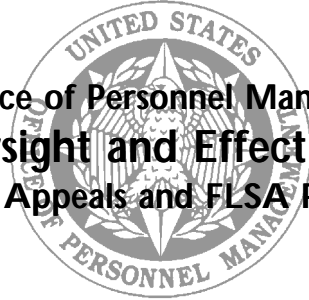


U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242

Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Forestry Technician
GS-462-09

Organization: [appellant's immediate organization]
Forest Service
Department of Agriculture
[geographic location]

OPM decision: Forestry Technician
GS-462-09

OPM decision number: C-0462-09-01

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

9/27/99

-
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's name and address]

[servicing personnel office]

Assistant Director of Human Resources
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U.S. Department of Agriculture
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Introduction

On June 18, 1999, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted an appeal from [the appellant]. The appealed position is assigned to the [appellant's organization], Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, [geographic location]. The agency has classified the position as Forestry Technician, GS-462-09. The appellant believes his position should be classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-11, and has filed an appeal with this office under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

The appellant certified to the accuracy of the duties described in his current position description (PD), [number], dated July 23, 1998. The appellant's supervisor certified that this PD accurately reflects the duties performed by the appellant. We find this PD is adequate for position classification purposes.

In reaching our classification decision, we considered information submitted in writing by the appellant and his agency and information obtained by telephone from the appellant and his supervisor. As required by law, we classified the position based upon its duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements as compared to the criteria specified in the appropriate OPM classification standards and guidelines (sections 5106, 5107, and 5112 of title 5, United States Code).

Position information

The appealed position is assigned to the [appellant's organization] staff in [a specific] Regional Office. The Region is responsible for establishing guidelines for fire management program analysis, planning, and monitoring of [a specific number of] National Forests. The appellant is one of four employees on the Fire Prevention staff, which is headed by the Assistant Director and also includes one GS-13 Economist, one GS-13 Fire Business Management Analyst, and one GS-12 GIS Data Specialist. The appellant is supervised by the Assistant Director of Fire Prevention and Training.

The appellant has responsibility for providing advice and assistance in the areas of fire planning and budgeting, fire computer systems, and fire budget analysis to Regional and Forest level staff. A summary of the appellant's major duties and responsibilities follows.

- The appellant provides expert assistance throughout the Region in the development and implementation of the National Fire Management Analysis System (NFMAS) planning efforts. The appellant ensures that data used in analysis is accurate and consistent with the history of the Forests within the Region.
- The appellant instructs Forest personnel in the use of NFMAS including the evaluation of economic efficiency as it relates to fire and resource management values, fire program staffing selection, and fuel management planning.

- The appellant is responsible for developing sampling procedures related to the Fuels Analysis Process for implementation by each Forest.
- The appellant assists the Forests in administering the fire management analysis portion of the Geographic Information System.
- The appellant assists the Regional Fire Budget Analyst by monitoring all Forest Fire Management Action Plans. The appellant provides assistance to Forests in preparing the action plans.
- The appellant develops and assists in the implementation of complex prescribed burn monitoring programs within each Forest of the Region.
- To help support fire suppression activities, the appellant is responsible for maintaining a database of Regional fire expenditures.

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-462. 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 GS-462 standard notes that the criteria for determining the grade of GS-462 positions are contained in the Grade Level Guide for Aid and Technician Work in the Biological Sciences, GS-400. Therefore, the appellant's position is properly evaluated using the GS-400 Guide.

Grade determination

The Grade Level Guide for Aid and Technician Work in the Biological Sciences is written in Factor Evaluation System (FES) format and uses nine grade influencing factors for determining grade level. Within each factor, there are factor level descriptions that represent the minimum or threshold for that factor. If the position exceeds one factor level but fails to meet the full intent of the next higher factor level, the lower point value must be credited. The total of the point values assigned to the nine factors is converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

For Factors 1 through 6, the appellant's desired grade level exceeds the highest grade level found in the GS-400 Guide. In this situation, our assessment of these factors requires reference to the Primary Standard, upon which all FES position classification standards are based. The FES

provides for use of the Primary Standard when the level assignable to a specific job fails to meet the lowest level, or exceeds the highest level described in the FES standard appropriately applied for grade level determination.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information that the forest technician must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, and policies) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply those knowledges. The appellant believes this factor should be evaluated at Level 1-7. The agency has evaluated this factor at Level 1-6, the highest level described in the GS-400 Guide.

Level 1-7 in the Primary Standard can be met when knowledge is required of a wide range of concepts, principles, and practices, such as would be gained through extended graduate study or experience, and skill is required in applying the knowledge to difficult and complex assignments.

The appellant's PD states that knowledge is required of NFMAS planning activities and of land management principles, practices, and concepts sufficient to perform the full range of duties associated with the development and review of resource protection programs related to Aviation and Fire/Fuels Management. However, we conclude that the appellant's position does not require the wide range and depth of knowledge referenced at this level, and that the nature of problems regularly dealt with are not of the difficulty and complexity associated with this level.

