

**U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Classification Appeal Decision  
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code**

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

**Agency classification:** Resource Specialist  
GS-1101-9

**Organization:** [activity]  
[installation]  
[region]  
Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
[city and state]

**OPM decision:** GS-1101-9  
Title to be determined by agency

**OPM decision number:** C-1101-09-02

/s/ Judith A. Davis for

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert D. Hendler  
Classification and Pay Claims  
Program Manager  
Merit System Audit and Compliance

11/15/2011

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), this decision constitutes a certificate which 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 (Introduction)*, appendix 4, Section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Since this decision changes the factor levels credited to the appealed position, the servicing human resources office must submit a compliance report with the revised position description (PD). As discussed in this decision, the appellant's PD of record must also be revised to meet the PD standard of adequacy in the *Introduction*. The revised PD must be submitted with the compliance report within 30 calendar days of the date of this decision to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) office which accepted the appeal.

**Decision sent to:**

[appellant's name and address]

[name and address of appellant's servicing personnel office]

Director of Human Capital Management  
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U.S. Department of Agriculture  
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## **Introduction**

On September 16, 2010, OPM's Dallas Oversight office accepted a classification appeal from [appellant's name]. The appellant's position is currently classified as Resource Specialist, GS-1101-9, but she believes it should be classified at the GS-11 grade level. The position is located in the [activity], [installation], [region], Forest Service (FS), U.S. Department of Agriculture, in [city, state]. We received the agency's administrative report on November 17, 2010. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

## **Background and general issues**

The appellant and her immediate supervisor requested a position classification review from FS's Albuquerque Service Center (ASC) in February 2009. ASC's March 23, 2009, evaluation statement found the appellant's position was appropriately classified at the GS-11 grade level. The appellant said the Forest Supervisor acting at the time experienced numerous difficulties in electronically approving the upgrade and then, before the action could be effected, the Forest's personnel liaison intervened and told him the upgrade would impact all of [region]. No further action was taken to upgrade her position. The immediate supervisor drafted a new PD at the request of the Forest Supervisor and [region]. The ASC then conducted a desk audit. Their February 9, 2010, evaluation statement concluded the appellant's position is appropriately classified as Resource Specialist, GS-1101-9.

The appellant subsequently forwarded her classification appeal to OPM. As a result, the ASC, with input from the appellant's second-level supervisor (Forestry and Range Staff Officer, GS-401-13), officially reassigned the appellant effective October 24, 2010, to a new PD, number [number], to better reflect her current duties and responsibilities. However, the appellant disagrees with the accuracy of the new PD.

The appellant notified OPM in February 2011 of her unavailability due to a family emergency. Meanwhile, OPM accepted a classification appeal for a GS-1101-9 resource specialist position assigned to the same [region] as the appellant's in February 2011. The two appealed positions are assigned to different organizations, supervisors, and PDs. However, since the positions are both assigned to [region] and perform related duties and responsibilities, OPM determined it was appropriate to adjudicate the appeals separately but concurrently to ensure consistency in the application of OPM's position classification standards (PCS).

The appellant raises various concerns about her agency's position review process (e.g., [service center] provided her with an incorrect address for the OPM appeals office, delaying her filing by five months; and the ASC reassigned her to a new PD, which she said was the agency's attempt to impede her appeal rights). In adjudicating this appeal, our responsibility is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of the appellant's position. Because our decision sets aside all previous agency decisions, any concerns regarding the agency's actions and classification review process are not germane to this decision.

**Position information**

The appellant's position is assigned to the [installation] National Forest, [state's] largest covering [number] acres and falling under [region] area of responsibility. The Forest is divided into [number] ranger districts including [district, district, district, district, district, district, and district]. At one time, all timber sales were administered at the forest level. [Region] then delegated the [area] Timber Zone in [city, state], with authority to administer all large complex timber sales from 1,000 CCF (hundred cubic feet) to 50,000 CCF and stewardship contracts for the zone's [number] forests including, in addition to the appellant's, [location, location, location, location and location] National Forests. The Forest retains authority for timber sales up to [number] CCF. The appellant performs administrative work related to the Forest's timber sale contracts and permits. She is directly supervised by the Timber Management Officer (TMO), who occupies a Supervisory Forester (Timber), GS-460-12, position. The TMO performs timber and program management responsibilities related to the preparation, administration, protection, development, conservation, and utilization of the Forest's timber resources.

The appellant's current PD states she spends 100 percent of her time on timber sale reporting, accounting, and preparation support work. The appellant disagrees. During our telephone audits, she estimated spending 45 percent of her time on contract preparation and reporting duties, 10 percent on compiling data and fulfilling agency reporting requirements, and 25 percent on supervising two employees. The appellant estimates spending the remaining 20 percent of her time on a combination of work related to the Timber Sale Accounting (TSA) system which maintains data on all timber-related revenue by individual timber sale contract or permit; oversight of the NATSCALE program, a log accountability database; and the special products program. She later said her special products duties occupy additional work time.

