AD-234, Charge Out form: Use this form to track records charged out to employees.
- b. File guide cards or dividers may be used as a quick visual reference to different categories of files retained in filing cabinets.

6. Set up additional folders if material within a folder becomes too bulky. Label the folders to indicate inclusive dates of the material and file the most recent folder in the front. For example: File a folder for May 1, 2005, to September 30, 2005, in front of one for October 1, 2004, to April 30, 2005.

7. Maintaining Official Files:

- a. File record material that originates in the office in standard, accordion, or specialty file folders.
- b. Working files retained outside of designated filing stations or centers, including documents stored in binders, must be:

(1) Labeled appropriately.

(2) Managed as records.

(3) As the case, project, or action is completed, the records shall be:

(a) Placed in file folders.

(b) Moved to an official filing center or sent to an authorized off-sight records storage facility, such as a Federal Records Center.

c. If it is necessary to retain the same file in different locations for business purposes, mark one file as the official record and the other file(s) as reference. Ensure the official file is complete.

d. Avoid retaining and/or filing information copies except those that:

(1) Contribute to carrying out program activities or office operations;

(2) Require a response; or

(3) Document policy or information cited as the basis for a decision or action. For example, when citing a Forest Service directive, law, or other regulation in a decision document include a copy of the cited material as part of the official record.

- e. Remove paper clips and rubber bands. Use staples, binder clips, metal clasps, or dividers. All metal (except staples) must be removed from file folders prior to sending records to a Federal Records Center for storage.
  - f. Staple Post-it© and similar loose notes to documents.
  - g. Remove incoming envelopes, except if postal cancelation stamp or other notation on the envelope is needed for legal or programmatic reasons. If so, staple the envelope to the original document.
  - h. If not indicated, write the file code category and date (if known) in the upper right-hand corner of each document, including incoming correspondence, in ink.
  - i. Avoid over filling folders.
  - j. Place photographs in archival quality sleeves in file folders and include a photo index with captions.
8. Case Files:
- a. Do not recreate folders for active case files each year. Bring the existing case file folder forward into the current year's files. The disposition period begins after the case file is closed.
  - b. Material in a case folder in the originating office might not be considered case file material in a receiving office.
  - c. The Agency-wide file plan (found in chapter 40 of this handbook) or program specific directives often provide specific instructions for organizing case files in a filing cabinet. Otherwise (as applicable), organize case file folders by unit (region, station, forest, grassland, and so forth), alphabetically by project name, and/or numerically by identifying case number (such as an agreement or contract number). Be consistent.
  - d. Do not remove individual items from case files. Use the entire folder for filing and charging out individual cases.
  - e. Properly label case files as they are activated and closed. Mark "closed" and the fiscal year of closure.
  - f. Optional: Place a label on front of active case files that states "KEEP CURRENT UNTIL FILE IS CLOSED."
9. Subject Files:
- a. Create subject file folders annually as needed.

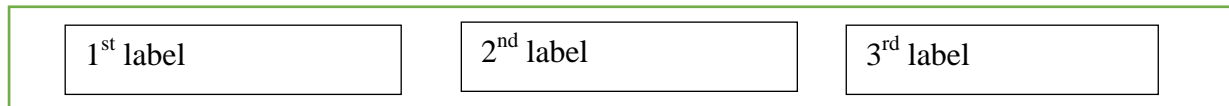


- b. The file is closed and disposition period begins as set forth in FSH 6209.11, chapter 40.
- c. Material in a subject folder in the originating office might not be considered subject file material in a receiving office.
- d. The Agency-wide file plan (found in chapter 40 of this handbook) or program specific directives may provide specific instructions for organizing subject files in a filing cabinet. Otherwise (as applicable) organize file folders by unit (region, station, forest, grassland, and so forth).
- e. Do not remove individual items from files. Use the entire folder for filing and charging out.
- f. Properly label files as they are activated and closed. Mark “closed” and the date of closure.

### 21.2e - Exhibit 01

#### File Label Placement

This exhibit shows placement of labels on the top back tab of a straight tab file folder, facing forward.



The first label is required. It is placed on the left hand side of the back tab. It always lists the file code, heading, sub-heading as found in the Records Handbook; along with the date/year of the records in the folder, and may also list whether the records in the folder are designated for permanent or temporary retention.

The second label and third labels on a file folder are interchangeable. In this example the second label contains information about a specific contract: The contract or purchase order number, the company, and the purpose of the contract.

And the third label contains additional information that may be helpful such as the date the file was closed and destruction date.

**21.2e - Exhibit 01--Continued**

**Sample File Labels**

<b>[File code] – Heading</b>	<b>[Fiscal Year]</b>
<b>[Sub-Heading]</b>	
<b>[Retention]</b>	

<b>6310 – Small Purchases</b>	<b>FY2014</b>
<b>PURCHASING</b>	
<b>Temporary</b>	

<b>6310 – Small Purchases</b>	<b>FY2012- 2014</b>
<b>TAX EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE</b>	
<b>Temporary</b>	

### **21.3 - Filing Unstructured Electronic Records [Reserved]**

## **22 - Non-Records**

1. Do not combine non-record and record material.
  - a. Hardcopy non-records must be physically segregated from records. As needed, place non-records in separate, temporary, or transitory folders in an auxiliary storage space in a location separate from official files.
  - b. Electronic non-record materials must be readily identifiable and separable from official records.
2. Non-records should be purged when no longer needed for reference. Approval from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is not required to destroy such materials.
3. Non-records (with the exception of personal papers) include documents and information owned by the Federal government that are excluded from the legal definition of a record because they:
  - a. Fail to meet the conditions of record status discussed earlier; or
  - b. Fall under one of three specific categories;
    - (1) Extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience of reference;
    - (2) Stocks of publications and of processed documents; and
    - (3) Library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference or exhibition purposes.
  - c. On the basis of the three categories and the legal definition of a record, examples of non-record materials include:
    - (1) Information copies of correspondence, directives, forms, and other documents on which no administrative action is recorded or taken; information, courtesy, or other copies of agency documents that do not require action and are not needed to document specific program activities of the receiving office;
    - (2) Documents received that provide information but are not connected to the transaction of agency business (for example, many email messages received from PDLs, journals, or other publications, training invitations, and catalogs and other mailings from vendors);
    - (3) Duplicate copies of documents maintained in the same file;