Level 1-7 in the Primary Standard can also be met if the position requires a comprehensive, intensive, practical knowledge of a technical field, and skill in applying this knowledge to the development of new methods, approaches, or procedures. Information that was obtained shows that the appellant is not typically required to apply his knowledge to the development of new methods, approaches, or procedures to the extent envisioned at Level 1-7.

The knowledge required by the appellant's assignments is best evaluated at Level 1-6, as covered in the GS-400 Guide. An employee at Level 1-6 uses knowledge of the technical methods and procedures, management practices, agency policies and programs, and an extensive familiarity with the methods and practices to design, coordinate, and execute complete and well-precedented conventional projects. The employee is required to exercise judgment based on critical analysis and evaluation of project objectives, past practices, source materials, alternatives among available work processes, and recognition of the intended use of completed work. Comparable to Level 1-6, the appellant's position requires knowledge of conventional land management principles and practices; fire ecology, fire hazard, and risk analysis; fuels management; computer application models; program planning and budgeting procedures; fire suppression techniques; and prescribed fire planning techniques. These knowledges are used to advise on and perform well-precedented projects related to the fire management program.

In summary, we do not find that the appellant's assignments fully meet the knowledge requirements of Level 1-7 in the Primary Standard. We judge that the appellant's position is properly evaluated at Level 1-6.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-6 (950 points).

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. The appellant believes this factor should be evaluated at Level 2-4. The agency has evaluated this factor at Level 2-3, the highest level described in the GS-400 Guide.

At Level 2-3, 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 his supervisor or a higher level employee. Completed work is reviewed for technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformity to policy and requirements.

Similar to Level 2-3, the appellant's supervisor makes assignments and is available to assist with new or unusual assignments. The appellant coordinates work efforts with outside parties and carries out the successive steps to complete project requirements and objectives. He exercises initiative in developing his own techniques and methods within established guidelines to resolve problems and deviations. He refers problems that do not have clear precedents to the Assistant Director for Fire Planning and Budgeting. Completed work is reviewed for compliance with Forest Service programs, policies, and procedures. Supervisory controls for the appellant's position fully meet Level 2-3.

Level 2-4 in the Primary Standard can be met when the employee and supervisor, in consultation, set the objectives and deadlines. At this level, the employee is responsible for planning work assignments, resolving conflicts that arise, coordinating the work with others as necessary, and exercising initiative in interpreting policy. An employee's completed work at Level 2-4 is reviewed only from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements or expected results. The appellant's supervisor is ultimately responsible for making assignments and providing direction on the priorities and objectives for the appellant's work. Although the appellant's analyses and recommendations are relied upon to be technically correct, his work receives a review for conformance to policies and procedures. Supervisory controls for the appellant's position fall short of the intent of Level 2-4.

This factor is evaluated at Level 2-3 (275 points).

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. The appellant believes this factor should be evaluated at Level 3-4. The agency has evaluated this factor at Level 3-3, the highest level described in the GS-400 Guide.

At Level 3-3, the technician works 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.

Similar to Level 3-3, the appellant maintains a broad understanding in applying guidelines that include Forest Service manuals, handbooks, directives and plans, and scientific and technical publications. When the appellant encounters situations for which guidelines or precedents are unclear or not completely appropriate, he resolves them based on considerable judgment and ingenuity or adaptation of the guides. Guidelines used by the appellant and the judgment needed to apply them are characteristic of Level 3-3.

Level 3-4 in the Primary Standard can be met if the guidelines used for performing the work are scarce or of limited use or in the form of generally stated policies and precedents. An employee at Level 3-4 uses initiative and resourcefulness in deviating from traditional methods or researching trends and patterns to develop *new* methods, criteria, or proposed new policies. Unlike Level 3-4, the appellant's guidelines are more specific and applicable to his work, and do not require development of new approaches. Consequently, the guidelines used by the appellant do not meet the intent of Level 3-4.

This factor is evaluated at Level 3-3 (275 points).

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. The appellant believes this factor should be evaluated at Level 4-5. The agency has evaluated this factor at Level 4-3, the highest level described in the GS-400 Guide.

At Level 4-3, the work requires the performance of various technical duties which involve differing and unrelated processes and methods. At this level, the decision regarding what needs

to be done depends upon the analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment, and the chosen course of action may have to be selected from many alternatives. There exists a number of possible courses of action for planning as well as executing the work, and the technician is given leeway or is otherwise expected to exercise discretion in choosing from among them. Judgment is required in applying a wide range of conventional, established approaches, methods, techniques, and solutions to new situations.

The complexity of the appellant's position fully meets and does not exceed Level 4-3. The appellant determines what data is applicable to each Regional Forest and makes decisions by identifying unique issues, obtaining additional information, and taking appropriate action. The appellant must consider diverse factors to prepare plans for fire management activities including soil types, slope aspect, weather conditions, timber type, aesthetics, and proximity to fish-bearing streams and other wildlife habitat. The appellant develops alternative fire management plans through analysis of the Forest's ground resources and changing environment. The appellant individually structures the analysis for a particular Forest by determining what program alternatives will ensure the most efficient use of its limited budget and resources.