Preparing FS timber sales consists of six steps or 'gates' describing the beginning stages of identifying the timber to be sold and conducting the environmental assessment of the sale area, to the end stages of advertising the sale and selling the timber. Because completion times vary for each gate, the appellant's contracts may be at various stages in the pipeline. Briefly, gate 1 describes the initial planning of a timber sale project required to ensure the feasibility of the proposed sale project. The appellant verifies the timber sale project plan, the output for gate 1, is signed by the district ranger, Forest Supervisor, or other land manager with authority to make project planning decisions. She also ensures the report generated by Timber Information Management (TIM), a system used to record initial information as well as generates bills for timber sales and permits, is certified. Gate 2 includes activities related to project analysis, design, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision notice. The appellant ensures the timber sale project design; gate 2's output, is certified by the appropriate officer and includes the NEPA decision and other required documents.

Gate 3 involves the timber sale preparation required to implement the sale design. The appellant verifies the timber sale summary, gate 3's output, is signed by the appropriate officer and includes the appropriate documents such as the cruise design, cruise results, marking guides, surveys and data, and presale and cutting unit cards. She reviews the timber sale package and makes necessary changes to ensure accuracy and consistency of facts and figures between the contract, appraisal, provisions, bid opening, NEPA documents, etc. Gate 4 describes advertising

the timber sale. At gate 5, the appellant performs bid openings for Forest-sized sales by conducting an oral or sealed-bid auction, which entails monitoring bidders during the auction for suspicious behavior, reviewing bids to determine their viability, and identifying the highest bidder. Gate 6 describes the award of the timber sale contract. The appellant, after evaluating the high bidder for compliance with pre-award requirements, prepares award letters for the review and signature of the contracting officer (CO).

We discuss the appellant's contract preparation work in greater detail later in the decision. She performs contract preparation work on both forest- and zone-sized sales. Although the contract preparation steps are nearly identical regardless of contract sale size, zone-sized sales require assembling a sale review team including the appellant and other forest staff, in addition to the CO, resource specialist, and other staff from the timber zone. As a team member, the appellant reviews the timber sale package; identifies changes to be made to or ensure consistency of facts and figures between the contract, appraisal, provisions, bid opening, and other documents; and makes necessary changes to the contract and other documents based on the review team's input.

After a contract is awarded, the appellant reviews the information entered into TSA for accuracy including timber value, purchaser information, and financial payments. She monitors contract activity quarterly to verify revenue collections are deposited into the correct fund. She also oversees NATSCALE, which tracks the timber removed by log trucks from the Forest to lumber mills, and monitors the loads to generate a TSA report for accountability and billing purposes. The appellant's upward reporting work includes ensuring contract information is appropriate in TIM and TSA, preparing TSA reports and reconciling funds. She compiles and completes the cut and sold, periodic timber sale accomplishment, bioenergy, stewardship acres award, timber sale pipeline, bid monitoring, and fund balance reports.

The Forest's special products are resources not associated with traditional timber products but are used for personal, commercial, and scientific purposes. Permits are required for collecting resources such as firewood, Christmas trees, poles, mushrooms, and ornamental cuttings. District-level resource clerks have day-to-day responsibility of the special products program. The appellant's work includes developing templates for vendor agreements, which is an arrangement between the FS and businesses located throughout the Forest to allow the public to purchase permits from vendors. The Forest currently has [number] vendor agreements. The appellant ensures vendors operate correctly and not stocked with products exceeding the \$1,000 performance bond requirement; revises the vendor agreements yearly to reflect new policy or handbook direction; updates maps; and audits permits sold by vendors. She verifies the permits transferred to the vendor are accounted for in TIM and TSA. After validating the number of permits sold, the appellant initiates payments to vendors for their services. She also establishes new vendors, which involves obtaining the district ranger's approval and meeting the vendor to review the terms and conditions of the agreement, explain the permit processing and payments, and respond to complaints and questions. The appellant also hosts an annual small products program meeting for the resource clerks, law enforcement, and others to discuss the next season.

The appellant's PD and other material of record furnish much more information about her timber sale reporting, accounting, and preparation support work. We incorporate it by reference into this decision. However, we noted her special products work is covered in the PD only partially

and peripherally by reference to the position's revenue collecting, accounting, and reconciling work. A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position or job by an official with the authority to assign work. Major duties are normally those occupying a significant portion of the employee's time. They should be only those duties currently assigned, observable, identified with the position's purpose and organization, and expected to continue or recur on a regular basis over a period of time.

