

New Education Requirements for Refuge Managers

New education requirements are in place for future managers of National Wildlife Refuges. As of December 2010, the requirement for nine semester hours of botany has been replaced by a requirement for three semester hours of botany and three semester hours of conservation biology. Conservation biology covers both plants and animals with a focus on theories and practices that effectively conserve populations and species.

In recent decades, refuge management has shifted towards biological integrity and landscape-level conservation of species and populations. With that shift, the principles of conservation biology now frame most decisions about how to manage, expand, and establish refuges. Because conservation biology has become highly important to public resource management decisions, it is now a required class in the undergraduate wildlife curriculum at most colleges.

1. **Question:** Where is the revised OPM's 0485 qualification standard published?

Answer: The revised 0485 qualification standard is published on this U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) [Web site](#).

2. **Question:** Where is OPM's policy guidance on implementing new or revised qualification standards?

Answer: The guidance may be found here.
<http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/policy/ApplicationOfStds-08-asp>

3. **Question:** Will the revised education requirements affect current Service employees occupying a position classified to the 0485 series?

Answer: The revised education requirements will not affect Service employees currently serving in a position classified to the 0485 series. Under OPM's special provisions, current Service employees occupying a position classified to the 0485 series are not required to meet the new educational requirements for the 0485 series.

4. **Question:** Does OPM's qualification policy require a current Service employee in the 0485 series to meet the new education requirements when applying for a different position in the 0485 series at the same or different grade level?

Answer: OPM's qualification policy does not require current Service employees to meet the new education requirements if he/she applies for a different position at

the same or different grade level in the 0485 series. However, employees must still meet any specialized experience requirements for the position.

5. **Question:** Does OPM's policy have special provisions for qualifying current and/or former employees who are currently occupying positions classified to a different series, but they met the former requirements of the 0485 qualifications requirement and previously occupied a position classified to the 0485 series?

Answer: Yes, OPM has prescribed special provisions for qualifying employees who formerly held the 0485 series. The work the employees performed while occupying previous position(s) will be analyzed by the Human Resources Office to determine if that work provided the employee with the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the duties of the new position.

6. **Question:** Are there special provisions for Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) students who weren't converted prior to December 3, 2010, and will not meet the new education requirements prior to conversion to permanent position in the competitive service?

Answer: Yes. The Service will allow current SCEP students who are eligible for conversion within six months from December 3, 2010, to meet the education requirements under either the former or revised qualification standard.

7. **Question:** What if a current SCEP was hired after December 3, 2010, which education requirements are they required to meet?

Answer: SCEPs hired after December 3, 2010, who are not eligible for conversion until six months after December 3, 2010, are required to meet the revised education requirements.

8. **Question:** Why is there a six month window for SCEPs to qualify by meeting either the former or revised education requirements?

Answer: The six month window is used for SCEPs because they were already on a formal track to meet the former 0485 education requirements. Because OPM's policy prescribes six months for the agency to implement new or revised standards, the Service is using the six month window to provide this flexibility to SCEPs.

9. **Question:** Can the Service pay for the additional course(s) the student needs to meet the new education requirement?

Answer: Although not obligated, program officials may pay the cost for the additional course(s) the student may need to meet the new education requirements for the 0485 series.

10. **Question:** How many individuals does the Service employ in the 0485 series?

Answer: Although the number is constantly changing, the Service employs between 600-650 people in the 0485 series. These individuals most often have the title of “Wildlife Refuge Manager” or “Wildlife Refuge Specialist.” The Service is the only agency with employees in this series.

11. **Question:** The Wildlife Biologist series (0486) has very similar education requirements. Why is that series not changing?

Answer: The Service is considering a similar change to the education requirements for the 0486 series; however, that series is used by other agencies and other departments. Therefore, changes regarding that series must be agreed upon by all the effected agencies. Other agencies with substantial numbers of employees in the 0486 series include APHIS – Wildlife Services, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

12. **Question:** What courses will meet the conservation biology requirement?

Answer: The courses below, or those with similar content, will fulfill the new requirement:

- Conservation Biology
- Conservation Ecology
- Conservation Ecology and Sustainable Development
- Population Ecology
- Behavioral Ecology and Conservation Biology
- Ecosystem Ecology
- Restoration Ecology
- Landscape Ecology
- Habitat Conservation and Restoration
- Science of Conservation
- Wildlife Ecology and Conservation

13. **Question:** Who decides whether a particular course meets the conservation biology requirement? For example, I took a course I believe fulfilled the conservation biology requirement, but the exact course title does not appear in Attachment 3. Who decides whether the course counts?

Answer: Colleges and universities do not use standard conventions for naming and describing courses; therefore, in some cases Regional Human Resource Offices may need to review the course syllabus to determine whether a course is creditable toward the requirement. If requested, it is the applicant’s responsibility to furnish supporting information needed to determine whether a course is creditable. In addition, Human Resources may consult with a senior official

currently in the 0485 series to determine whether the course fulfills the conservation biology requirement.