

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

**Forest Service Handbook 6209.12 – Correspondence Handbook
Chapter 20 - Special and Controlled Correspondence**

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

6209.12: Revises entire handbook with extensive edits throughout.

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20.2 - Objectives

To provide a consistent process for drafting, reviewing, approving, mailing, storing, and tracking Forest Service controlled correspondence, particularly priority correspondence for signature at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

20.4 - Responsibility

20.41 - Washington Office, Chief of Staff, Deputy Chiefs and Directors

In addition to the responsibilities listed in FSM 6220.4, the Washington Office, Chief of Staff, Deputy Chiefs, and Directors have the responsibility to:

1. Coordinate with the Correspondence Manager in the management and processing of controlled correspondence through the use of the official electronic tracking system used by the Forest Service and USDA for controlled correspondence.
2. Assign all incoming Congressional correspondence that is received in the Chief's, Deputy Chief's, or Director's office (without an assigned control number) to the ORMS correspondence team for assignment of a control number and processing as controlled correspondence.
3. Determine if other incoming correspondence directly routed to other Washington offices must be controlled, and if so, immediately refer it to the ORMS correspondence team for assignment of a control number.
4. Review and clear draft responses for controlled correspondence in a timely manner.
5. If a draft cannot be prepared by the due date, ensure that an interim reply is prepared.
6. Return misdirected controlled correspondence immediately to the ORMS correspondence team for reassignment to another staff. Include the reason the controlled correspondence belongs to another staff.

20.42 - Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, Institute Director, and Forest Supervisors

Regions, Stations, the Area, the Institute, Forests, and Ranger Districts shall create and maintain controlled correspondence systems that are compatible with the Washington Office system.

1. Establish and maintain a controlled correspondence tracking system that is compatible with the Washington Office system.

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2. Ensure that the unit's controlled correspondence objectives, policies, and procedures:
 - a. Meet objectives of this handbook and the correspondence manual.
 - b. Are understood by Correspondence Managers.
 - c. Facilitate correspondence requests from the USDA, the Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Directors of the Washington Office, and ORMS.
3. Ensure that letters from Members of Congress are controlled:
 - a. If a letter is answered at the local level, copies of the incoming and outgoing letters must be sent to ORMS for record-keeping purposes.
 - b. If a letter is addressed to the Chief (or other Washington Office official), or the Secretary (or other USDA official), the incoming letter must be forwarded to ORMS, so that a response can be coordinated from the Washington Office (or USDA), not at the local level.

20.43 - Director, Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS)

The Director, ORMS has the responsibility to:

1. Provide service-wide advice and direction on controlled correspondence procedures, authorities, and responsibilities.
2. Communicate with Deputy Chiefs and staffs about controlled correspondence requiring their review, input, and concurrence.
3. Serve as the liaison between the Forest Service Washington Office and USDA on non-routine Forest Service controlled correspondence requiring USDA signature.
4. Provide weekly reports to the Chief and Deputy Chiefs identifying overdue controlled correspondence.
5. Provide regular reports to the Chief and Deputy Chiefs on controlled correspondence quality and timeliness for each Deputy area.
6. Coordinate with the Assistant Director, Office of Regulatory and Management Services, to ensure training of Correspondence Managers in the use of the electronic correspondence management system and controlled correspondence procedures.

20.44 - Assistant Director, Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS)

The Assistant Director in the Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS) is the Controlled Correspondence Manager for the Washington Office and a liaison between the Washington Office, Forest Service and the USDA on routine controlled correspondence to be signed by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Agriculture or the Under Secretary of Natural Resources and Environment.

The Assistant Director has the responsibility to:

1. Provide leadership, guidance, and training to all Correspondence Managers in the field and in the Washington Office in the production and processing of controlled correspondence.
2. Provide guidance and training for Washington Office Correspondence Managers in the use of the electronic correspondence management system used by the Department and the Washington Office, Forest Service.
3. Manage the Washington Office controlled correspondence process through adherence to the controlled correspondence processes and coding system used by the Forest Service, as determined by the Department.
4. Review incoming controlled correspondence received by the Forest Service or referred to the Agency by USDA and assign correspondence to the appropriate staff for preparation of a response.
5. Ensure that Office of Regulatory and Management Services Writer-Editors are trained and skilled in writing, editing, creating, processing, and tracking controlled correspondence.
6. Serve as a liaison between Correspondence Managers in the Washington Office and the field offices on the production of controlled correspondence.
7. Provide weekly reports to the Director, Office of Regulatory and Management Services, as well as other accountability reports upon request.
8. Provide direction on the content, format, appearance, distribution, assembly, clearance, mailing, and filing of Washington Office controlled correspondence.
9. Develop and maintain a file of current standard responses that are accessible to Correspondence Managers when writing responses to repetitive questions, issues, or concerns.

20.45 - ORMS Writer-Editors

ORMS Writer-Editors have the responsibility to:

1. Provide editing, revision, tracking, and oversight in the preparation and processing of all Washington Office controlled correspondence.
2. Coordinate with Washington Office staff Correspondence Managers to facilitate preparation and processing of controlled correspondence for Forest Service concurrences and signature.
3. Serve as a liaison, in coordination with Correspondence Managers, between the Washington Office and field offices in the production and processing of controlled correspondence.
4. Contribute to the development and maintenance of a file of standard responses that are accessible to Correspondence Managers and other Writer-Editors for interim responses and responses to repetitive questions, issues, or concerns.
5. Assist Correspondence Managers in application of and training for controlled correspondence preparation and processing procedures.