- (4) Catalogs, trade journals, and other publications that are received from other Government agencies, commercial firms, or private institutions that require no action and are not part of a case on which action is taken;
  - (5) Physical exhibits, artifacts, and other material objects; and
  - (6) Tickler, follow-up, or suspense copies of correspondence, provided they are extra copies of the originals.
4. Excluding personal papers, non-record material may become official records and is subject to:
- a. The Freedom of Information Act;
  - b. The Privacy Act;
  - c. Statutory restrictions regarding access; and
  - d. Litigation hold and discovery actions associated with litigation.
5. Personal papers are documentary materials belonging to an individual that are not used to conduct agency business. They relate solely to an individual's personal and private affairs or are used exclusively for that individual's convenience. They may refer to or comment on agency business, provided they are not used to conduct said business. In contrast to both records and non-records, personal papers are not Government-owned. Certain documentary materials are clearly personal and may readily be identified and claimed as such.
- a. Categories of personal papers include:
    - (1) Materials accumulated by an individual before joining Government service that are not later used to conduct Government business. Examples include previous work files, political materials, and reference files.
    - (2) Materials brought into or accumulated in the office that are not used to conduct agency business and that relate solely to an individual's family matters, outside business pursuits, professional activities, or private political associations. Examples include family and personal correspondence, volunteer and community service records, literature from professional organizations, and manuscripts and drafts of articles and books.
    - (3) Work-related materials, such as diaries, journals, notes, personal calendars, and appointment schedules that are not prepared, received, or used in the process of transacting agency business. Although these materials contain work-related information, they are personal papers if they are claimed as such and serve only the individual's own purpose (such as, as reminders and personal observations about

work-related and other topics). This category is the most difficult to distinguish from agency records because of its work-related content.

b. Some Government employees, especially executives, senior staff, scientists, and other specialists, accumulate and keep various personal papers at the office.

(1) The maintenance of personal papers in agency space and equipment requires agency approval and also compliance with Federal and agency requirements.

(2) If kept there, such personal papers must be clearly designated as such and maintained separately from records.

(3) Employees should keep in mind that some materials appearing to be personal papers could prove to be agency records. Determining their record status depends on all the circumstances of their creation, maintenance and use, and disposition.

c. Personal papers may be disposed of without special authority. Employees, contractors, volunteers, and political appointees should only maintain a minimal level of personal papers in Federal or Agency facilities.

## **23 - Loan of Records**

1. Agency staff should consider reproducing or scanning records in response to a loan request as the loan of records increases the likelihood of the records becoming lost, misplaced, or incorporated into other files. See chapter 30, section 33.3 of this handbook for direction on donation of official Agency records designated for temporary retention (note: permanent records may not be donated).

a. All loans of Forest Service records require:

(1) Approval of the Forest Service unit Line Officer, Agency Records Officer, and Agency FOIA/PA Officer.

(2) Concurrence from the Office of General Counsel.

(3) Documentation of the transaction and clearances from the aforementioned entities.

b. Copies sent in lieu of official records require documentation of the transaction and pre-approval from the Forest Service unit Line Officer, assigned records staff, and unit FOIA/PA coordinator.

2. Temporary Records (36 CFR 1228.8): Loans of temporary records between Federal agencies and non-Federal recipients do not require NARA approval. When temporary records (not copies) are loaned, the documentation must identify all responsible parties, date records must be returned to the Agency, and actions as a result of non-compliance.

3. Permanent or Unscheduled records (36 CFR 1228.10, 1228.12)
  - a. In addition to the requirements set forth in section 23, item 1 above, loans of permanent or unscheduled records between Federal agencies or to non-Federal recipients require prior written approval from NARA.
  - b. An agency proposing to loan permanent or unscheduled records must prepare a written loan agreement with the proposed recipient. The loan will not take place until the Archivist has signed the agreement. The agreement must include:
    - (1) The name of the Forest Service office having custody of the records;
    - (2) The name and address of the proposed recipient of the records;
    - (3) A list containing identification of the records to be loaned, by records schedule item or system;
    - (4) The inclusive dates for each records schedule item or system;
    - (5) The volume and media of the records to be loaned;
    - (6) The NARA records disposition schedule for the records to be loaned (as applicable);
    - (7) A statement of the purpose and duration of the loan;
    - (8) A statement specifying any restrictions on the use of the records and how these restrictions will be imposed by the recipient;
    - (9) A certification that the records will be stored in areas with security and environmental controls equal to those specified in 36 CFR 1234;
    - (10) Indication of concurrence from OGC;
    - (11) Signature blocks for the Forest Service unit Line Officer, Agency Records Officer, Agency FOIA/PA Officer, and the Archivist of the United States;
    - (12) After the agreement is signed by all Forest Service entities and received documented concurrence from OGC, the Agency Records Officer shall submit a written request to the National Archives and Records Administration, Modern Records Programs (NWM), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001. The request shall be signed by the Agency records officer and include:
      - (a) A transmittal letter citing the rationale for not providing copies in place of the original records, with the name, title, and phone number of an agency contact;

(b) The signed agreement ready for signature by the Archivist of the United States; and

(c) Per 36 CFR 1228.14, NARA will review the request and make a determination within 30 days.

