

U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs

San Francisco Oversight Division  
120 Howard Street, Room 760  
San Francisco, CA 94105-0001

**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [appellant's name]

**Agency classification:** Forestry Technician  
GS-462-07

**Organization:** [Name] Ranger District  
[Name] National Forest  
U.S. Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
[City, State]

**OPM decision:** Forestry Technician  
GS-462-7

**OPM decision number:** C-0462-07-04

/s/ Carlos A. Torrico

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Carlos A. Torrico  
Classification Appeals Officer

June 28, 2002  
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

**Decision sent to:**

**Appellant:**

[Appellant's name and address]

**Agency:**

Personnel Officer  
[Name] National Forest  
Human Resources  
U.S. Forest Service  
[Address]

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## **Introduction**

On March 5, 2002, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. We received the complete appeal administrative report on April 5, 2002. [The appellant's] position is classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-7, but he believes it should be graded at the GS-8 level. The position is assigned to the [Name] Ranger District, [Name] National Forest, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, [City, State]. Before appealing to OPM, [the appellant] appealed to the U.S. Forest Service, which sustained his current classification. We have accepted and decided this appeal under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

On April 1, 2002, in response to our request for information, the appellant and his immediate supervisor certified that the position description (PD) [number] accurately reflects the duties performed by the appellant. We find this PD is adequate for position classification purposes.

To help decide the appeal, an OPM representative conducted telephone interviews with the appellant and the District Ranger on June 5, 2002, and the appellant's immediate supervisor and the Lead Forestry Technician on June 20, 2002. In reaching our classification decision, we reviewed the information obtained during these interviews and all information submitted in writing by the appellant and his agency.

## **General issues**

The appellant refers to a Forest Service position description for a Forestry Technician, GS-462-8, position in support of his appeal request. However, we must classify positions solely by comparing the duties and responsibilities of the appellant's position to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to another position.

The appellant mentions that his extra duties in facilities support a higher grade. His facilities work occupies about 20 percent of his time; warehouse duties, about 20 percent; and fleet manager duties, about 5 percent. His major duties are in silviculture and fuels/fire management and occupy about 55 percent of his time. Major duties are those that represent the primary reason for the position's existence, and that govern the qualification requirements for the position. Typically, they occupy most of the employee's time. Minor duties generally occupy a small portion of time, are not the primary purpose for which the position was established, and do not determine qualification requirements. Only duties that occupy at least 25 percent of an employee's time, however, can affect the grade of a position (see section III.J of the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards). Therefore, we will not evaluate the appellant's facilities, warehouse, and fleet manager duties.

## **Position information**

The appellant's primary duties are to provide forestry technician support to the reforestation program, with additional duties relating to fuels and fire management, warehouse, facilities, and fleet. To mention just a few duties listed in his PD, the appellant assists in developing schedules

and work plans for monitoring, inspecting, and implementing silviculture activities; performs silviculture field reconnaissance and surveys to determine planting needs, future site preparations, planting conditions, seedling survival, and timber stand improvement; recommends site preparation, planting techniques, species mix, and thinning techniques; and identifies plantations that need to be secured to reduce livestock and wildlife damage. He collects, compiles, maintains, and updates data for silviculture projects. The appellant serves as Contracting Officer Representative or Lead Inspector on silviculture and other contracts and submits related inspection reports that recommend acceptance of completed contract work. The appellant's PD and other material of record furnish much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The appellant does not question the series or title of his position. We concur with the agency's determination that the duties performed by the appellant and the knowledge required for the position are best covered by the Forestry Technician Series, GS-0462. This series includes all positions that primarily require a practical knowledge of the methods and techniques of forestry and other biologically based resource management fields. Forestry technicians provide technical support in forestry research efforts; in the marketing of forest resources; or in the scientific management, protection, and development of forest resources. The position classification standard for Forestry Technician Series, GS-0462 (dated December 1991) notes that the criteria for determining the grade of GS-462 positions are contained in the Grade Level Guide for Aid and Technical Work in the Biological Sciences, GS-0400 (dated December 1991). Therefore, the appellant's position is properly assigned to the GS-462 series, titled Forestry Technician, and evaluated using the GS-0400 Guide. The agency may supplement the basic title by adding a parenthetical suffix to identify duties and responsibilities that reflect specific knowledges and skills required in the work.