20.46 - Correspondence Managers

Correspondence Managers serve at all levels of the Forest Service as the primary contacts and facilitators for processing controlled correspondence within their respective staffs, in coordination with Correspondence Managers of other staffs and with ORMS.

Correspondence Managers have the responsibility to:

1. Check the electronic correspondence management system inbox, as well as any hard copy correspondence inbox, at least every day to ensure that incoming controlled correspondence is handled promptly. Upon receipt of assigned controlled correspondence from the ORMS correspondence team, begin work promptly.
2. Analyze the content of incoming controlled correspondence and assign to the appropriate subject matter expert for preparation of a response.
3. If a letter has been assigned to the wrong staff, immediately notify the ORMS correspondence team so that the letter can be reassigned.
4. Develop and maintain an internal tracking system to identify the status and location of all currently-assigned controlled correspondence within the staff at all times. Include

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names and dates, and work with ORMS Writer-Editor(s) to ensure that information remains up-to-date.

5. Facilitate the prompt preparation of all controlled correspondence, particularly correspondence assigned from USDA, by the designated due date. If this is not possible:
 - a. Notify the ORMS correspondence team.
 - b. Prepare an interim response explaining the reasons for the delay, and indicate a date when the final response may be expected.
6. Work with staff subject matter experts to ensure that due dates are adhered to, questions are addressed, and expectations are understood.
7. Facilitate the prompt review, revision, and clearance of all controlled correspondence within the staff.
8. After internal drafting and clearance are complete, ensure that controlled correspondence is conveyed to the appropriate ORMS Writer-Editor(s) for further review and clearance, along with any accompanying material and signed routing and clearance sheets.
9. Ensure that controlled correspondence to be signed by the staff Director is not finalized prior to receipt of official clearance from ORMS.
10. After signature by the staff Director, ensure that a copy of the signed response is sent to the appropriate ORMS Writer-Editor.
11. Maintain an accessible collection of responses previously prepared by subject matter experts and approved for use. Material from these preapproved responses may be used to answer correspondence of a repetitive nature or correspondence featuring similar requests, questions, issues, or concerns.

Note: Care must be taken to ensure that responses are current, including up-to-date signing authority, when using preapproved material. In addition, standard review procedures must be followed with all controlled correspondence, even if preapproved material is used.

20.47 - All Employees and Authors

1. All employees have the responsibility to comply with Forest Service policy for the preparation of Forest Service controlled correspondence.

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In addition to the detailed responsibilities described in FSM 6220.4, all employees have the responsibility to provide support and information to requests from Correspondence Managers in preparing and reviewing Forest Service controlled correspondence.

2. Employees who are subject matter experts (authors) and who prepare responses to controlled correspondence have the responsibility to:
 - a. Facilitate, with the Correspondence Manager, the preparation, review, revision, and clearance of controlled correspondence in a timely manner.
 - b. Follow established policy and procedures in the preparation and revision of controlled correspondence.

20.5 - Definitions

See FSM 6220.5, as well as FSH 6209.11, Records Management Handbook, section 05, for definitions.

20.6 - Forest Service and USDA Acronyms

Natural Resources and Environment (NRE). See: Office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment.

Office of Regulatory and Management Services (ORMS). Under the Business Operations Deputy area, ORMS is the Washington Office staff that serves as the liaison between the Forest Service and the Department on matters related to the management of executive correspondence.

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES). The office within USDA that manages Secretarial correspondence, other documents signed by the Secretary, and official records of the Office of the Secretary. OES receives and analyzes all incoming Secretarial correspondence; refers it to Departmental agencies and staff offices for the drafting of responses; coordinates clearances; and provides quality control for proposed responses prior to signature. As the central repository for the Secretary's records, OES is responsible for organizing, storing, and accessing a variety of materials. OES serves as a liaison between the Office of the Secretary and USDA agencies regarding all Secretarial correspondence matters. OES assigns controlled correspondence to the Forest Service for the preparation of responses.

Office of the Secretary (OSEC). The office within USDA containing the Immediate Office of the Secretary, the offices of all Under and Assistant Secretaries, and Departmental staff offices that report directly to the Secretary.

Office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment (NRE). The USDA subcabinet office responsible for the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation

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Service. NRE assigns controlled correspondence to the Forest Service for the preparation of responses.

21 - Types of Special and Controlled Correspondence and Codes

21.1 - Restricted Correspondence

Sensitive situations sometimes require limited handling of correspondence. Such correspondence is designated “For Official Use Only,” “Personal Attention,” or “National Security Classified.” If correspondence requires limited handling, the same format and procedures will be used as for regular correspondence, but the document(s) must be marked to indicate special handling is required, as specified in Forest Service Manual 6232, “Records Creation, Maintenance, and Disposition,” and USDA DM 3440-001, “USDA Classified National Security Information Program Manual.”

Relevant authorities for the handling of sensitive and classified materials can be found in:

Executive Order 13556

USDA DR 3060-001 - “Correspondence Management”

USDA DR 3440-001 - “Classified National Security Information Program Regulation”

USDA DR 3440-002 - “Control and Protection of ‘Sensitive Security Information’”

Forest Service Handbook 6209.11, chapter 60, “Management of Special Records”

See exhibit 01 for a list of some subjects of sensitive information.

21.1 - Exhibit 01

Sensitive Information Not Releasable to the Public or to All Employees

The list is representative and not all-inclusive.