The appellant initially reported spending 20 percent of her time on the special products, TSA maintenance, and NATSCALE oversight work. She later estimated spending at least 25 percent of her time on the special products work. Despite the varying work percentages of the special products duties, we find the work is assigned, observable, identifiable to the appellant's position and organization, and expected to recur with potential to escalate depending on increases in vendor agreements and permit season popularity. Therefore, the omission of the special products work is sufficient to warrant clear inclusion in the PD of record so as to meet the PD standard of adequacy discussed in section III.E of the *Introduction*. The appellant's agency must revise her PD to meet the standard as discussed on page ii of this decision. Regardless, an OPM decision classifies a real operating position and not simply the PD. We have decided this appeal based on an assessment of the actual work assigned to and performed by the appellant.

To help decide this appeal, we conducted telephone audits with the appellant on April 20 and May 19, 2011. On June 24, 2011, we conducted a telephone interview with [supervisor's name], the Forest's TMO and the appellant's immediate supervisor before he retired in February 2011. In addition, we conducted telephone interviews with the Acting TMO on August 24, 2011, and the individual later selected for the TMO position on August 25, 2011. In deciding this appeal, we fully considered the interview findings and all other information of record provided.

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

The agency determined the appellant's duties and responsibilities are consistent with the GS-1101 General Business and Industry Series, and the appellant does not disagree. Based on careful review, we agree. Since OPM has not prescribed titles for positions in this series, the agency may construct a title by following the guidance in the *Introduction*.

The appellant said she spends approximately 25 percent of her time supervising two employees occupying GS-1101 Resource Assistant positions at the GS-5 and the GS-7 grade levels. Implicit in the appellant's rationale is that her position is supervisory because she spends 25 percent of her time supervising her staff and that the General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) should be used to evaluate the position's grade level. We reviewed the PDs of her subordinate employees, both of which are currently at the full performance level. We noted the grade of the GS-7 position rests, in part, on the crediting of Level 2-3. The Primary Standard, in Appendix 3 of the *Introduction*, is the "standard-for-standards" for the Factor Evaluation System (FES). Level 2-3 is appropriate, as described in the Primary Standard, for positions when a supervisor makes assignments by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and assists the employee with unusual situations that do not have clear precedents. Otherwise, the employee independently plans and carries out the successive steps and handles problems and deviations in the work assignments in accordance with instructions, policies, accepted practices, etc. Even

allowing for the additional supervisory controls required by the GS-5 position, we cannot support the appellant's contention that she spends at least 25 percent of her time on supervisory work in light of the supervisory controls credited to the GS-7 position.

Furthermore, the appellant provided OPM with her undated responses to the agency's desk audit questionnaire used during the FS's position review process. Her questionnaire responses indicated she spent 5 percent of her time supervising three positions, which included a temporary position no longer part of the appellant's organization. Therefore, we do not find it plausible the appellant spends 25 percent or more of her time supervising two subordinate employees. Thus, the GSSG cannot be used to evaluate the grade of the position's supervisory work. Further, only duties occupying at least 25 percent of an employee's time can affect the grade of a position (*Introduction*, section III.J). Therefore, the appellant's supervisory duties cannot control the grade of the position and we will not address them further.

The GS-1101 series does not contain grade-level criteria. As directed by the *Introduction*, an appropriate general classification guide or criteria in a PCS for related work should be used if there are no specific grade-level criteria. The agency applied the grading criteria in the Administrative Analysis Grade Evaluation Guide (AAGEG), which provides criteria for nonsupervisory staff administrative analytical, planning, and evaluative work at grades GS-9 and above. After careful review of the record, we concur with the agency's application of the AAGEG.

### **Grade determination**

The AAGEG is written in the FES format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are assigned for each of the nine factors. The total is converted to a grade level by use of the grade conversion table provided in the PCS. Under the FES, each factor-level description demonstrates the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. If a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor-level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level unless an equally important aspect that meets a higher level balances the deficiency. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

The agency credited the appellant's position at Level 1-6, 2-4, 3-3, 4-3, 5-3, 6-2, 7-b, 8-1, and 9-1. The appellant only disagrees with the agency's evaluation of Factors 1, 3, 4, and 6, as evidenced by the written record and telephone audit responses. We reviewed the agency's determination for Factors 5, 7, 8, and 9, concur, and have credited the position accordingly. Our evaluation will focus on the remaining factors.

We also refer to the PCS in the GS-1104 Property Disposal Series for cross-series confirmation of the levels credited to Factors 1 and 6. The GS-1104 is suitable as the PCS is also in the FES format; covers work in the GS-1100 Business and Industry Group like the appellant's position; and covers positions responsible for performing administrative and technical work required to redistribute, donate, sell, abandon, destroy, and promote the use of excess and surplus personal property. Comparable to the appellant's position, the marketing duties of GS-1104 employees involve developing, signing, executing, and administering sales contracts. This work entails

researching laws and regulations for special clauses, terms, and requirements to include in contracts; investigating buyers for compliance with contract terms; proposing default, debarment, and termination actions against contractors; and/or reviewing and resolving contractor appeals, disputes, claims, and bidding errors. Also similar to the appellant's work, GS-1104 employees manage the financial accounts of property transactions and proceeds from sales.

*Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts the employee must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, regulations, and principles) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply the knowledge.

At Level 1-6, positions require skill in applying analytical and evaluative techniques to the identification, consideration, and resolution of issues or problems of a procedural or factual nature. The issues or problems deal with readily observable conditions (e.g., office or shop layout, workflow, or working conditions), written guidelines covering work methods and procedures such as performance and production standards, and information of a factual nature (e.g., number and type of units actually produced or capability of equipment). Included at this level is knowledge of the theory and principles of management and organization, including administrative practices and procedures common to organizations, such as those pertaining to areas of responsibility, channels of communication, delegation of authority, routing of correspondence, filing systems, and storage of files and records. Assignments typically involve using qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques such as literature search; work measurement; task analysis and job structuring; productivity charting; determining staff to workload ratios (e.g., span of control); organization design; space planning; development and administration of questionnaires; flowcharting of work processes; graphing; and calculation of means, modes, standard deviations, or similar statistical measures.

At Level 1-7, the position requires knowledge and skill in applying analytical and evaluative methods and techniques to issues or studies concerning the efficiency and effectiveness of program operations carried out by administrative or professional personnel, or by substantive administrative support functions (i.e., internal activities or functions such as supply, budget, procurement, or personnel which serve to facilitate line or program operations). Level 1-7 includes knowledge of pertinent laws, regulations, policies, and precedents affecting the use of program and related support resources (people, money, or equipment) in the area studied. Projects and studies typically require knowledge of the major issues, program goals and objectives, work processes, and administrative operations of the organization. Knowledge is used to plan, schedule, and conduct projects and studies to evaluate and recommend ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of work operations in a program or support setting. The assignments require knowledge and skill in adapting analytical techniques and/or organizational productivity. Knowledge is applied in developing new or modified work methods, organizational structures, management processes, procedures for administering program services, guidelines and procedures, etc.

The appellant's position fully meets Level 1-6. As at this level, she uses knowledge of commonly applied timber sale contracting principles, concepts, and procedures to independently



perform a wide variety of well-precedented timber project assignments. Her timber sale contract work requires knowledge of pertinent timber sale contract laws, regulations, policies, and precedents to ensure contracts meet legal and agency requirements prior to advertisement; environmental documents to ensure mitigation measures are properly addressed in contracts; proper auditing procedures to ensure volume, rate, collection, deposit, trust fund collection, load accountability, and other information are tracked before contract closure; and timber sale contract financial system, reporting, and accountability requirements.

The FS uses six “2400” type timber sale contract formats to establish the terms and conditions when the FS sells timber and the purchaser buys, pays, harvests, and removes goods. Based on FS directives (e.g., the Forest Service Manual (FSM) and Forest Service Handbook (FSH)), the appellant decides the appropriate contract type based on sale volume, whether timber is measured for payment before or after harvesting, contract length, and other factors. Large, complex timber sales require preparing the 2400-6 contract form when timber is measured for payment after harvesting and 2400-6T when payment is based on measurement prior to sale. The appellant also prepares integrated resource timber or “goods for services” contracts, which involves the 2400-13 form when timber is measured after harvest. Contractors completing a service activity (e.g., harvest, road construction and maintenance, treatment of noxious weeds, prescribed burning, and other land management activities) can exchange credit for timber of equal value. Preparing stewardship contracts requires cost specifications to place a value on the land management activity, requiring the appellant research different cost guides and coordinate with sales administrators, engineers, and other industry professionals. The issues and problems typical of the appellant’s position are consistent with Level 1-6, as they involve readily observable conditions and facts. She uses her knowledge of program guidelines and operating procedures, as well as skill in applying fact-gathering techniques, to gather and track factual information for compliance with all laws, regulations, and policies and procedures in the review and preparation of various types of timber contracts and associated documents.

Furthermore, the GS-1104 PCS describes Level 1-6 knowledge comparable to that required by the appellant’s position; e.g., knowledge of merchandising and marketing policies, procedures, and methods; established sales contracting procedures and conditions; and proper accountability systems and requirements. As described in the GS-1104 PCS, employees at Level 1-6 use this knowledge to perform work involved in selling a variety of property types within a local market area or among a few activities with different functions, property requirements, and disposal needs, or a number of activities with similar functions, property requirements, and disposal needs. An illustration in the GS-1104 PCS describes an employee, at Level 1-6, as researching the various uses and local demand for property and selecting the most effective disposal methods, directing and controlling the maintenance of accountability records containing the types, conditions, amounts, and values of property received and allocated. Employees at this level advertise and conduct local sales for a variety of property items, awarding sales to the highest qualified bidder based on closed and open bidding procedures and collecting payments. Similarly, the appellant performs timber sale contract-related functions for the Forest as those described at Level 1-6 in the GS-1104 PCS.