4. The Agency Records Officer shall contact the recipient of the loaned permanent or unscheduled records 30 days prior to the expiration of the loan period (as stated in the loan agreement) to arrange for the return of the records. If the Agency extends the duration of the loan, it must notify NARA (per 36 CFR 1228.12(b)) in writing, specifying the reason for the extension and providing the new expiration date.

## **24 - Unlawful or Accidental Removal, Defacing, Alteration, or Destruction Of Records**

### **24.1 - Reporting Incidents**

1. Records must be retained and maintained according to NARA requirements for their entire lifecycle. This includes taking action to prevent the unlawful or accidental removal, defacing, alteration, or destruction of records.

2. Existing records inventories will be useful in determining what records should be onsite (hardcopy and electronic) and disposition dates.

3. There are penalties for the unlawful or accidental removal, defacing, alteration, or destruction of Federal records or the attempt to do so. Per 18 U.S.C. 641 and 2071, these penalties include a fine, imprisonment, or both.

4. Reporting Incidents:

a. Immediately upon discovery, all incidents of unlawful or accidental removal, defacing, alteration, or destruction of records must be:

(1) Reported to the responsible Washington Office staff Director or unit Line Officer, the assigned records liaison (as applicable), and the assigned Records Manager; and

(2) Assessed for extent of the incident.

b. The assigned records manager shall immediately notify the Agency Records Officer, who in turn shall immediately notify NARA.

c. For damaged records, begin immediate salvage operations under the oversight of the assigned Records Manager.

d. Within 15 calendar days of the incident, the responsible Washington Office staff director or unit Line Officer shall submit a written, formal report to the appropriate senior management official (Deputy Chief, Regional Forester, or Research Station

Director) and the assigned Records Manager. The report shall include the following information:

- (1) A complete description of the records with volume and dates if known;
  - (2) Identification of the office maintaining the records;
  - (3) A statement of the exact circumstances surrounding the removal, defacing, alteration, or destruction of records;
  - (4) A statement of the safeguards established to prevent further loss of documentation; and
  - (5) When appropriate, details of the actions taken to salvage, retrieve, or reconstruct the records.
- e. The senior management official shall forward the report within 10 calendar days to the Chief and the Agency Records Officer.
- f. Within 30 calendar days of the incident, the Agency Records Officer shall review the report; obtain additional information from the originating official (as needed); and submit the final report to NARA, Modern Records Programs (NWM), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001.

4. Allegations of unlawful or accidental removal, defacing, alteration, or destruction:
- a. Report suspected incidents to the responsible line officer, assigned records liaison (as applicable), and the assigned records manager. Include all known details. Take necessary action to:
    - (1) Protect records.
    - (2) Determine the validity of the allegation and the extent of the incident.
  - b. The records manager shall notify the Agency Records Officer.
  - c. Upon receiving credible information that records are at risk of actual, impending, or threatened damage, alienation, or unauthorized destruction, the Agency Records Officer shall notify NARA.

## 24.2 - Salvaging Records

1. The Agency must make a reasonable attempt to safely salvage damaged records that have a permanent retention period or temporary records that have not yet reached the scheduled disposition date (3 CFR 1229.10). Per 36 CFR 1228.92, employees may destroy records that constitute a menace to human health, life, or property that cannot be



mitigated (FSH 6209.11, ch. 30, sec. 35).

2. Before evaluating records, make sure that the space has been determined safe to enter and that all those entering the space are appropriately outfitted for their protection.

3. Employees shall collect and report the following information to the assigned Records Manager prior to conducting salvage operations or destroying damaged records. Written and photographic documentation should be collected to provide information on the entire space, selected portion, or specific group of records.

a. Location: street address, building, space within building, and so forth.

b. Date and time information was collected.

c. Name(s) of individual(s) conducting the assessment.

d. Information about the records:

(1) Format: bound volumes; loose paper; oversized plans, maps, or drawings; photos or film; video or audio recordings; electronic or computer; artifacts; and so forth;

(2) Quantity;

(3) Reconstruct/copies exist;

(4) Condition; and

(5) Other comments.

e. Determination as to whether the damaged documents considered the official agency record or are copies of records. If the damaged documents are reference copies, identify the location of the official records.

f. If the damaged documents are the official record, determine whether;

(1) The records are permanent or temporary (and if temporary, have the records reached their destruction date);

(2) The records can be recreated from existing hardcopy or electronic files; and

(3) The records are under litigation hold.

4. Permanent records and temporary records not eligible for destruction must be analyzed for recovery. If it is determined that the records are not recoverable and cannot be reconstituted, the unit may seek approval to destroy the records (FSH 6209.11, ch. 30, sec. 35).

5. If the records can be recreated from an electronic format and nothing from the hardcopy records needs to be salvaged (such as a page from a permit or contract with original signatures), the damaged record may be destroyed. Consider salvaging only those documents that are needed to supplement or complete the record recreated from another source.

6. If a vendor is used to restore the records, non-disclosure and confidentiality of Agency records must be addressed through terms in any contract(s). Forest Service policy must be followed regardless of whether agency records are managed by the Agency or a vendor. The contractor and any sub-contractors shall abide by Federal government and Forest Service laws, policies, and procedures for protecting sensitive and proprietary information.

## **25 - Records Storage Facilities**

### **25.1 - Approved Storage Facilities**

Federal agencies may store records at records storage facilities as set forth in 36 CFR § 1232.12, as long as the facilities meet the standards set forth in 36 CFR § 1234. Records transferred to any approved records storage facility remain in the legal custody of the Forest Service.