- Personnel issues regarding specific employees
- Adverse actions
- Complaints or grievances
- Work deficiencies
- Reprimands
- Personal information, such as home addresses or phone numbers
- Medical information
- Social security numbers
- Personal financial information
- Award justifications
- Letters of reference
- Homeland Security information
- Investigations, including law enforcement and administrative investigations
- Business financial information, such as that of corporations, contractors, or permittees
- Special use permits
- Accident claims
- Civil rights complaints
- Scientific research proposals and manuscripts
- Information about minors
- Litigation and settlement-related documents or information
- Predecisional documents
- Privacy Act systems of records materials (FSH 6209.13, section 21.3, exhibit 01)
- Information excluded from the public domain by the Freedom of Information Act

21.11 - For Official Use Only

This designation is used when the sender wants access to outgoing material to be limited to specific offices or individuals within the Forest Service. The correspondence is labeled by typing or stamping “FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY” in all capital letters at the center top and bottom of the first page.

21.12 - Personal Attention

When the sender has determined that official material should be directed to a specific person, the material is placed in a sealed envelope marked “PERSONAL ATTENTION, to be opened only by [Full Name].” The return address on the upper left corner indicates the material can be returned unopened if the addressee is absent for an extended period. The sender may then decide whether to change or remove the restriction.

21.13 - National Security Classified

Procedures for marking and safeguarding national security information are in FSM 6232 and DM 3440-1.

21.2 - Foreign Correspondence

The Foreign Agricultural Service has primary responsibility within USDA for matters pertaining to agricultural trade and policy with foreign countries. For all Forest Service international matters, the International Programs staff in the Washington Office is the liaison. Contact International Programs with questions pertaining to international correspondence.

21.3 - Controlled Correspondence

21.31 - Tracking Controlled Correspondence

Controlled correspondence is priority executive correspondence designated for special handling. Such correspondence is assigned a control number for the purpose of tracking and a priority code that indicates workflow procedures. See section 21.32, exhibit 01 for some examples of commonly used priority codes.

USDA Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) and Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) assign controlled correspondence to the Forest Service, for draft or final response. These letters may have been received by USDA or forwarded from the White House. Letters received within the Forest Service may be designated as controlled correspondence by ORMS. Any staff within the Forest Service can also request to have something controlled. Contact the ORMS correspondence team to make arrangements.

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The control number is used to track the correspondence through specific phases:

1. Preparation of a draft response.
2. Clearance of the draft.
3. Preparation of the final response.
4. Signature.
5. Mailing.
6. Filing.

21.32 - Types of Controlled Correspondence

There are four types of controlled correspondence discussed in detail in this chapter. The type of correspondence determines how it is processed. These types are:

1. Correspondence addressed to the Secretary, or other senior-level officials at USDA. The Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) handles this correspondence for the Office of the Secretary (OSEC).
2. Correspondence addressed to the Under Secretary, or other officials, for Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) at USDA.
3. Correspondence addressed to the White House and forwarded to the Forest Service through OES at USDA.
4. Correspondence addressed to the Forest Service.

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21.32 - Exhibit 01

Controlled Correspondence Codes

The following are some examples of priority codes and what they signify:

<u>Code</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Received by</u>	<u>Signed by</u>
OES20S	Governors	OES	Secretary
OES21S	Commercial or interest groups	OES	Secretary
OES27S	Non-governmental organizations	OES	Secretary
OES30	Members of the public	OES	FS staff Director or higher
OES43	Members of the public, forwarded from the White House	OES	FS staff Director or higher
OES50	Members of Congress	OES	Under Secretary
OES50S	Members of Congress	OES	Secretary
OES56	Members of Congress, on behalf of constituents	OES	FS Chief or Deputy Chief
NRE20	Governors	NRE	Under Secretary
NRE21	Commercial or interest groups	NRE	Under Secretary
USFS30	Members of the public	FS	FS staff Director or higher
USFS50	Members of Congress	FS	FS staff Director or higher
USFS93	Members of the public, sent via email	FS	FS staff Director or higher

22 - Office of The Executive Secretariat (OES) Controlled Correspondence Procedures

The Forest Service works with the Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) within the Office of the Secretary (OSEC) of USDA to provide responses to controlled correspondence received at OES (or elsewhere in USDA). Contact the ORMS correspondence team for current information about types and codes.

The basic procedures are as follows:

1. OES determines that the incoming correspondence must be controlled and that the Forest Service will provide the response, whether draft (to be signed at USDA) or final (to be signed in the Forest Service).
2. OES assigns the correspondence a control number and a priority code. The priority code will include “OES” if it comes from OES.
3. OES forwards the correspondence to ORMS via USDA’s electronic correspondence management system for drafting, clearance, and (if appropriate) signing.
4. The ORMS correspondence team circulates the correspondence to the appropriate staff(s) for drafting and clearance.
5. For letters to be signed in the Forest Service: The ORMS correspondence team works with the staff to ensure that the response is mailed, copied, and filed, in accordance with established procedures.
6. For letters to be signed at USDA: The ORMS correspondence team returns the approved draft response, signed clearance sheet, and any accompanying material to OES electronically. OES then works with appropriate USDA offices to ensure that necessary reviews are completed, before finalizing, mailing, and filing the final response signed by the Secretary or Assistant Secretary.

22.1 - Control Numbers and Correspondence Types

OES assigns each piece of incoming controlled correspondence a control number, which identifies the correspondence and facilitates tracking, and a priority code, which identifies the source of the letter and the signing authority.

See section 21.32, exhibit 01 for some examples of priority codes and what they signify.