The appellant’s position does not meet Level 1-7. The operational nature of her position does not require or permit her to plan, schedule, and conduct studies to evaluate and recommend ways

to improve efficiency and effectiveness of work operations or perform equivalent analytical projects as intended at Level 1-7. She plans and schedules her work and provides advice to others based on established programs, procedures, requirements, and precedents. The appellant's sale preparation work typically involves compiling and reviewing the presale checklist and required documents including the gate 1 position statement, decision document, heritage project completion memorandum, cruise plan, cruise input sheets, sale area map, marking guides, and provision checklist; validating timber volumes; reviewing TIM input sheets and appraisals for completeness and accuracy of calculations; and ensuring the accuracy of the sale map's legal description, legend symbols, cutting units, and subdivisions. She is also responsible for performing bid openings for Forest sales. Her post award work involves completing upward reporting responsibilities and overseeing TSA-related functions. She also prepares contract modifications, analyzing a situation to ensure conditions warrant modifying the contract (e.g., due to court injunctions, market-related contract term adjustments, purchaser road costs, timber designation changes, price escalations, and environmental protests) and taking the necessary steps to prepare modifications.

Unlike Level 1-7, the appellant's work does not require devoting a substantial amount of time developing new or modified techniques or procedures for performing program operations or work of similar demands. Instead, her work is typically covered by established guidelines or precedents relating to the timber sale program operations, the permit program, records maintenance, timber sale contract preparation, bid conduct and review, and financial accounting systems and oversight. Her work requires determining the most efficient contract type for Forest timber projects; e.g., she researched in CFR, FS handbook, and [region] directives after the Forest decided it wanted to remove a lot of hazardous trees from the area. The appellant identified the most efficient method to sell the timber as the 2400-1 permit process rather than preparing and administering 70 or more of the contract types originally suggested. Following the 2400-1 process cut workload down tremendously, allowed the Forest to set up permits in TIM, needed no further TSA work, and required less provisions and documentation. However, this and other work, as at Level 1-6, involves analysis of the facts and observed timber sale conditions, is of a repetitive nature, and does not require or permit developing new or modified work procedures.

As described in the GS-1104 PCS, employees at Level 1-7 use knowledge to perform work involved in disposing of a broad range of highly complex or special property within a multi-State market area or among a wide variety of Federal activities with different property needs and disposal requirements; identifying, analyzing, and resolving a broad range of property disposal issues or problems; and/or interpreting and advising on property disposal policies, procedures, and practices for agencies and activities. An illustration in the GS-1104 PCS describes an employee, at Level 1-7, applying contracting policies, regulations, and practices to advise on or conduct and administer sales involving large market areas (e.g., multi-State or regional) or highly specialized property. The appellant's position falls short of the Level 1-7 illustration as it has neither the scope with its smaller market area focus nor complexity with its focus primarily on timber sale and small products programs with comprehensive guidelines in place.

Level 1-6 is credited for 950 points.

*Factor 2, Supervisory Controls*

The supervisor covers the nature and extent of direct and indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the degree to which work is reviewed by the supervisor.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor assigns specific projects in terms of issues, organizations, functions, or work processes to be studied and sets deadlines for completing the work. Where two or more projects are involved, the supervisor may assign priorities among the various projects as well as deadlines for attainment of specific milestones within a project. The supervisor or higher grade analyst provides assistance on controversial issues or on the application of qualitative or quantitative analytical methods to the study of subjects for which precedent studies are not available. The employee plans, coordinates, and carries out the successive steps in fact-finding and analysis of issues necessary to complete each phase of assigned projects. Work problems are normally resolved by the employee without reference to the supervisor, in accordance with the body of accepted office policies, applicable precedents, organizational concepts, management theory, and occupational training. Work is reviewed for conformance with overall requirements as well as contribution to the objectives of the study. Complete work products, such as evaluation reports and staff studies, are also reviewed for consistency of facts and figures, choice of appropriate analytical methods, and practicality of recommendations. Findings and recommendations developed by the employee are reviewed prior to release, publication, or discussion with management officials.

At Level 2-4, the employee and supervisor develop a mutually acceptable project which typically includes identification of the work to be done, the scope of the project, and deadlines for its completion within a framework of priorities, funding, and overall project objectives (e.g., cost reduction, improved effectiveness and efficiency, better workload distribution, or implementation of new work methods). Within the parameters of the approved project plan, the employee is responsible for planning and organizing the study, estimating costs, coordinating with staff and line management personnel, and conducting all phases of the project. This frequently involves the definitive interpretation of regulations and study procedures, and the initial application of new methods. The employee informs the supervisor of potentially controversial findings, issues, or problems with widespread impact. Completed projects, evaluations, reports, or recommendations are reviewed by the supervisor for compatibility with organizational goals, guidelines, and effectiveness in achieving intended objectives. Completed work is also reviewed critically outside the employee's immediate office by staff and line management officials whose programs and employees would be affected by implementation of the recommendations.