1. NARA Federal Records Centers. NARA owns or operates records centers for the storage, processing, and servicing of records for Federal agencies. These records centers include the National Personnel Records Center that contains designated records pertaining to former Federal civilian employees.
2. Agency operated records center.
  - a. The term “agency records center” excludes Forest Service records storage, staging, or holding areas with a capacity for containing less than 25,000 cubic feet of records.
  - b. Obtain prior written approval from NARA before establishing or relocating a Forest Service records center.
  - c. Each separate Forest Service records center must be specifically approved by NARA prior to the transfer of any records to that individual facility.
  - d. If a Forest Service agency records center has been approved for the storage of Agency records, any other Federal agency that proposes to store its records in that facility must obtain NARA approval to do so. (36 CFR § 1234.30).
3. Forest Service use of another records center operated by or on behalf of another (non-Forest Service) Federal agency other than NARA.
  - a. The records center must be specifically approved by NARA for storage of 25,000 cubic feet or more of Federal records.

- b. The Forest Service must obtain written approval from NARA prior to storing records at another Federal agency's records center.
- 4. Commercial storage facilities operated by private entities. Such facilities must be pre-approved by the Agency Records Officer and NARA prior to use. See FSM 6230.3, item 21.

## 25.2 - Storage Facility Requirements

In addition to requirements set forth in FSM 6230.3, item 21, the Agency must meet the following requirements prior to transferring records to a records storage facility.

1. Transfer of unscheduled records to a records storage facility requires authorization from the Agency Records Officer.
  - a. Prior to authorizing such transfers, the Agency Records Officer shall notify NARA, Modern Records Programs (NWM), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD, in writing prior to the transfer.
  - b. The notification must identify the records storage facility and include a copy of the information required by 36 CFR Section 122.16(a).
2. Create individual transfers for each file code category (also known as a records disposition schedule item). Do not include multiple file code categories in a single transfer.
3. Ensure that requirements of 36 CFR part 1234 are met.
  - a. Appropriate storage conditions exist for paper and non-paper based media such as film, audio tape, and magnetic tape; especially records scheduled for long-term or permanent retention.
  - b. Documentation is created for all records to be transferred that is sufficient to identify and locate files.
  - c. NARA-approved retention periods are properly implemented and that records documenting disposition actions (destruction or transfer to the National Archives) are created and maintained. Documentation for each individual each file code category (also known as a records disposition schedule item) transferred to storage must include:
    - (1) Creating an office name, mailing address, commercial telephone number, and email address of the office initiating the records transfer. Provide the name and contact information of the Records Liaison or Records Manager, as appropriate;

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- (2) Name and contact information for the Agency transferring official who is approving the transfer (the Agency Records Officer, Records Manager, or designated alternate) as authorized by FSM 6230.41e thru 6230.41g;
- (3) Physical location, including name and address of facility where the records will be stored;
- (4) Records schedule title (file code, heading, and subheading);
- (5) General description of the records as found in FSH 6209.11, chapter 40. Include originating unit and staff name in description;
- (6) Date span of the records being transferred;
- (7) Physical form or medium of the records (paper, motion picture film, sound recordings, photographs, maps, digital images, and so forth);
- (8) Volume of the records being transferred (number of boxes, number of gigabytes, and so forth);
- (9) Citation to NARA-approved records schedule;
- (10) Include all applicable access restrictions, such as:
  - (a) Exempt from FOIA: Use if all records in the transfer are covered by an approved FOIA exemption. Cite the exemption.
  - (b) GAO Site Audit: Use if the records have been so designated by the Government Accountability Office, and indicate whether the site audit records pertain to Native Americans.
  - (c) PII and PSI - restrict access
  - (d) Privacy Act System of Records [cite system]
  - (e) If the records are covered by an FRC-issued freeze code, cite the code. This is not a litigation hold code, though the records may also be under litigation hold, the litigation hold code goes on the records index and is an internal designation.
  - (f) If the records pertain to Native American Tribes, include the following citation: “Accounts and supporting documents pertaining to American Indians and Alaska Natives are not authorized for disposal. Such records must be retained indefinitely since they may be needed in litigation involving the Federal Government’s role as trustee of property held by the Federal Government and managed for the benefit of American Indians.”

(11) Disposition (permanent or temporary).

(12) Date of disposition action (transfer to the National Archives or destruction).

(13) Control number or identifier used to track records.

(14) Box list or index.

d. For permanent and unscheduled records stored at Forest Service, other Federal (non-FRC), or commercial records facilities notify NARA in writing of new location whenever the records are moved to a new storage facility. Include information from item 3c above. Send the notification to NARA, Modern Records Programs (NWM), 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001, no later than 30 days after records are transferred to the agency records center, other Federal records center, or commercial records storage facility.

4. Retain temporary records until expiration of their NARA-approved retention period and no longer, except as specified in FSH 6209.11, (chp. 30, sec. 34).

5. Transfer permanent records to the National Archives of the United States as specified in FSH 6209.11, (chp. 30, sec. 32).

## **26 - Transfer of Records to Records Storage Facilities**

### **26.1 - Preparing Records for Transfer**

The following instructions should be used to prepare records for transfer to off-site storage, regardless of the storage facility (NARA Federal Records Center, Agency records center, other Federal agency records center, or commercial records storage facility).

1. Use the following required boxes and other supplies. Obtain prior approval from FRC before using containers other than those listed below.

a. Materials available from GSA ([www.gsaadvantage.gov](http://www.gsaadvantage.gov)).

(1) Special use, standard size box for legal- or letter-size files: GSA NSN 8115-00-117-8249 (14 ¾" x 12" x 9 ½").

(2) Special purpose boxes are different from special use boxes. Contact the receiving FRC to determine if they will take special purpose or special sized boxes. Special purposes boxes include:

(a) Half-size boxes: GSA NSN 8115-00-117-8338.