### **Grade determination**

The GS-0400 Guide uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES) which places positions in grades by comparing their duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements with nine factors common to most nonsupervisory positions in the General Schedule. A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor level descriptions in the standard. Each factor level description in a standard describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. A position factor must fully meet the overall intent of the selected factor level description to warrant a given point value. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor level description in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. Conversely, the position may exceed the criteria for a given factor level in some respects but would not be credited with the next higher factor level unless the position fully meets the overall intent of that factor level description. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard. Our evaluation with respect to the nine factors follows.

*Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that an employee must understand to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge.

Level 1-5 (described on pages 10 - 14 of the Guide) addresses knowledge of the technical methods and procedures related to the professional field(s) supported, of management practices, and of the agency's policy and programs to lay out, schedule, organize, and execute the details of either: (1) a wide variety of types of limited operational projects incorporating diverse technical knowledges, e.g., limited projects requiring the application of appreciably dissimilar specialized methods, procedures, and/or techniques; and/or (2) one-at-a-time multiphased projects, at least some of which have nonstandard technical problems that the technician must coordinate with others to resolve, e.g., technical problems requiring the use of specialized, complicated techniques. At this level, technicians apply a practical knowledge of basic theories and practices of the scientific discipline(s) supported and must be adept at combining this knowledge with resourcefulness, initiative, and independent judgment in locating precedents and resolving the details inherent to application.

Technicians at Level 1-6 (described on pages 14 - 18 of the Guide) are recognized experts in a narrow specialty area of a scientific field, and they have administrative and/or technical assignments, projects, and responsibility which are hard to distinguish from those assigned to the less experienced (but post-trainee) scientists employed in the same organization to perform standardized professional level research studies, projects, or assignments or to perform routine administrative or professional work in support of higher level research scientists or program/project managers. The GS-0400 Guide explains that *all* technician positions cannot realistically be structured to reach Level 1-6 because of a variety of organizational reasons, including the amount and type of high level work available in the organization; the organization's willingness to delegate authority and controls for programs and projects; the availability, number, and/or assigned responsibilities of on-site professional workers, technician supervisors, or work leaders; ability of the technician; and other such limiting factors.

Comparable to Level 1-5, the appellant's position requires knowledge of standard forestry practices and the agency's policies and programs to carry out reforestation and fuels management projects in an area with substantial variation in forest types. The appellant uses this knowledge to assist in developing schedules and work plans for silviculture activities and monitor contract compliance. Using established procedures, the appellant determines planting needs, species mix, site preparation, and fire and fuel treatments. The appellant's duties closely match illustration number 5 on page 12 of the Guide where the technician develops a schedule and other plans for monitoring and inspecting timber stand improvement or reforestation operations, executes assignments which are precedented, and reports on contractor compliance with contract terms or standard specifications. The appellant's district is geographically diverse, bordering on desert and extending into mountains, and requires the appellant to adapt techniques to severe sites (for example, steep slopes, varying elevations, and droughty conditions).

It is clear that the appellant's vast experience allows him to provide valuable support to the reforestation, timber stand protection and improvement, and fuel/fire management efforts. However, discussions with the appellant's supervisor (a GS-462-9 Forestry Technician who serves as the District Assistant Fire Management Officer) and the GS-462-9 Lead Forestry Technician who is responsible for the reforestation in the appellant's District and a neighboring district, indicates that their positions limit the appellant's authority. The GS-9 Assistant Fire Management Officer serves as project manager and is responsible for planning and implementing fuel/fire management projects. The GS-9 Lead Forestry Technician is responsible for the effective planning and overall performance of all reforestation and timber stand protection and improvement activities for the two Districts. Therefore, the appellant does not have the delegated authority and responsibility for the design, coordination, and execution of projects typical of Level 1-6. Overall responsibility for fire management rests with the District Assistant Fire Management Officer and for silviculture projects, the Lead Forestry Technician.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-5 and 750 points are credited.

### *Factor 2, Supervisory controls*

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the responsibility of the employee, and the degree to which work is reviewed by the supervisor.

At Level 2-3 (described on pages 19 - 20 of the Guide), the supervisor makes assignments by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance with unusual assignments. The employee carries out successive steps to complete project requirements and objectives, seeks assistance as needed, and coordinates the work with others. The employee exercises initiative in developing solutions within established guidelines to resolve common problems. The employee refers significant technical or procedural problems to the supervisor or a higher level employee. Completed work is reviewed for technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformity to policy and requirements. Level 2-3 is the highest level for this factor described in the Guide.