The agency credited the appellant's position at Level 2-4, but we found the position meets Level 2-3. The appellant's work is mostly driven by planned timber contract work, and, as at Level 2-3, she uses initiative in carrying out the recurring assignments independently without specific instructions. She plans her own work, resolves problems, and makes adjustments within established policy or overall objectives and priorities. The appellant resolves work problems or issues based on the consideration of accepted timber sale program requirements, formal and on-the-job training, and agency directives. Her experience and knowledge of the timber sale

program allows her to work independently with little or no day-to-day supervision. The appellant's work does not receive a detailed review as her duties are largely handled in accordance with established instructions, policies, and guidelines in the form of the CFR or FS manuals and handbooks (e.g., FSM 2400 timber management, FSH 2409.15 timber sale administration handbook, FSH 2409.18 sale preparation handbook, FSH 2409.22 timber sale appraisal handbook, FSH 6509.17 automated timber sale accounting, and TIM user guides). Similar to Level 2-3, the supervisor defines continuing assignments, provides information on new tasks, and assists with unusual or controversial problems with no clear precedents. The supervisor, though he does not review the specific work methods used in completing assignments, reviews the appellant's finished work products to ensure deadlines are met and conformity to program-related requirements. Her work receives the limited review consistent with Level 2-3.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 2-4, where supervisors outline overall objectives and available resources. Level 2-4 describes the employee and supervisor jointly determining timeframes, assignment scope, and possible approaches. In contrast, the appellant's work involves implementing existing guidelines to ensure timber sale contract work complies with established requirements. She performs specific tasks required by laws, regulations, and agency standards guiding the Forest's timber sale operations. This environment type limits the appellant's opportunities to negotiate with the supervisor on pre-defined, concrete timeframes, assignment scope, and work approaches as expected at Level 2-4. Level 2-4 describes work frequently providing definitive interpretation of regulations and study procedures, and the initial application of new methods. This requires considering the appellant's degree of supervision within the context of the complexity, difficulty, and knowledge required in performing the work as well as the degree to which the nature of the work permits exercising judgment and making independent decisions and commitments. Her work requires judgment and decision-making to perform timber sale contract preparation, assembly, accounting, and reporting related tasks. This and other work falls short of the Level 2-4 description of frequently interpreting, i.e., beyond following and adhering to, regulations and applying new methods.

Level 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

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

At Level 3-3, guidelines consist of standard reference material, texts, and manuals covering the application of analytical methods and techniques (statistical, descriptive, or evaluative) and instructions and manuals covering the subjects involved (e.g., organizations, equipment, procedures, policies, and regulations). Analytical methods contained in the guidelines are not always directly applicable to specific work assignments. However, precedent studies of similar subjects are available for reference. The employee uses judgment in choosing, interpreting, or adapting available guidelines to specific issues or subjects studied. The employee analyzes the subject and the current guidelines which cover it (e.g., workflow, delegations of authority, or regulatory compliance) and makes recommendations for changes.

At Level 3-4, guidelines consist of general administrative policies and management and organizational theories which require considerable adaptation and/or interpretation for application to issues and problems studied. At this level, administrative policies and precedent studies provide a basic outline of the results desired but do not go into detail as to the methods used to accomplish the project. Administrative guidelines usually cover program goals and objectives of the employing organization, such as agency controls on size of workforce, productivity targets, and similar objectives. Within the context of broad regulatory guidelines, the employee may refine or develop more specific guidelines such as implementing regulations or methods for the measurement and improvement of effectiveness and productivity in the administration of operating programs.

The appellant's guidelines meet Level 3-3. Similar to this level, her work requires interpreting, selecting, and applying various laws, regulations, and agency guidelines. Specifically, her guidelines include the CFR; FS manuals and handbooks; timber sale procedures, instructions, and precedents; contracting instructions and regulations; court decisions; and other guides. She uses experienced judgment in interpreting and modifying guidelines when encountering situations where guidelines do not specifically fit (e.g., in deciding the appropriate contract type, monitoring for bidder collusion, developing recommendations for improving the Forest's permit processing procedures). The appellant's guidelines fully meet Level 3-3.

The appellant's guidelines do not meet Level 3-4. Unlike the 'general' policies, theories, and guidelines described at Level 3-4, her work is guided by comprehensive plans, instructions, and handbooks. The appellant's guidelines are specific, voluminous, and readily available for most tasks, providing more than a 'basic' outline of the results desired as described at Level 3-4. Her work does not require interpreting scarce, inapplicable, or incomplete guidelines. In contrast, the appellant generally encounters recurring problems, not unusual or unique problems for which guidelines or precedents would be unsuitable.

