

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability
Classification Appeals Program

Chicago Field Services Group
230 S. Dearborn Street, DPN-30-6
Chicago, IL 60604-1687

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

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Forestry Technician
GS-462-6

Organization: [name]
Division
[location] Ranger District
[site] National Forest
[location] Region
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
[city and state]

OPM decision: Forestry Technician
GS-462-6

OPM decision number: C-0462-06-02

/s/Ricardo Sims

Ricardo Sims
Operations Supervisor

June 5, 2003

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]
[site] National Forest
[address]
[city and state]

Chief Steward, Local [#####]
National Federation of Federal Employees
[location] National Forest
[address]
[city and state]

Human Resources Officer
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
[site] National Forest
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Director, Human Resources Management
Forest Service
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Director of Human Resources Management
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Introduction

On February 24, 2003, the Chicago Field Services Group, formerly the Chicago Oversight Division, of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant]. We received the agency administrative report on March 14, 2003. The appellant's position is currently classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-06, in the Timber Management Administration Division of the [location] Ranger District of the [site] National Forest in [city and state]. The [location] National Forest is part of the [location] Region, U.S. Forest Service (FS), Department of Agriculture. The appellant believes that the classification of his position should be Forestry Technician, GS-462-07. We have accepted and decided the appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

Background information

The appellant's position description was updated to reflect his current work on July 14, 2000. The agency hired an outside contractor who initially classified the position as Forestry Technician, GS-462-7. However, after further discussion between the agency and the contractor, his position was officially classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-6, in November 2000. In March 2001, the appellant appealed to his agency and received its decision in October 2002, sustaining the classification as Forestry Technician, GS-462-6. The appellant subsequently appealed to OPM

In reaching our classification decision, a representative of the Chicago Field Services Group conducted a telephone audit with the appellant on April 11, 2003, and a telephone interview with his immediate supervisor on April 16, 2003. In deciding this appeal, we fully considered the audit, the interview findings, and all information of record provided by the appellant and his agency, including his current work assignments and position description (PD) of record. Both the appellant and his supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellant's official PD, number [#####].

General issues

Although the appellant agrees that his PD accurately describes his duties and responsibilities, he does not agree with the factor levels assigned in the evaluation statement. The appellant based his appeal on the premise that he believes that the factor levels were not updated to reflect the major duties of his position when his PD was updated. He believes that his position was correctly classified in the contractor's original determination.

A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by an official with the authority to assign work. A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by an employee. Position classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the actual duties and responsibilities assigned by management and performed by the employee. An OPM appeal decision grades a real operating position and not simply the PD. Therefore, this decision is based on the actual work currently assigned to and performed by the appellant and sets aside any previous agency decision.

In adjudicating his appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of his position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing his current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). This decision is based on the work currently assigned to and performed by the appellant and sets aside any previous agency decision. Therefore, the classification practices used by the appellant's agency in classifying his position are not germane to the classification appeal process.

Position information

The purpose of the appellant's position is to provide forestry technical support to the District in pre-sale activities of the timber management program. The appellant performs duties of preparing timber for sale by laying out timber sales, determining timber volumes, and marking timber for sale. He independently applies the prescribed sale plan, marks and designates timber to be removed in timber sales or for disposal. The appellant gathers and records field data on the size, content, and condition of timber and gathers basic information, such as species and population of trees, disease and insect damage. In addition, he serves as the District check cruiser. This entails checking the accuracy of estimating volume and quality of the timber, completing cruise data report, interpreting photographs for mapping purposes, and prepares maps of fieldwork.

The appellant currently oversees the activities of one temporary employee, including reviewing his work. The intent of this review is primarily to make sure correct timber cruising procedures are followed and the trees are marked correctly. The appellant will perform various other technical forestry work, such as firefighting, recreation, and wildlife activities, when the need arises. However, these additional duties do not represent a significant portion of the appellant's time. For the most part, the appellant carries out timber marking and cruising duties in support of his unit's timber management program. Occasionally, the appellant trains seasonal employees in fundamental timber measuring practices, cruise methods and techniques. The appellant's supervisor occupies a Forester, GS-460-9, position.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency determined that the appellant's position is properly classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462. The appellant does not disagree with the series and title determination with we also concur. The GS-462 PCS contains no grade level criteria, but provides for grade level evaluation by application of the Grade Evaluation Guide for Aid and Technical Work in the Biological Sciences, GS-400.

Grade determination

The GS-400 Guide is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Positions graded under the FES format are compared to nine factors. Levels are assigned for each factor and the points associated with the assigned levels are totaled and converted to a grade level. Under the FES, factor level descriptions (FLD's) mark the minimum characteristics needed to receive

credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in an FLD in any significant aspect, the next lower level and its lower point value must be assigned unless an equally important aspect that meets a higher level balances the deficiency. The position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level. The illustrations in the standard provide a context for applying the FLD's to work in the occupation.

The appellant did not take issue with her agency's crediting of Levels 2-3, 3-2, 6-2, 8-2, and 9-2. Based on our analysis of the record, we concur with and have credited these levels. Our analysis addresses Factors 1, 4, 5 and 7.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that the employee must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply that knowledge. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, knowledge must be required and applied.