Like Level 2-3, the appellant's supervisor assigns work, provides general instructions, sets overall goals, provides more specific instructions for new or more complex assignments, and is available for consultation on new or unusual aspects of assignments. The appellant operates independently, determines the applicable guidance, and consults his supervisor for guidance on new or unusual assignments. The appellant's work is generally accepted without detailed review.

This factor is evaluated at Level 2-3 and 275 points are credited.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them.

At Level 3-2 (described on pages 21 and 22 of the Guide), procedures for doing the work have been established and a number of specific guidelines are applicable. Guides may range from complex, standardized, codified regulations to maps, blueprints, standing operating procedures,

oral instructions, equipment or instrument manuals, or standard scientific or technical texts. Judgment must be used in selecting appropriate guidelines because of the number, similarity, linkage, and overlapping nature of the guides. Guidelines contain criteria to solve the core question contained in the assignments, although the applicability may not be readily apparent. Further, technicians may also need to be especially resourceful in searching assigned guides; locating the controlling criteria; and applying it as specified, although the process of locating and selecting the applicable rule may be taxing and time consuming.

At Level 3-3, employees work with new requirements or applications for which only general guidelines are available or with assignments where the most applicable guides are limited to general functional statements and/or work samples which are not always directly related to the core problem of the assignments, have gaps in specificity, or are otherwise not completely applicable. The employee exercises judgment independently in applying the guidelines or extending their applicability to situations not specifically covered; uses guidelines as the basis for making procedural deviations from established administrative and/or technical methods; or otherwise adapts guidelines when judgment is exercised based on an understanding of the intent of the guidelines and reacting accordingly.

Like Level 3-2, the appellant uses Forest Service manuals, handbooks, and procedures that provide general guidance and direction. The appellant selects the applicable guidance and interprets it for local resource conditions but is not required to exercise the judgment typical of Level 3-3. The guidance used by the appellant changes infrequently and does not lack the specificity that would require the appellant to adapt or extend the guidance or deviate from it to the degree typical of Level 3-3. If the guidance does not cover a situation, the appellant consults his supervisor. We found no evidence that the appellant's position must work with applications for which only general guidelines or functional statements exist or exercise the degree of independence and judgment to extend guidelines contemplated by Level 3-3.

This factor is evaluated at Level 3-2 and 125 points are credited.

#### *Factor 4, Complexity*

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

At Level 4-3 (described on pages 23 and 24 of the Guide), the technician is responsible for a variety of assignments that involve differing and unrelated processes and methods. There exist a number of possible courses of action for planning and executing the work and the employee is given leeway or otherwise expected to exercise discretion when choosing among them. Judgment is required in applying a wide range of conventional, established approaches, methods, techniques, and solutions to new situations. The technician: (1) identifies and recommends resolution of discrepancies in data based on a study of how the data interrelates; (2) adjusts work methods to accommodate unusual conditions; and/or (3) recommends or determines what data to use, record, or report. Level 4-3 is the highest level for this factor described in the Guide.

Comparable to Level 4-3, the appellant's responsibilities include planning and completing assignments, determining the best methods for executing assignments, and coordinating work with others. The appellant uses judgment to recommend a course of action, such as how a site should be prepared and the planting and thinning techniques to be used and he works with his supervisor to determine fire and fuel treatments.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-3 and 150 points are credited.

#### *Factor 5, Scope and effect*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-3, the work involves applying conventional technical and administrative solutions and practices to a variety of problems. The employee may have responsibility for the ongoing operation of a field site or for execution of a standardized project or program area cited in an annual or comparable work plan as a performance objective for the organization. Work products at this level directly affect the design and execution of experiments; the operation of systems, programs, or equipment systems; or the adequacy of such activities as long-range work plans, field investigations, testing operations, or research conclusions. Level 5-3 is the highest level for this factor described in the Guide.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-3 (described on page 25 of the Guide) where the work involves applying conventional technical and administrative solutions and practices to a variety of problems. Using established procedures, the appellant conducts field reconnaissance and surveys vital to the planning and implementation of silviculture and fire treatments. The appellant monitors the implementation of silviculture contracts, inspects for compliance, and makes recommendations for final acceptance of contract work. Level 5-3 is the highest level for this factor described in the Guide.