In her initial request to OPM, the appellant said her position should be credited at Level 3-4, in part, because:

In order for the Forest to implement specific direction, the Incumbent develops forest guides, like those displayed above, specific to general direction outlined in Manuals and Handbooks. The guides are used by sale preparation crews, timber appraisers and sale administrators for the financial and the log accountability aspects of timber sale contracts. The Incumbent does use her own judgment in choosing, interpreting or adapting available guidelines to specific issues; however, the major controlling factor is that the Incumbent regularly develops and updates guidelines where no guidelines exist.

The appellant provided examples of the checklists, work aids, and other guides she created. She compiled a variety of guides to improve the efficiency of the presale staff, supplementing and adapting the existing regulations, manuals, handbooks, FS directives, and engineering cost guides. Examples of the guides or procedures she established for the Forest staff includes TIM input sheets for timber appraisals and permit product plan development, presale checklists, post and pole spreadsheets, award letter templates, TSA statement of account monthly review process, log accountability action plan, etc. She developed the Forest guidelines for the purpose

of ensuring consistency at each of the districts and to aid them in performing work. However, the appellant's position is not responsible for creating new guidelines, but rather for adapting the wide variety of established guidelines including the CFR, agency directives, and [region] guidance to fit the Forest's needs. This type of work is credited at Level 3-3, which describes positions adapting available guidelines to specific situations.

Level 3-3 is credited for 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.

At Level 4-3, work principally involves dealing with problems and relationships of a procedural nature rather than the substance of work operations, issues, or other subjects studied. At this level, the employee analyzes the issues in the assignment, then selects and applies accepted analytical techniques such as task analysis, work simplification, work-flow charts, workload measurement, and trend analysis to the resolution of procedural problems affecting the efficiency, effectiveness, or productivity of the organization and/or workers studied. Projects usually take place within organizations with related functions and objectives, although organization and work procedures differ from one assignment to the next. Typical organization efficiency assignments involve observing work in progress to identify and resolve problems in work-flow, work methods and procedures, task distribution, overall workload, forms and record keeping, span of control, and organizational structure. When performed, evaluative studies involve measurement of current work output, group productivity and accomplishments, or identification of current resource needs (staff, supplies, equipment, and space). Typically, the employee prepares a narrative report containing a statement of the issue or problem, background, observations, options for change, and recommendations for action. Findings and recommendations are based upon analysis of work observations, review of production records or similar documentation, research of precedent studies, and application of standard administrative guidelines (e.g., staffing guidelines or performance and production standards).

At Level 4-4, work involves gathering information, identifying and analyzing issues, and developing recommendations to resolve problems with the effectiveness and efficiency of work operations in a program or program support setting. Work at this level requires the application of qualitative and quantitative techniques frequently requiring modification to fit a wider range of variables. Projects usually consist of issues that are not always susceptible to direct observation and analysis. Difficulty is encountered in measuring the effectiveness and productivity due to variations in the nature of processing information. For example, assignments may involve compiling voluminous workload data from a variety of sources with different reporting requirements and formats. Originality in refining existing work methods and techniques is characteristic of Level 4-4.

The appellant's position meets Level 4-3. She provides oversight, coordination, and advice on, and support to the Forest on timber sale contract preparation, assembly, accounting, and

reporting related functions. As at Level 4-3, the appellant's work requires considering and analyzing timber sale issues and factors (e.g., contract type, timber value, etc.), and then identifying the appropriate course of action to ensure timber contracts comply with laws, regulations, and agency requirements. She applies fact-gathering techniques to collect, track, and review the adequacy and accuracy of a large amount of timber contract-related information and documents. The appellant's duties include ensuring mitigation measures in NEPA decision documents are covered by appropriate contract provisions; reviewing cruise plans for consistency with contracts; verifying calculations are correct; overseeing sales advertisements; conducting sales bid openings; ensuring bidder compliance; and fulfilling all upward reporting requirements. She also observes the workflow of the timber staff and, when appropriate, recommends changes to more effectively and efficiently accomplish work, e.g., by developing and revising work aids, checklists, and worksheets for use in completing timber sale-related work. This work is characteristic of the Level 4-3 description of identifying and resolving problems with workflow and work method.