(b) Magnetic tape box: GSA NSN 8115-00-117-8347 (14 ¾" x 11 ¾" x 11 ¾").

(c) Microfiche box: Special Order - GSA (14 ¾" x 6 ½" x 4 ½").

(d) Microfiche box (archival): Local Purchase - GSA (14 ¾" x 6 ½" x 5").

b. Other possible materials needed include:

(1) Archival photo sleeve (available from GSA Advantage).

(2) Filament tape: GSA NSN 7510-00-159-4450.

(3) Felt-tip Marker: GSA NSN 7520-00-973-1059.

(4) Box fillers, such as inflatable air bags; do not use newsprint or other paper-based products that may have high acidic levels.

**2. Preparing records for transfer:**

a. Ensure file folders, magnetic tape containers, and microfiche containers are properly organized and labeled. At a minimum, the label identifies the most important information about the records in the file folder - the file code, heading, subheading, and date/year of creation. This information is necessary to ensure that the records are properly retained and processed.

b. Hard Copy Records:

(1) Place all letter and legal size hardcopy records in labeled file folders. Loose papers or files will not be accepted.

(a) Do not overfill boxes. Try and leave one to two inches of space in box so records are easier to access.

(b) Half size boxes are an option if a unit does not have enough records in a single category to fill a full-size box. See item 1a(2)(a) above. Contact the destination FRC to determine if half-size boxes are accepted at the facility.

(c) Do not ship boxes that contain only a few folders.

(d) Use box fillers (see item 1b(4) above) if sending partially full boxes that may become disarranged in transit if there is too much empty space in the box. Do not use packing material such as newsprint (which is highly acidic); consider using inflatable air bags.

(2) Remove all non-record material.

(3) Remove documents from 3-ring binders and place into labeled file folders. Remove all metal clasps, binder clips, paper clips, and rubber bands from file folders.

- (4) Label file folders (sec. 21.2e, item 2 above): Additional labels can be added to the file folder (using a single tab folder makes this easier). These additional labels can provide information on the project or case name, date the file was closed, the retention period, the disposition date. Including as much information as possible on the file label will save time in the future.
  - (5) Identify and separate records by records schedule item, also known as the file code category. Include only one file code category per transfer request.
  - (6) Organize folders in the same file code category by case number, alphabetically, chronologically, and so forth.
  - (7) Note the inclusive or cutoff dates of the records in a single file code category. One transfer may contain multiple years of records in the file code category (records schedule item).
  - (8) Disposition date should be based on the closure date of the youngest records in the transfer.
    - (a) To manually calculate a disposition date, you determine the date the record was closed, and add the retention period plus one day.
    - (b) The retention periods can be found in FSH 6209.11, Chapter 40 and are listed by file code category.
3. Box the records.
- a. Use approved boxes (see item 1 above).
  - b. Packing hard copy records.
    - (1) It is recommended that the records be boxed prior to indexing, as the index must exactly match the contents of the box.
    - (2) Use the proper size box when packing records:
      - (a) Standard-size boxes for legal and letter-size material; and
      - (b) Check with FRC before using half-size or specialty boxes for microfilm, index cards, or other odd-size material.
    - (3) All documents must be in labeled file folders.
    - (4) Pack only one file code category (also known as a records disposition schedule item.) per box. (Reminder: One file code category per transfer request.)

(5) Pack the boxes as follows:

(a) Letter-size folders: File folder labels face the numbered end of box;

(b) Legal-size folders: File folder labels face the left of the box as you face the numbered end;

(c) Special note: If you are using side tab folders, such as those used in Lektrievers, you currently have one of two options:

(i) The folders are too wide to pack facing the front of the box, so you will need to follow the instructions for packing legal-size folders, file folder labels face the left of the box as you face the numbered end; and

(ii) Refile the documents into standard top tab file folders with new labels.

(d) Leave at least 1 inch of space in each box.

(e) Leave all guides and tabs in the records.

(f) If information on the folders can be seen through the box cut-out handles, place a blank piece of paper in the front of the first folder in the box and behind the last folder in the box. This is very important if the information visible is PII.

(g) Each box must be at least 2/3 full, but do not over-pack boxes.

(h) Do not add additional material on the bottom, side, or top of the records in the box.

4. Create an index (box list) for the records.

(a) The index must list records by box, in order found in box.

(b) The index must include:

(1) File code - heading - subheading information;

(2) Date of records;

(3) Additional pertinent information from file folder labels;

(4) Identification of all restricted or protected records. Include citation or litigation hold case number (as applicable); and

(5) Include enough information so that anyone searching for a particular record can find it.



## **26.2 - Transferring Records to NARA Federal Records Center (FRC)**

1. Use the designated NARA FRCs specified in the USDA agreement with NARA.
2. Records eligible for transfer to FRC storage:
  - a. Records with 12 months or longer remaining until disposition date.
  - b. Transfers of records with less than 12 months remaining until the final disposition date must be approved on a case-by-case basis by the destination FRC, the assigned Records Manager, and the Agency Records Officer.
  - c. For records under litigation hold:
    - (1) Obtain written approval from the OGC Attorney (or other entity) who issued the hold prior to submitting a transfer request for FRC approval; and
    - (2) The assigned Records Manager shall contact the named OGC Attorney and the Agency Records Officer to determine whether a FRC freeze code is required for the records.
3. Currently the Forest Service is only transferring hard copy, magnetic tape, and microfiche records to FRC storage. At this time the Agency is not transferring electronic or digital records to FRC storage.
4. Contact FRC to determine if there are any:
  - a. Special instructions: and
  - b. Approvals needed (for example: odd-sized storage containers).
5. Creating and submitting FRC Transfer Requests:
  - a. Must be submitted and authorized by the Agency Records Officer, assigned Records Manager, or designated alternate using the FRC ARCIS system or its successor.
  - b. Must be preceded by submission of required documentation using the FRC ARCIS system or its successor.
    - (1) Records liaisons shall use Standard Form (SF) 135, Records Transmittal and Receipt, to submit records transfer requests to their assigned records manager (or their designated alternate) for review and approval.
    - (2) Liaisons shall prepare a copy of the SF-135 using a Microsoft Word or Adobe version of the form and mail electronically. The information on the form will be used

by the assigned Records Manager (or designated alternate) to prepare the electronic submission using the FRC ARCIS system or its successor.