22.2 - Assignment of USDA Controlled Correspondence

22.21 - Assignment by OES to ORMS

OES refers congressional and other priority executive correspondence addressed to the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, or the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations (OCR) to the ORMS correspondence team through the electronic tracking system.

OES does not manage correspondence originating in subcabinet offices other than OCR. Congressional and other priority executive correspondence addressed to the Under Secretary for NRE is handled by NRE, and will be referred by NRE to ORMS.

22.22 - Assignment by ORMS to Staff

The ORMS correspondence team reviews the incoming correspondence from OES and electronically refers it to the appropriate Forest Service staff for preparation of a response.

22.23 - Misdirected Correspondence

Immediately return correspondence that is obviously the responsibility (for preparation of a response) of another staff or Deputy Area to ORMS, so that the ORMS correspondence team can reassign the letter to the appropriate staff. Only ORMS can reassign controlled correspondence. Units cannot reassign a response to another unit.

22.24 - No Response Necessary

Correspondence is sometimes classified as No Response Necessary (NRN). This primarily occurs with exact duplicates of previously received letters and letters that are part of a form-letter writing campaign from the public.

If you believe a letter from OES should be reclassified as NRN, contact the ORMS correspondence team with a written justification, and the correspondence team will consult with OES to determine if this can be done.

22.3 - Due Dates

1. For responses designated for signature in the Forest Service, draft, clear, finalize, sign (including electronically, as applicable), and mail the letter within the established timeframe for the priority code. The timeframe begins when the correspondence is entered into the electronic tracking system.
2. For responses that are designated for signature at USDA (by the Secretary or the Assistant Secretary), prepare a draft response and clear it within the Forest Service within the established timeframe. This timeframe begins when the correspondence is entered into the electronic tracking system, and it is typically no more than 5 working days.

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3. The USDA does not grant extensions on due dates. All correspondence must be answered by the designated due date. If it is not possible to meet the due date, the staff assigned to respond to the letter shall:

- a. Notify the ORMS correspondence team, so that it can be determined how best to proceed.
 - b. Consider preparing an interim response stating the reason(s) for the delay and providing a date when the final response can be expected. If possible, prepare and send the interim response within the 5-day time limit.
 - c. Prepare, review, clear, and forward a final response to USDA for signature and mailing by the date cited in the interim letter.
4. Letters may occasionally be identified for rush handling. In such cases, preparation and review of responses must be handled as quickly as possible.

22.4 - Correspondence Signed in the Office of the Secretary

For more complete style and format guidelines, pertaining to all types of correspondence at the Forest Service, see FSH 6209.12, chapter 30.

The following information is specific to controlled correspondence for signature at the USDA.

22.41 - Writing for the Secretary's Signature

1. Use the first person, as though the Secretary himself (or herself) were writing the response.
2. Use more first person singular ("I") than plural ("we").
3. Remember that the Secretary is speaking for the USDA, and for the Forest Service as a part of the USDA. Some distinction may be necessary, depending on the context, between the actions or intentions of the Agency and the Department.
4. Don't commit the Secretary to anything without approval.

22.42 - Appearance, Signature, and Title

Letters must be kept to a maximum of two pages (single-spaced). If a response exceeds this limit, then the material will be placed in a briefing paper or fact sheet, which can be sent as an enclosure with a brief cover letter.

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Drafts will be double-spaced to allow for revisions, unless otherwise instructed. Include a signature block with the full name (including middle initial) and title of the Secretary or Assistant Secretary.

22.43 - Enclosures

If an enclosure is to be included, make sure it is referenced within the text of the letter, and type the word “Enclosure” (or “Enclosures”) on the second line below the signature block. However, do not list the titles of the enclosures. Enclosures are printed single-sided only, not double-sided.

When transmitting the draft for review and clearance, remember to include a copy of any enclosure(s).

22.44 - Legend Line and Control Number

Provide a legend line on the last page of the working copy of the letter, a few lines after the signature block. The legend will identify whether the correspondence is draft, rewrite, or final. It will also include the Agency, the Deputy Area and staff responsible for drafting the letter, the full name of the author (subject matter expert), the author’s telephone number, the ORMS writer/editor’s initials and telephone number, the priority code and control number assigned to the letter, and the date of the most recent activity on the letter.

See the following example. Legend lines are not displayed on final copies or courtesy copies.

DRAFT:USDA:FS:NFS:MGM: John Doe 202-205-1621: ORMS: Tom Wilson 202-205-5463:
OES50S:8152793: 07/12/12

22.5 - Clearance Procedures for OES Controlled Correspondence

22.51 - Forest Service Clearance Procedures

All requirements established by OES, NRE, and ORMS must be met for review and clearance of draft responses. These requirements are subject to change. For current clearance procedures, contact the ORMS correspondence team.

At present, drafts for signature by the Secretary or Assistant Secretary must be formally reviewed by: the appropriate staff Director, ORMS, Legislative Affairs, and the appropriate Deputy Chief of the Forest Service (corresponding to the staff that drafted the response).

Deputy Chiefs have the delegated authority to sign for the Chief as “Agency Head” on the official USDA clearance sheet. If there is no appropriate Deputy Chief, or if further review is required for some other reason, the letter will be reviewed by the Chief’s Office.

Clearances from the Agency’s Correspondence Control Officer (in ORMS) and the Agency Head (the Chief, or one of the Deputy Chiefs) must be entered on the official USDA clearance sheet

and forwarded electronically to the Department, along with the approved draft response and any other accompanying material.

22.52 - USDA Clearance Procedures

At USDA, all letters of program and policy significance are reviewed by: the Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA), the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), and the Office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) (or other appropriate subcabinet office). These requirements are subject to change.