The appellant also oversees the issuance of Forest permits (2400-1), which allow permittees to remove fuelwood, post and pole, mushroom, Christmas tree, medicinal herb, and other Forest products with limited resource impact. In coordination with the district rangers, she sets up each product plan in TIM with the legal description, permit use code, product, unit of measure, conversion factor, rate, provision, and other information. District-level resource clerks can then input the permittee's name and address in TIM, creating a 2400-1 permit based on the product plan. The appellant evaluates the Forest's 2400-1 activity, identifying trends, lessons learned, and recommendations to improve the district's permit processes and procedures. She also conducts log accountability and scaling audits, which entails reviewing the district-level process used to receive, maintain, and issue truck ticket receipts and books; identifying anomalies in account records; and ensuring appropriate follow up on missing load removal receipts. The appellant's evaluative and auditing work is consistent with the Level 4-3 description involving recommending changes based on an analysis of observation, review of records, and application of guidelines.

She performs a wide variety of timber sale project functions typical of Level 4-3. For example, the appellant's timber appraisal work entails ensuring the logging and harvest methods are appraised and inputted correctly; timber volume, species, and units of measures are correct; deposits for road maintenance, brush disposal, and erosion are addressed when appropriate; deposits and other requirements adhere to agency directives; and uniformity in the rates reported in the appraisal and the timber sale report phase. Her contract assembly work entails reviewing the cruise report for species, product, acreage, and sale volume; analyzing the appraisal and timber sale report to ensure the project complies with FS manuals and handbooks, laws and regulations, NEPA documents, and other requirements; ensuring all sale provisions required by the NEPA document are added to the contract; examining the sale map for accuracy; and creating the sale contract, prospectus, bidding documents, and advertisements in TIM.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 4-4. Projects at Level 4-4 usually consist of issues that are not always susceptible to direct observation and analysis or involve situations where information is conflicting, incomplete, or difficult to obtain. Unlike this level, the appellant's work requires identifying problems and recommending solutions by completing timber sale

procedures, tasks, and forms based on an analysis of factual information or processes and the application of established standards, methods, and techniques. Her work does not require refining work methods and techniques, revising methods of collecting workload data, or adopting new measures as envisioned at Level 4-4.

Moreover, illustrations at Level 4-4 describe work of greater difficulty than the appellant's. The first illustration describes an employee who improves information and systems for disseminating information about the agency's programs and workforce to managers at many organizational echelons or geographic locations. The second Level 4-4 illustration describes an employee serving as a management advisor in the bureau or command headquarters of an agency with responsibility for performing a range of analytical studies and projects related to field program operations in the areas of management and productivity improvement including effectiveness of work methods, manpower utilization, and distribution of functions. In contrast, the appellant serves as the Forest-level expert on matters related to procedural aspects, rather than on substantive administrative operations, of the organization's timber sale and permit program operations.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

#### *Factor 6, Personal Contacts*

This factor includes face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place.

At Level 2, contacts are with employees, supervisors, and managers of the same agency but outside of the immediate office, or employees and representatives of private concerns in a moderately structured setting.

At Level 3, contacts are with persons outside the agency and may include consultants, contractors, or business executives in a moderately unstructured setting. This level may also include contacts with the head of the employing agency or program officials several managerial levels removed from the employee when such contacts occur on an as needed basis.

The appellant's personal contacts meet Level 6-2. As at this level, her contacts are with Forest employees, supervisors, and managers engaged in different functions and kinds of work. The appellant also has contact with members of the general public where the exact purpose of the contact may be unclear at first but is typically made within the context of the Forest's timber sale or small products programs.

Unlike Level 6-3, the appellant's contacts are not with persons outside the agency comparable to consultants, contractors, or business executives in a moderately unstructured setting. The GS-1104 PCS describes the moderately unstructured setting of Level 6-3 where contacts are not routine and the purpose and extent of each is different, identified, and developed during the course of the contact. Level 6-3 contacts, as described in the GS-1104 PCS, include disposal



specialists, property managers, and inventory managers from other agencies and departments; property users at different agencies and departments from various functional areas and levels; State and foreign Government representatives and donation recipients; property manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and marketing experts; and property bidders, buyers, and contractors.

The appellant's more routine contacts are with a variety of FS personnel including, but not limited to, the TMO, the COs for forest- and zone-sized contracts, timber sale administrators, foresters, district rangers, and resource clerks. Her contacts with timber bidders, buyers, and members of the general public approach Level 6-3. However, these contacts do not occur in the moderately unstructured setting described at Level 6-3. The context, purpose, and development of her contacts are readily and immediately established, as the contacts are typically limited to and defined in focus on the functional operations of the timber sale or small products program, as well as intended to provide factual, procedural-related information on the FS programs. The appellant's role, authority, and responsibility with the persons contacted is promptly and easily established and does not have to be developed during the course of the contact as expected in the moderately unstructured setting of Level 6-3.

Levels 6-2 and 7-b are credited for 75 points.

#### *Summary*

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
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. & 7. Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts	2-b	75
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
<i>Total</i>		1,885

A total of 1,885 points falls within the GS-9 range (1,855 to 2,100) on the grade conversion table in the AAGEG.

#### **Decision**

The position is properly classified as GS-1101-9. The title is at the agency's discretion.