(3) List the Agency Records Officer as the Agency Official on all transfer requests submitted via the FRC ARCIS system or its successor.

(4) Address for Shipping and Retiring Office:

Use the address of the office that has physical custody of the records, not the address of the Records Manager submitting the transfer request.

Example: If the Region 4 Records Manager is submitting a transfer request for records from the Salmon-Challis National Forest, the shipping and retiring office in ARCIS should both be listed as: Salmon-Challis National Forest, 1206 S. Challis St., Salmon, ID 83467.

This will ensure that the correct national forest is listed on the transfer request, the FRC Holdings Report, and all disposition notices.

c. A separate transfer request is required for each file code category (also known as a records disposition schedule item.)

d. The information listed in section 25b, item 3c must be provided for all transfer requests.

e. In addition to identifying records restricted due to security classification and statutory or regulatory restrictions, identify Agency programmatic restricted records using the following codes:

(1) HR for Human Resources;

(2) LEI for Law Enforcement and Investigation; and

(3) CR for Civil Rights.

**6. Shipping Records to FRC Storage:**

a. Numbering Boxes for Shipment.

(1) After receiving approval via ARCIS for the transfer request, write the transfer number and box number in the designated printed blocks on the front of each box. Use a black permanent felt-tip marker and make the numbers at least 1.5 inches high. Do not write on sealing tape or place tape over transfer or box numbers.

(2) For boxes without the printed blocks, write the transfer number in the upper left corner and the Agency box number in the upper right corner on one end of each box.

(3) Begin with number 1 and include the total number of boxes in the transfer (for example: 1/10, 2/10, 3/10, and so forth).

(4) Do not use labels to cover old box markings or to supply additional identifying information. This is especially important for transfer and box numbers as no standard method of affixing labels is effective for long-term storage.

(5) Seal boxes securely with packing tape.

(6) Optional: Use the sides of the boxes to write any information concerning box content.

**b. Shipping records.**

(1) Arrange for shipment of records within 90 days after notification that the transfer request has been approved. Notify the FRC if the transfer cannot be made within this period, as delays of more than 90 days may result in FRC cancellation of the transfer request.

(2) The sending office is responsible for covering the costs of shipping their records to the designated FRC.

(3) Records may be sent via U.S. Postal Service, commercial carrier, common carrier (on pallets), or by agency courier.

(4) If mailing 20 or more boxes, the shipment may be sent in a postal container or by bulk mail.

(5) If shipping boxes on pallets using a commercial carrier, the FRC instructs the sender to complete a transportation services order, which can be found at: [www.archives.gov/frc/forms/transportation-services-order.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/frc/forms/transportation-services-order.pdf). For large shipments, contact the destination FRC to schedule a delivery date and instruct commercial carriers to contact the records center 24 hours before delivery.

(6) Any increased costs are incurred due to errors in properly preparing, boxing, or shipping the records must be assessed by the sending unit. Such errors include:

(a) Shipments arriving at the FRC are out of order;

(b) In oversize boxes;

(c) Damaged;

(d) Improperly taped;

(e) Improperly marked;

- (f) Without transfer approval; or
- (g) With a transfer approval that does not match the shipment.

**7. Job Corps Student Records.**

Job Corps Center student records clerks are to work with the Forest Service National Job Corps Records Manager regarding transfer of student records to FRC storage. They are to follow the instructions provided by the JC Records Manager. Transfers of all other Job Corps records to FRC storage are to be done according to the guidelines in section 25 of this chapter.

**8. Interfiles.**

Agencies may send documents or folders that were not included in the original transfer to be interfiled into that transfer at the center. The Agency must provide the transfer number, box number, records center location number, and correct file designation where the interfile should be filed. The FRC will contact the designated agency contact if the new material will not fit into the original box.

**26.3 - Reference and Permanent Withdrawal procedures for NARA FRCs**

1. Agency records transferred to a NARA FRC remain in the legal custody of the Forest Service. NARA acts as the Agency's agent in maintaining the records. NARA will not disclose the record except to the Forest Service or under rules established by the Agency which are consistent with existing laws.
2. Agency employees needing access to records stored at a FRC shall work with their assigned Records Manager to either:
  - a. Review the records at a specific FRC;
  - b. Request photocopies or electronic scans of the records (fees to be paid by requesting unit); or
  - c. Have the records retrieved from a specific FRC via a reference request submitted using the ARCIS system (or its successor).
3. Permanent withdrawals must be submitted via ARCIS (or its successor) by authorized Records Managers (or their designated agent).
4. For urgent/Special Reference Requests (requests requiring same day or overnight delivery), contact the FRC where the records are stored to determine if this service is available.

5. Returning records retrieved via reference request:

a. Return the records to the FRC when no longer needed.

(1) The FRCs use a bar scanning system that encodes the location where the records are stored within the FRC facility. All records that are shipped from FRCs should have a bar code affixed to them, regardless of whether the records are in boxes or folders. When refiles are shipped back to the originating FRC, the bar code is scanned, thus retrieving the location within the center where the records should be returned. There is no need for a note or advance notice to the FRC alerting staff that records are being returned since the refiling information is encoded within the bar code.