OBPA reviews all correspondence, official reports, and documents for budgetary, legislative, regulatory, program, and policy significance. OBPA serves as the liaison with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in the White House.

OGC reviews correspondence, official reports, and documents of major program significance for legal sufficiency, legal implications, including relationship to anticipated or pending litigation, and program and policy significance.

NRE provides an overall review, with a special emphasis on consistency with Agency, Department, and U.S. Government policies.

In addition, the Office of Congressional Relations (OCR) reviews correspondence, official reports, and documents directed to Members of Congress.

The Office of the Secretary (OSEC) or the Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) may also require additional clearances.

23 - Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) Controlled Correspondence Procedures

The Forest Service works with the office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment to provide responses to controlled correspondence received at NRE. The procedures are similar to those followed by OES and ORMS, as outlined in section 22.

The basic procedures are as follows:

1. NRE determines that the incoming correspondence must be controlled and that the Forest Service will provide the response, whether draft (to be signed by the Under Secretary for NRE) or final (to be signed in the Forest Service).
2. NRE assigns the correspondence a control number and a priority code. The priority code will include “NRE” if it comes from NRE.

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3. NRE forwards the correspondence to the ORMS correspondence team via USDA's electronic correspondence management system for drafting, clearance, and (if appropriate) signing.
4. The ORMS correspondence team circulates the correspondence to the appropriate staff(s) for drafting and clearance.
5. For letters to be signed in the Forest Service: The ORMS correspondence team works with the staff to ensure that the response is mailed, copied, and filed, in accordance with established procedures.
6. For letters to be signed by NRE: The ORMS correspondence team returns the approved draft response, signed clearance sheet, and any accompanying material to NRE electronically. NRE then works with appropriate USDA offices to ensure that necessary reviews are completed, before finalizing, mailing, and filing the final response signed by the Under Secretary or Deputy Under Secretary.

23.1 - Control Numbers and Correspondence Types

NRE assigns each piece of incoming controlled correspondence a control number, which identifies the correspondence and facilitates tracking, and a priority code, which identifies the source of the letter and the signing authority.

See section 21.32, exhibit 01 for some examples of priority codes and what they signify.

23.2 - Assignment of Controlled Correspondence by NRE

23.21 - Assignment by NRE to ORMS

NRE refers congressional and other priority executive correspondence addressed to the Under Secretary for NRE or the Deputy Under Secretary for NRE to the ORMS correspondence team through the electronic tracking system.

23.22 - Assignment by ORMS to Staff

The ORMS correspondence team reviews the incoming correspondence from NRE and electronically refers it to the appropriate Forest Service staff for preparation of a response.

23.23 - Misdirected Correspondence

Immediately return correspondence that is obviously the responsibility (for preparation of a response) of another staff or Deputy Area to ORMS, so that the ORMS correspondence team can reassign the letter to the appropriate staff. Only ORMS can reassign controlled correspondence. Units cannot reassign a response to another unit.

23.24 - No Response Necessary

Correspondence is sometimes classified as No Response Necessary (NRN). This primarily occurs with exact duplicates of previously received letters and letters that are part of a form-letter writing campaign from the public.

If you believe a letter from NRE should be reclassified as NRN, contact ORMS with a written justification, and the ORMS correspondence team will consult with NRE to determine if this can be done.

23.3 - Due Dates

1. For responses designated for signature in the Forest Service, draft, clear, finalize, sign (including electronically, as applicable), and mail the letter within the established timeframe for the priority code. The timeframe begins when the correspondence is entered into the electronic tracking system.
2. For responses that are designated for signature by the Under Secretary, or the Deputy Under Secretary, for NRE, prepare a draft response and clear it within the Forest Service within the established timeframe. This timeframe begins when the correspondence is entered into the electronic tracking system, and it is typically no more than 5 working days.
3. The USDA does not grant extensions on due dates. All correspondence must be answered by the designated due date. If it is not possible to meet the due date, the staff assigned to respond to the letter shall:
 - a. Notify the ORMS correspondence team, so that it can be determined how best to proceed.
 - b. Consider preparing an interim response stating the reason(s) for the delay and providing a date when the final response can be expected. If possible, prepare and send the interim response within the 5-day time limit.
 - c. Prepare, review, clear, and forward a final response to USDA for signature and mailing by the date cited in the interim letter.
4. Letters may occasionally be identified for rush handling. In such cases, preparation and review of responses must be handled as quickly as possible.

23.4 - NRE Correspondence Signed in the Office of the Under Secretary

For more complete style and format guidelines, pertaining to all types of correspondence at the Forest Service, see FSH 6209.12, chapter 30.

The following information is specific to controlled correspondence for signature at the USDA.

23.41 - Writing for the Under Secretary's Signature

1. Use the first person, as though the Under Secretary himself (or herself) were writing the response.
2. Use more first person singular ("I") than plural ("we").
3. Remember that the Under Secretary is speaking for NRE, and for the Forest Service as a part of NRE. Some distinction may be necessary, depending on the context, between the actions or intentions of the Agency and the Department.
4. Don't commit the Under Secretary to anything without approval.

23.42 - Appearance, Signature, and Title

Letters must be kept to a maximum of two pages (single-spaced). If a response exceeds this limit, then the material will be placed in a briefing paper or fact sheet, which can be sent as an enclosure with a brief cover letter.

Drafts will be double-spaced to allow for revisions, unless otherwise instructed. Include a signature block with the full name (including middle initial) and title of the Under Secretary or Deputy Under Secretary.