This factor is evaluated at Level 5-3 and 150 points are credited.

#### *Factor 6, Personal contacts, and Factor 7, Purpose of contacts*

Factor 6 addresses the regular and recurring contacts with individuals outside the supervisory chain, and Factor 7 addresses the purpose of those contacts.

The appellant has routine contact with Forest Service employees in his District, a neighboring District, the Forest Supervisor's Office, contractors, and the public. Such contacts are comparable to Level 6-2 (described on pages 25 - 26 of the Guide) where contacts are with employees in the agency, inside and outside of the immediate organization. The appellant's contacts do not meet Level 6-3 (described on page 26 of the Guide) where contacts are made on a nonroutine basis and may include a variety of noted subject matter experts from other Federal agencies, universities, private foundations, and professional societies; influential local

community leaders such as members of tribal governing bodies or comparable State or local government officials; newspaper, radio, and telephone reporters; legal representatives of private landowners; or representatives of organized landowners or special interest groups.

At Level 7-b (described on pages 26 - 27 of the Guide), the purpose of the contacts is to plan and coordinate work efforts; explain the need to adhere to laws, rules, or contract or lease provisions; and discuss inspected work and contract requirements when monitoring activity of contractors.

Like the purposes described in Level 7-b, the appellant exchanges information with Forest Service employees; inspects the work of contractors and explains shortcomings, corrections that are needed, and the need to adhere to contract terms; and explains rules to public users. The appellant's contacts do not require the skill necessary at Level 7-c where the purpose is to influence, motivate, interrogate, or control persons or groups.

This factor is evaluated at Level 6-2 and 7-b and a total of 75 points are credited.

#### *Factor 8, Physical demands*

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and physical exertion involved in the work

Some of the appellant's work is sedentary; much of it is outside in a forest environment. It requires considerable walking and climbing over steep, uneven terrain usually covered with trees, brush, and rock debris. Long periods of physically demanding work may be required when the appellant is engaged in fire suppression activities. Physical demands for the appellant's position meet Level 8-2 (described on page 28 of the Guide) where the work requires some physical exertion, such as regular and recurring running, walking, or bending; or walking or climbing over rocky areas, through plowed fields or other uneven surfaces, through dense vegetation, and in mountainous terrain.

The appellant's position does not meet the intent of Level 8-3 where the work requires regular and protracted periods of considerable and strenuous physical exertion such as carrying or lifting heavy objects; hacking passages through dense vegetation; or climbing ladders or scaffolds carrying heavy equipment used to install, maintain, or repair research installations.

This factor is evaluated at Level 8-2 and 20 points are credited.

#### *Factor 9, Work environment*

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety and occupational health regulations required.

Similar to Level 9-2 (described on page 28 of the Guide), much of the appellant's work is performed outdoors and subject to varying seasonal weather. Surfaces may be wet and slippery. The appellant is subject to moderate risks associated with falls while working on steep and

uneven terrain and with smoke, heat, and other fire-related conditions. The work environment for the appellant's position meets Level 9-2 where the work involves regular and recurring moderate risks or discomforts which require special safety precautions, e.g., working around machine parts, motorized carts, machines, or working with irritant chemicals. At this level, technicians are required to use protective clothing or gear, such as masks, gowns, coats, goggles, gloves, or shields to moderate risks or to follow procedures for minimizing risk.

The appellant's work environment does not meet Level 9-3 (described on page 29 of the Guide). At Level 9-3, the work environment involves high risks with regular and recurring exposure to potentially dangerous situations or unusual environmental stress where high risk factors exist which cannot be reasonably controlled. Examples of this level include working at great heights under extreme weather conditions, or working closely with toxins or dangerous pests or animals such as poisonous snakes, where safety precautions cannot completely eliminate the danger.

This factor is evaluated at Level 9-2 and 20 points are credited.

### *Summary*

In sum, we have evaluated the appellant's position as shown in the following table.

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-5	750
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150
6. Personal contacts and		
7. Purpose of contacts	6-2 and 7-b	75
8. Physical demands	8-2	20
9. <u>Work environment</u>	9-2	20
<i>Total</i>		1565

The total of 1565 points warranted by the appellant's position falls within the GS-7 grade level point range of 1455 to 1600 on the Grade Conversion Table provided in the GS-0400 Guide. The appellant's position is properly graded at GS-7.

### **Decision**

The appellant's position is properly classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-7.