The complexity of the appellant's position does not meet Level 4-4 in the Primary Standard where decisions regarding the work typically include the assessment of unusual circumstances, variations in approach, and incomplete or conflicting data. Although the appellant does interpret a considerable amount of historical data on the Regional Forests, he is not required to make numerous decisions concerning the planning of work or the refinement of processes, as is typical at Level 4-4. Neither can the next higher level be met by the appellant's position. The complexity at Level 4-5 addresses major areas of uncertainty resulting from technological developments, unknown phenomena, or conflicting requirements which require the establishment of criteria or the origination of new techniques.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-3 (150 points).

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. To receive credit for a factor level, both the scope and effect of the work must meet the level. The appellant believes this factor should be evaluated at Level 5-4. The agency has evaluated this factor at Level 5-3, the highest level described in the GS-400 Guide.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-3 where the work involves applying conventional technical and administrative solutions and practices to a variety of problems. The appellant is responsible for providing expertise in the NFMAS planning process and assuring consistent analysis procedures throughout the [appellant's specific] Region. The appellant continually works in conjunction with other Federal agencies on a variety of issues. At Level 5-3, the work product directly affects the design and operation of systems, programs, or equipment systems. The

appellant's work has significant influence on both the budget process and overall effectiveness of the organization's Regional and Forest fire management program.

Level 5-4 in the Primary Standard can be met when the work involves establishing criteria; formulating projects; assessing program effectiveness; or investigating or analyzing a variety of unusual conditions, problems, or questions. The work product or service affects a wide range of agency activities or the operation of other agencies. The appellant's work does not meet Level 5-4 because it involves responsibility for a more established, conventional program than that described at this level. The appellant's work does not affect a wide range of Forest Service programs.

This factor is evaluated at Level 5-3 (150 points).

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 believes these combined factors should be evaluated at 3b. The agency has evaluated these factors at Level 2b.

The appellant has contacts with individuals both within and outside the agency, including Forest fire staff officers, Regional systems analysts, Forest and agency fire planning personnel, operating unit personnel, and subject matter specialists. Such contacts are comparable to Level 2 in that contacts at this level are with individuals or groups within and outside the agency on matters for which there is a routine working relationship.

The appellant's contacts do not meet Level 3 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 television reporters; legal representatives of private landowners; and representatives of organized landowner or special interest groups.

At Level b, 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; discuss inspected work and contract requirements when monitoring activity of contractors; discuss technical requirements of equipment with manufacturers and resolve problems concerning the work or the peculiar needs of the organization; interpret data obtained and explain its purpose; or to reach agreement on operating problems such as recurring submission of inaccurate, untimely, incomplete, or irrelevant data. Similar to Level b, the purpose of the appellant's contacts is to plan, coordinate, and advise on work efforts of the Region's NFMAS, prescribed fire, and fuels management programs. Many of the appellant's contacts parallel those described at Level b where contacts are made to resolve operating problems by influencing or motivating individuals or groups who are working toward mutual goals and who have basically cooperative attitudes.

The appellant's contacts do not require the skill necessary at Level c where the contact is to influence, motivate, interrogate, or control persons or groups. For example, the purpose of contacts at this level is to persuade others to participate in projects or organizational objectives when there is no requirement for doing so; to gain compliance with established policies and regulations by persuasion or negotiation; to influence others who are knowledgeable about the work to adopt, within the organization, methods about which there are conflicting opinions among those in the line of work; or to persuade technical and administrative personnel from outside the government to submit the information desired for a study when there is no official or legal basis for requiring submission of the information and there are conflicts with the parties involved.

We evaluate these combined factors at Level 2b and credit 75 points.

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.

At Level 8-2, 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 work is mostly sedentary. However, field work done by the appellant requires considerable walking and climbing over steep, uneven terrain. Long periods of physically demanding work may be required when and if the appellant is engaged in fire suppression. Physical demands for the appellant meet Level 8-2.

The physical demands of the appellant's position do not meet those described at Level 8-3 where the work requires regular and protracted periods of considerable and strenuous physical exertion such as carrying or lifting heavy objects (over 50 pounds); 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 (20 points)

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.

At Level 9-2, 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.

Most of the appellant’s work is performed in an office environment. Similar to Level 9-2 in the GS-400 Guide, some of the appellant’s work is performed outdoors and is subject to moderate risks associated with falls while working on steep and uneven terrain, smoke, heat, and other fire-related conditions.

The appellant’s work environment does not meet Level 9-3, when work is performed at great heights under extreme weather conditions, the employee works closely with toxins or dangerous animals, or safety precautions cannot completely eliminate potential danger.

This factor is evaluated at Level 9-2 (20 points).

Summary

In summary we have evaluated the appellant’s position as follows:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-6	950
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150
6. and 7. Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts	2b	75
8. Physical demands	8-2	20
9. Work environment	9-2	20
TOTAL POINTS		1915

The appellant’s position warrants 1915 total points. In accordance with the grade conversion table provided in the GS-400 Guide, the position is properly graded at GS-09.

Decision

The appellant’s position is properly classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-09.