23.43 - Enclosures

If an enclosure is to be included, make sure it is referenced within the text of the letter, and type the word "Enclosure" (or "Enclosures") on the second line below the signature block. However, do not list the titles of the enclosures. Enclosures are printed single-sided only, not double-sided.

When transmitting the draft for review and clearance, remember to include a copy of any enclosure(s).

23.44 - Legend Line and Control Number

Provide a legend line on the last page of the working copy of the letter, a few lines after the signature block. The legend will identify whether the correspondence is draft, rewrite, or final. It will also include the Agency, the Deputy Area and staff responsible for drafting the letter, the full name of the author (subject matter expert), the author's telephone number, the ORMS writer/editor's initials and telephone number, the priority code and control number assigned to the letter, and the date of the most recent activity on the letter.

See the following example. Legend lines are not displayed on final copies or courtesy copies.

DRAFT:USDA:FS:NFS:MGM: John Doe 202-205-1621: ORMS: Tom Wilson 202-205-5463:
NRE21:8425523: 09/3/12

23.5 - Clearance Procedures for NRE Controlled Correspondence

23.51 - Forest Service Clearance Procedures

All requirements established by OES, NRE, and ORMS must be met for review and clearance of draft responses. These requirements are subject to change. For current clearance procedures, contact the ORMS correspondence team.

At present, drafts for signature by the Under Secretary or Deputy Under Secretary must be reviewed by: the appropriate staff Director, ORMS, Legislative Affairs, and the appropriate Deputy Chief of the Forest Service (corresponding to the staff that drafted the response).

Deputy Chiefs have the delegated authority to sign for the Chief as “Agency Head” on the official USDA clearance sheet. If there is no appropriate Deputy Chief, or if further review is required for some other reason, the letter will be reviewed by the Chief’s Office.

Clearances from the Agency’s Correspondence Control Officer (in ORMS) and the Agency Head (the Chief, or one of the Deputy Chiefs) must be entered on the official USDA Clearance Sheet and forwarded electronically to the Department, along with the approved draft response and any other accompanying material.

23.52 - NRE Clearance Procedures

The Office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) requires all letters of program and policy significance to be reviewed by: the Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA), the Office of General Counsel (OGC), and any other appropriate subcabinet office. These requirements are subject to change.

OBPA reviews all correspondence, official reports, and documents for budgetary, legislative, regulatory, program, and policy significance. OBPA serves as the liaison with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in the White House.

OGC reviews correspondence, official reports, and documents of major program significance for legal sufficiency, legal implications, including relationship to anticipated or pending litigation, and program and policy significance.

In addition, the Office of Congressional Relations (OCR) reviews correspondence, official reports, and documents directed to Members of Congress.

NRE, the Office of the Secretary (OSEC), or the Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) may also require additional clearances.

24 - White House Controlled Correspondence Procedures

OES forwards correspondence received from the White House to the ORMS correspondence team for handling within the Forest Service. This correspondence may be designated for signature in the Forest Service, or, if it is priority correspondence, OES may designate the response for Secretarial signature, in which case special instructions for handling will be included.

White House correspondence must be handled promptly and treated as a top priority.

Correspondence from the White House cannot be reclassified as No Response Necessary (NRN).

For specific guidelines, follow the instructions in sections 22 or 23, if the response is to be signed at the USDA, or in section 25, if the response is to be signed in the Forest Service.

25 - Forest Service Controlled Correspondence Procedures

Priority executive correspondence received within the Forest Service that requires special handling must be designated as controlled correspondence by ORMS. This correspondence will be assigned a control number for the purpose of tracking and a priority code that indicates workflow procedures. Any staff within the Forest Service can request to have a letter controlled. Contact the ORMS correspondence team to make arrangements.

Controlled correspondence may be received at the Forest Service by postal mail, fax, email, or other means. Controlled correspondence in the Forest Service is handled via USDA's electronic correspondence management system.

If incoming letters received at the Forest Service are addressed to the Secretary or Under Secretary (with the Chief or other Agency official included as a co-addressee or CC), the ORMS correspondence team will coordinate with OES or NRE to see if USDA has received the incoming letter. OES or NRE will determine which priority code to assign and who must sign the response.

25.1 - Identification of Forest Service Controlled Correspondence

Correspondence from a Member of Congress, other high-level governmental official (including State, local, or Tribal government), or high-level official of a non-governmental organization must be controlled.

This may include correspondence addressed to the Chief of the Forest Service, the Congressional Liaison Officer, the Deputy Chiefs, staff Directors, or other Agency officials.

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Other correspondence, such as letters pertaining to controversial or high profile issues, may also be controlled if deemed by the Chief, a Deputy Chief, or a staff Director to require special handling and tracking.

25.2 - Correspondence Received in the Field

If the Regional Office, Forest Supervisor's Office, District Ranger's Office, or Station receives a Congressional letter addressed to the Forest Service Chief, the response must be signed within the Washington Office. Staff at the Regional, Forest, District, or Station level shall forward the letter to the ORMS correspondence team, and the correspondence team will coordinate preparation and signature of the response at the Washington Office.

If a Congressional letter is addressed only to a Regional Forester, Forest Supervisor, District Ranger, or a Station Director, the response may be handled at those levels, without direct involvement by ORMS or the Washington Office. However, upon completion, copies of the incoming letter and the signed response must be forwarded to the ORMS correspondence team so that the letters can be controlled. The correspondence team will assign a control number and enter the incoming and outgoing letters in the electronic correspondence management system, which will enable later tracking.

