

Understanding the Forest Service Directive System (Manuals and Handbooks)

The Forest Service Directive System is comprised of the Forest Service Manuals and related Forest Service Handbooks. The Directives are the primary source of administrative direction to Forest Service employees. The Directives consists of numerous volumes organized by numerically coded subject matter. The volumes contain legal authorities, responsibilities, delegations, and general instruction and direction to plan and execute programs.

The purpose of the Forest Service Directive System is:

1. To establish the minimum standards of program conduct and achievement that must be met Service-wide to fulfill the mission of the Forest Service as set forth in law, regulation, and order.
2. To provide a unified system for issuing, storing, and retrieving all continuing internal direction that governs Forest Service programs and activities.
3. To ensure that the Directive System serves as the primary source of agency internal direction.

Manuals (FSM) contain legal authorities, objectives, policies, responsibilities, instructions and guidance. Handbooks (FSH) are the principal source of specialized guidance and instruction for carrying out the direction issued in the FSM.

The directives have a unique coding scheme, called "zero code." The zero code is at the beginning of each manual and handbook and applies to all subsequent direction within a series, title, chapter, or section where the zero code is set out. Zero code is a uniform coding of the following categories of direction; authority (01), objective (02), policy (03), responsibility (04), definitions (05), and Handbooks (09), 06 through 08 are optional codes for use as needed. The coding also applies to the manual chapters and handbook sections. For example these sections can be found in the 2500 manual (the 2500 "title" is in the 2000 "series"):

Zero Code*	Chapter 2510	Section 2511
2501 – Authority		
2502 – Objectives	2510.2 – Objectives	2511.02 – Objectives
2503 – Policy	2510.3 – Policy	2511.03 - Policy
2504 – Responsibility	2510.4 – Responsibility	
2509 - Handbooks		

*The Zero Code direction applies to all chapters and sections of the 2500 Manual.

Manual direction is organized by series, title, chapter, and section. For a listing of the Manual and Handbook series, titles and chapters see Section 51, Exhibit 01 in Chapter 50 of FSH 1109.12. The manuals and handbooks can be found at fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/directives.

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