(2) If the records from the FRC do not have a label with a bar code affixed to the folder or box, write the word “RE-FILE” on a memo and attach it to the file/box being returned. The memo must include the following information:

(a) Transfer number;

(b) Box number;

(c) Records center location number; and

(d) Account number: 3907900.

b. Do not re-folder or re-box the records being returned to the records center unless prior arrangements have been made with the center. If the box or folder is unusable for shipment, copy the transfer number, location, box number, and any other information on the outside of the container onto the front of the replacement box or folder.

c. In the event it is decided that records retrieved via reference will be permanently withdrawn from FRC storage, the unit must:

(1) Contact to the FRC to ask that the records be permanently withdrawn via ARCIS; or

(2) Return the records to the FRC and then permanently withdraw the records via ARCIS.

#### **26.4 - Transferring Records to Non-NARA Federal Records Center or Commercial Storage Facility**

Use the following procedures to transfer records to a non-NARA records centers operated by a Federal agency (including the Forest Service) or to a commercial records storage facility.

**Forest Service Handbook 6209.11 – Records Management Handbook**

**Chapter 20 - Records Creation and Maintenance**

**Amendment:** 6209.11-2017-4

**Effective date:** June 29, 2017

1. All Forest Service records centers storing 25,000 or more cubic feet of records must meet standards set forth in 36 CFR 1234 and allow for inspections by Forest Service personnel and NARA to ensure compliance.
2. Agreements with non-NARA records centers operated by another Federal agency or contracts with commercial records storage facilities must incorporate the standards set forth in 36 CFR 1234 (FSM 6230.3, item 21) and allow for inspections by the Forest Service and NARA to ensure compliance.
3. For records under litigation hold, obtain written approval from the OGC Attorney (or other entity) who issued the hold prior to transferring records to off-site storage.
4. The Forest Service must remove records promptly from a facility if deficiencies identified during an inspection are not corrected within six months of issuance of the report.
5. For temporary records, the Agency must make available to NARA on request the documentation specified in 36 CFR 1232.16.
6. Retain temporary records until expiration of their NARA-approved retention period and no longer, except as specified in FSH 6209.11, (chp. 30, sec. 34).
7. Ensure that NARA-approved retention periods are implemented properly and that records documenting final disposition actions (destruction or transfer to the National Archives of the United States) are created and maintained as required by 36 CFR 1232.14.
8. Establish procedures that ensure temporary records are destroyed in accordance with NARA-approved records schedules and that NARA-approved changes to schedules, including the General Records Schedules, are applied to records in non-NARA Federal records centers or commercial records storage facilities in a timely fashion. Procedures must include a requirement that the non-NARA Federal records center or commercial storage facility obtain authorization from agency Records Managers before the disposal of temporary records unless disposal of temporary records are initiated by the Agency.
9. Move temporary records that are subsequently reappraised as permanent to a facility that meets the environmental control requirements for permanent records found in 36 CFR 1234.14 within one year of reappraisal, if not already in such a facility.
10. Establish procedures to ensure that permanent records retained in a non-NARA Federal Records Center or commercial storage facility are transferred to the National Archives of the United States according to agency protocols set forth in FSH 6209.11, chapter 30, section 32.
11. Ensure that records designated for restricted access due to security classification, agency restrictions, or because the information contained in the records is exempt from

disclosure by statute, including the Privacy Act of 1974, or by regulation are stored and maintained in accordance with applicable laws, Executive orders, or regulations. Cite the restriction on all transfer documentation.

12. Ensure that temporary records, including restricted records (security classified or exempted from disclosure by statute, including the Privacy Act of 1974, or regulation) are destroyed in accordance with the requirements set forth in FSH 6209.11, Chapter 30.

13. Ensure that emergency operating essential records, as defined in FSM 6230.5, transferred to a non-NARA Federal Records Center or commercial records storage facility are available in accordance with 36 CFR 1223.24.

14. Provide appropriate NARA staff access to records (wherever located) in order to conduct inspections or to process requests for disposition authority.

## **27 - Records Inventories and File Plans**

Agency records personnel are to maintain current inventories and file plans for unit records. Inventories and file plans should be updated annually by February 1.

### **27.1 - Unit Inventories**

1. A unit records inventory provides a detailed listing of the volume, scope, and complexity of a unit's records. An inventory is useful in:

- a. Developing and validating currency of records retention schedules, including records schedules no longer needed by the Agency;
- b. Identifying records retained in a specific physical or virtual location;
- c. Creating unit file plans; and
- d. Detecting:

(1) Permanent records to be transferred to the National Archives;

(2) Temporary records eligible for destruction;

(3) Inadequate documentation;

(4) Insufficient identification of essential records;

(5) Unsatisfactory records security practices;

(6) Deficient records filing and maintenance practices; and

(7) Improper applications of recordkeeping technology.

2. Records inventories are to be completed for hardcopy and electronic records (structured and unstructured). Retain inventories under “6230, Records Management Program, Records Management Program.” The following information should be included in a unit records inventory.

- a. Name of the individual responsible for preparing the inventory.
- b. Date of inventory (month, day, and year).
- c. Unit and (as applicable) program area or office maintaining the files.
- d. Records custodian(s), including name, location, Agency phone number, Agency email address.
- e. File location (hardcopy or electronic).

(1) Hardcopy records: Include physical location of each records station or filing center.

(2) Electronic records: Include location of records within all electronic repositories used by Agency personnel.

- f. Fiscal year(s) of records.
- g. File code, heading, subheading used to retain records.
- h. Description of records.
- i. Physical medium used to store records:
  - (1) Paper (documents, photographs, maps, architectural plans, and so forth);
  - (2) Negatives;
  - (3) Microform;
  - (4) Audio visual (format, subject, finding aids, related documentation);
  - (5) Sound recordings (format, subject);
  - (6) Electronic; and
  - (7) Other (describe).