Congressional letters addressed to the Secretary of Agriculture (or other USDA officials) must be controlled and handled by USDA. No response may be sent from the Region, Forest, District, or Station, if the Secretary is one of the addressees. This has been mandated by the USDA Office of the Executive Secretariat. ORMS will work with the appropriate Forest Service staffs to prepare and review the draft, then forward it to USDA for eventual signature.

The foregoing does not apply if an official is only included on a letter as a "cc."

25.3 - Control Numbers and Correspondence Types

When neither OES nor NRE are involved, the ORMS correspondence team assigns Forest Service controlled correspondence with a control number and a priority code. The control number identifies the correspondence and facilitates tracking, while the priority code identifies the source of the letter and the signing authority. Priority codes for letters controlled by ORMS will include "USFS."

See section 21.32, exhibit 01 for some examples of priority codes and what they signify.

25.4 - Misdirected Controlled Correspondence

Immediately return correspondence that is obviously the responsibility (for preparation of a response) of another staff or Deputy Area to ORMS, so that the ORMS correspondence team can reassign the letter to the appropriate staff. Only ORMS can reassign controlled correspondence. Units cannot reassign a response to another unit.

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The ORMS correspondence team will transfer correspondence that is the responsibility of another agency within USDA to that agency. The ORMS Writer-Editor will notify the receiving agency in advance, before forwarding the correspondence, to determine the appropriateness of the transfer and to verify to whom the correspondence should be directed. The ORMS Writer-Editor may write a transfer letter to the sender of the incoming correspondence, notifying the sender that the correspondence has been forwarded by the Forest Service to the appropriate agency for response.

25.41 - No Response Necessary

Correspondence is sometimes classified as No Response Necessary (NRN). This primarily occurs with exact duplicates of previously received letters and letters that are part of a form-letter writing campaign from the public. If you believe a letter should be reclassified as NRN, contact ORMS with a justification and the ORMS correspondence team will determine if this can be done.

Criteria for NRN include: correspondence containing essentially the same language, as though from a template; correspondence generated from a single Web form; correspondence that can be identified as coming from a single organization, as when all correspondents are members of the same organization; or more than 25 pieces of correspondence on the same subject received within a short period of time, such that responding would create an unreasonable burden on the Agency.

25.5 - Due Dates

1. Draft, clear, finalize, sign (including electronically, as applicable), and mail responses designated for signature in the Forest Service within the established timeframe for the priority code. The timeframe begins when the correspondence is entered into the electronic tracking system.
2. All controlled correspondence must be answered by the designated due date. If it is not possible to meet the due date, the staff assigned to respond to the letter shall:
 - a. Notify the ORMS correspondence team, so that it can be determined how best to proceed.
 - b. Consider preparing an interim response stating the reason(s) for the delay and providing a date when the final response can be expected. If possible, prepare and send the interim response within the designated response time.
 - c. Prepare, review, sign, and mail a final response by the date cited in the interim letter.

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3. Letters may occasionally be identified for rush handling. In such cases, preparation and review of responses must be handled as quickly as possible.

25.6 - Forest Service Signature

Forest Service controlled correspondence may be signed by the Chief, the Associate Chief, a Deputy Chief, an Associate Deputy Chief, a staff Director, or other Forest Service official with the appropriate delegated signing authority. See FSM 1230 for delegations of authority.

Signing authority is indicated by the priority code assigned to the incoming letter. In some cases, signing authority may be upgraded, if warranted by the subject matter or sensitivity of the letter, or for some other reason.

Controlled correspondence (including Congressional correspondence) must be signed by an Agency official at the staff Director level or higher. The letter must display the signature block of the designated official. An Acting Director may sign for the designated official, if appropriate.

Letters regarding the transfer of correspondence to a different organization or agency may be signed by the Assistant Director, ORMS.

See FSM 1231.2, Signing Authority.

25.7 - Preparing Forest Service Controlled Correspondence

25.71 - The Electronic Correspondence Management System

1. Use the authorized electronic correspondence management system to create, review, revise, and file Forest Service controlled correspondence, except for highly sensitive or confidential matters.

See section 25.72, exhibit 01 for a list of file code categories that are particularly likely to contain sensitive or confidential material, which may not be appropriate for entry in the electronic correspondence management system.

The electronic correspondence management system contains a document history that identifies the correspondence's creation date, author, file code, subject, and signing and mailing dates. This information and the document itself may be viewable by multiple persons within the agency. How broadly depends on administrative settings. Always be aware of the system's open access nature when determining the appropriateness of using it for your documents.

2. Enter all relevant or necessary elements of metadata, such as subject key words or description or staff acronyms.

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3. If safety or confidentiality concerns preclude the inclusion of material in the electronic correspondence management system, you must develop program-specific alternative storage, tracking, and retrieval procedures for this material, with appropriate access privileges.

4. Forest Service employees have the obligation to use information as authorized and directed; to use information in a manner consistent with position descriptions; and to protect information from unauthorized access. Employees must not disclose, release, disseminate, or transfer any sensitive information to any other person or entity, except as required in the performance of the employee's duties, complying with policy, procedures, and responsibilities.

Public release of information must be in accordance with the Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information Act. All requests for information from a non-USDA individual or entity must be referred to your Freedom of Information Act representative or the Office of General Counsel.


5. See exhibit 01 for a sample controlled correspondence letter.

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25.71 - Exhibit 01

Sample Forest Service Controlled Correspondence

Correct formal letterhead

 **United States
Department of
Agriculture** **Forest
Service** **Washington
Office** **1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250**

File code goes here **File Code:** 6220 (7495955) *Control number
goes here*

Date: *Date will be stamped here
– after letter is signed*

The Honorable Joe Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
1234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Correct salutation
Dear Congressman Smith:



Thank you for your letter of November 10, 2012, on behalf of your constituent Mr. Bill Lee regarding his concerns about, etc.

Body of the response ... Body of the response ... Body of the response ...

Again, thank you for writing on behalf of your constituent. If you have any further questions, please contact, etc.

Complimentary close
Sincerely,

Appropriate signing authority
THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief

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25.72 - File Codes

1. The appropriate file code category must be included in all controlled correspondence. File code categories correspond to a subject or staff and indicate filing instructions and records retention schedules. See FSH 6209.11, Records Management Handbook, for a complete list of file codes.

For controlled correspondence, the file code determines filing (or archival) location of program area files. Official copies of correspondence will be filed according to file code category.

2. Each file code category corresponds to a unique heading and subheading, describing its subject or staff. File code headings and subheadings are not displayed in the document, but they may appear in the document summary (metadata). Select the code that best corresponds to the primary subject of the letter.

a. Only use multiple file code categories when more than one primary subject is discussed. There is a limit of 3 file code categories per document.

b. Enter routing codes, abbreviations, or acronyms in other locations.

3. See Exhibit 01 for a list of file codes that are particularly likely to contain sensitive or confidential material, which may not be appropriate for entry in the electronic correspondence management system.

Note: The list is not comprehensive or absolute. Sensitive or confidential material may occur under other file codes, and not everything under these file codes will definitely be sensitive. Individual pieces of correspondence should be assessed carefully for the information they contain.

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25.72 - Exhibit 01

Some File Codes in Need of Special Care

1700 – Civil Rights
1760 – Equal Employment Opportunity
1770 – Federal Financial Assistance Programs
5300 – Law Enforcement
5320 – Investigation
5330 – Law Violations
6100 – Personnel
6120 – Programs, Standards, Actions, and Documents
6130 – Employment and Status Changes
6140 – Employee Development, Performance, Awards
6140 – Personnel Relations and Services: Personnel Counseling
6150 – Classification and Pay
6160 – Attendance, Leave, and Telework
6170 – Personnel Relations and Services
6180 – Insurance and Annuities
6320 – Contracting: Solicited and Unsolicited Bids and Proposals
6570 – Claims
6730 – Accident Reporting and Investigation

25.73 - Letterhead

1. All controlled correspondence signed in the Washington Office must use the official Washington Office formal letterhead. This letterhead is available as an electronic template in the electronic correspondence management system.
2. Printed captions, such as “Subject” or “To,” do not appear on a formal letter.
3. The formal letter includes a salutation and a complimentary close and is directed personally to the addressee.

25.74 - Letter Date

Letters are not dated until they are signed. The date on the letter indicates when the letter was signed and mailed, not when it was initially drafted, since there could be a delay between drafting and signature.

25.75 - Other Formatting and Style Guidelines

For more complete style and format guidelines, see FSH 6209.12, chapter 30.

25.8 - Processing Forest Service Controlled Correspondence

25.81 - Forest Service Clearance Procedures

Controlled correspondence must be reviewed by appropriate Forest Service officials prior to signature. All requirements established by ORMS, as well as Legislative Affairs and other interested Agency or Department offices, must be met for review and clearance of responses. These requirements are subject to change. Contact the ORMS correspondence team for current clearance procedures.

At present, drafts for signature by Forest Service officials must be formally reviewed by the appropriate staff Director, ORMS, and (for responses to members of Congress) Legislative Affairs.

In addition, the appropriate Deputy Chief of the Forest Service (corresponding to the staff that drafted the response) or the Chief’s office may need to review a response. Other interested staff areas may also choose to review a response. For instance, the Office of Tribal Relations may request to review a response drafted for signature by a different staff if the subject matter relates to Tribal affairs.

25.82 - Processing No-Response Codes

Correspondence that is coded with a no-response code (OES06) normally does not need a response. However, receiving staffs should review each letter to determine that the coding is

accurate and that no response is needed. Staffs may choose to answer the correspondence if the subject is sensitive or may become controversial. If the staff determines that a response is required, the ORMS correspondence team must be informed, and a copy of the signed response must be sent to ORMS for electronic records and closeout.

25.83 - Forwarding Signed Copies

A copy of the signed letter must be forwarded to the ORMS correspondence team by the Correspondence Manager of the staff where the letter was signed. The ORMS correspondence team must have this copy in order to finalize the letter in the electronic correspondence management system, and for tracking and reporting purposes.

Copies should also be forwarded to other appropriate offices or staff, as necessary.

25.9 - Forest Service-Initiated Controlled Correspondence

25.91 - Processing Forest Service-Initiated Controlled Correspondence

Agency-initiated correspondence to be signed by an Agency official may be controlled. Agency-initiated correspondence to be signed at the Department level will be controlled, after it has been signed by the Secretary or Under Secretary.

25.92 - Informational Memorandums

Agency-initiated correspondence will be accompanied by an informational memorandum. See chapter 10, section 15.1 for more information.

After the conclusion of review and signature of Agency-initiated material at the Department, the informational memorandum will be controlled along with the other material. A control number will be added and the material will be processed in the electronic correspondence management system.

25.93 - Decision Memorandums

Decision memorandums for the Secretary or Under Secretary are controlled after the conclusion of review and signature at the Department. A control number will be added and the material will be processed in the electronic correspondence management system.

See chapter 10, section 15.2 for more information.