3. Indicate the number of folders, file drawers, or boxes used to store the records:

- a. Electronic records (include volume).



b. Hardcopy records.

(1) Location of stored records and storage container type (filing cabinet, map drawer, boxes, map tubs, and other storage containers). In addition to narrative description of filing location, locations may also be identified on a building map. (Suggestion: Use the same map used for indicating emergency exits.)

(2) For storage containers:

(a) The number of individual file drawers, maps drawers, boxes, map tubes, and other individual containers used for each file code category. Use file code categories and descriptions found in chapter 40 of this handbook.

(b) Linear inches of records for each file code category per individual container.

(c) Condition of records: Excellent, good, fair, or poor.

(d) Retention period (years/months).

(e) Cut-of date (month/year).

(f) Disposition date (month/year).

(g) Pending disposition action (if known): Transfer to FRC or Archives; cut-off; or destroy.

(h) Vital records designation: None, type I (emergency operating), type II (legal and financial rights).

(i) Filing method indicating how the files are organized in the physical storage container: Numeric, alphabetic, geographic, or other (describe).

(j) Is the access to the records restricted due to FOIA, PII, Privacy, security, or other statute or regulation? If yes, cite rationale for restriction.

(k) Add any additional comments.

## 27.2 - Unit File Plans

The Agency's master file plan is found in FSH 6209.11, chapter 40. Units are to develop file plans that provide information on the records retained in a specific office or location. Unit file plans compliment but do not supersede the Agency file plan.

The following information should be included in a unit file plan.

1. Unit/staff name.

2. Unit/staff physical address.
3. Unit/staff Records Manager or Liaison (include contact information).
4. Provide information about the records:
  - a. File code, heading, subheading.
  - b. Medium used to retain records: hardcopy, electronic, or other (describe).
  - c. Disposition date.
  - d. Disposition action recommended.
  - e. Office/staff where records located.
  - f. File location:
    - (1) Hardcopy records, indicate physical location (if desired, include floor plan with location indicated).
    - (2) Electronic records, indicate directory, pathname, filename or other identifier that can be used to locate the records.
  - g. Record custodian (name and phone number).
  - h. Indicate whether access to records is restricted due to FOIA, PII, PA, Security, or other reasons? If restricted, explain restriction.

## 28 - Records Requiring Special Attention

These record types are unique and require special attention.

### 1. Permanent Records.

Permanent records require special attention and should be created on archival-quality media and maintained properly and in good order. To prevent the loss or destruction of permanent records, the Agency records personnel should monitor records inventories to ensure permanent records are transferred to FRC storage until eligible for transfer to the National Archives.

### 2. General Accounting Office (GAO) Records.

These records are unique because while the Forest Service creates and maintains the records, the Agency does not have full legal control over them. Since 1950, agency programs have dealt with records of Accountable Officers that are held in agency space for General Accounting Office audit. These records reflect an audit responsibility GAO

has had since its creation in 1921. It is necessary to distinguish GAO site audit records from Agency memorandum copies of Accountable Officers' records.

## **29 - National Personnel Records Center (NPRC)**

### **1. Personnel Records.**

- a. Personnel records contain documents and information containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and records covered by various Privacy Act Systems of Records. Access to these records must be restricted to authorized personnel only, regardless of storage format (electronic or hardcopy).
- b. Supervisor and employee development records are to be maintained onsite until eligible for destruction. Traditionally these records are maintained by the employee's Supervisor.
- c. Employee performance reports: The completed performance reports are to be placed into the eOPF before records are transferred electronically to the NPRC. Contact Forest Service Performance and Awards staff for instructions.

### **2. Transferring Records to NPRC.**

- a. Records retained within the electronic official personnel file (eOPF) are the only records that are transferred to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC).
- b. Only the Agency Records Officer, Human Resources Management (HRM) Records Manager, or designated alternate are authorized to submit transfer requests to the NPRC.
- c. Records targeted for storage at the NPRC, identified by the General Records Schedule for personnel records, shall be transferred using the following procedures:
- d. Follow established NPRC procedures to prepare and submit transfer requests and official records.
- e. Forward the official personnel folder (OPF) and the employee medical folder (EMF) to the NPRC at the same time.
- f. Transfer EMFs and OPFs in separate folder.
- g. Retirement of individual folders is based on the date of separation and should occur within 90 to 120 days after the employee separates from Federal service.
- h. For additional guidance, consult the Forest Service Records Manager for Human Resource Management. The HRM Records Manager, as needed, shall consult the

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Office of Personnel Management publication “The guide to Personnel Recordkeeping” for procedures on the transfer of OPFs and EMFs.

i. In special circumstances, hardcopy personnel records may be temporarily stored at FRCs.

(1) Prior approval from the Director of Personnel and NARA is required.

(2) Transfers must follow established and be submitted using the ARCIS system.

(3) Personnel records must not be stored at non-Forest Service Federal records centers or commercial records storage facilities.

3. Reference procedures for personnel records stored at NPRC or FRC.

Use the following procedures to submit a reference request for civilian personnel records:

a. Standard Form 127, Request for Official Personnel Folder (separate employees), to request transmission of personnel folders of separated employees stored at the NPRC.

b. Standard Form 184, Request for Employee Medical Folder (Separated Employee) to request medical folders stored at the National Personnel Records Center.

c. The Forest Service Records Officer, the Human Resources Management Records Manager, or designated alternate shall use ARCIS (or designated successor) to request or permanently withdraw:

(1) Personnel records temporarily stored at Federal Records Centers; or

(2) Medical records transferred to FRC storage prior to September 1, 1984.

4. Interfiles: The NPRC has special procedures for interfiles. Contact the NPRC for details.