The appellant's position is comparable to Level 1-4 where knowledge of technical methods and procedures to carry out a variety of duties common to a specialty area is required. These duties require knowledge of the basic principles of a biological science to assess readings and measurements taken, tests executed, observations made, work completed, samples collected, etc., to understand and relate the significance of results to the higher objectives of the activity. In addition, at this level, employees must have the knowledge required to operate complex equipment systems such as those with numerous components or parts that must be calibrated and synchronized to achieve desired results.

The knowledge required for the appellant's responsibilities as a Forestry Technician is consistent with Level 1-4. The appellant's position requires knowledge of standard forestry practices, methods and techniques and an in-depth knowledge of a wide variety of silvicultural interrelated steps, conditions, procedures, and processes to perform work within that specialty area. Typical of that level, he applies silvicultural systems and criteria, including even-age and uneven-aged management, a variety of timber types, species and age classes in selecting trees, marking and cruising the timber, and a practical knowledge of timber management. He independently applies the marking and cruising plans prescribed by his supervisor to perform duties of preparing timber for sale by laying out timber sales, determining timber volumes and marking timber for sale. This entails estimating volume, defects, and the quality of commercial timber and conditions of tree stands. The appellant gathers and records field data on the size, content, and condition of timber and gathers basic information, such as species and population of trees, disease and insect damage. In addition, he serves as the District check cruiser. This entails checking the accuracy of estimating volume and quality of the timber, completing cruise data reports, interpreting photographs for mapping purposes, and prepares maps of field work.

The appellant's position compares favorably with illustrations in the standard where the technician assists in timber cruising and sample surveys to estimate the quantity of timber in a given area by species, type, and quality. The area, percent of cruise, and data to be collected

have been predetermined and there are few complicating factors involved in determining marketable volume in any individual tree, e.g., the timber stands have relatively similar features such as timber type and species, age classes, soil classes, tree vigor, and obvious defects, and the timber cutting generally involves only one cutting practice such as precommercial thinning or clear cut. The technician collects and summarizes data and may prepare reports or rough topographic maps indicating the quantity of timber and other characteristics, the general condition of the area, and the logging difficulties to be encountered.

Some aspects of the appellant's description of his work exceed Level 1-4. He states that he applies practical knowledge with resourcefulness, initiative and independent judgment to layout timber sale boundaries, which includes environmental assessment requirements and considering factors such as harvest methods, transportation systems, silvicultural objectives, topography, wildlife needs, and other related resource considerations. Through the application of prescribed plans and the use of individual judgment he lays out timber sale boundaries; recommends adjustments; applies a variety of marking rules to independently select and mark trees for cutting involving various silvicultural characteristics such as type; species; composition; disease, insect, and other damaging agents; and age class. These silvicultural decisions based on species characteristics and other conditions require application of knowledge that somewhat exceed Level 1-4.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 1-5, which requires 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 a wide variety of types of limited operational projects incorporating diverse technical knowledges, and/or one-at-a-time (often long-range) multiphase projects. 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. Illustration #10 describes where the technician plans and carries out precedented types of timber cruises or surveys to estimate the quantity of commercial timber by determining sample cruise pattern; selecting sampling method; collecting, and refining data; summarizing results, including preparation of maps and reports; when there are complicating factors such as: (a) varied types and conditions of timber stands; (b) a variety of products and defect types; and (c) different cutting practices.

Although the duties and responsibilities performed by the appellant require an understanding of forestry practices, methods and techniques, the work does not require the in-depth knowledge of professional forestry concepts and principles indicative at Level 1-5. Technicians at Level 1-5 use their knowledge as the basis for planning, scheduling and analyzing to provide overall preparations required prior to timber sale. In contrast, the appellant does not have the delegated authority and responsibility for the preparation, scheduling, coordination, and execution of the program or analyzing results. The appellant handles the execution of the plans as instructed by his supervisor. The GS-9 Forester is responsible for the effective planning and overall performance of the presale timber management activities that uses a professional knowledge of forestry concepts and principles found above Level 1-4. In addition, the appellant's duties and responsibilities do not require either diverse technical knowledge or involve multiphase projects

expected at Level 1-5. Because Level 1-5 is not fully met, this factor must be credited at Level 1-4.

Level 1-4 is credited for 550 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's position is comparable to Level 4-2, where the assignments consists of performing a variety of routine procedural tasks or one or more complex duties related to regular and recurring technical work, operating a variety of pieces of equipment or one or more complex equipment systems commonly associated with the work site, and/or performing a full variety of the standardized technical support and technical duties associated with the work. In addition, duties assigned often have steps or processes that vary, depending on the factors such as the reason the work is being performed or the condition under which it is being performed. Technicians at this level are expected to exercise independence in choosing the right course of action and then selecting and executing the proper task sequences for completing the work. The employee determines what needs to be done to update or complete records and initiates action to acquire needed information from others.

Similar to Level 4-2, the appellant performs repetitive tasks that are associated with broader assignments that are the responsibility of his supervisor and other employees. He performs a full variety of the standardized technical support and technical duties associated with the work including laying out timber, recommending adjustment to boundaries, selecting trees for cutting, performing as the District check cruiser, working with the sale administrator, leading other crewmembers, distributing workload and work on firefighting and recreation duties. His duties include related steps, processes, or methods, where he must follow silvicultural prescriptions while marking and cruising timber. As at Level 4-2, he independently applies the prescription and a variety of marking rules to select trees for cutting. The appellant determines which data are applicable to the Forest, makes recommendations to his supervisor by identifying unique issues, and obtaining additional information from others. He prioritizes and completes assignments, determines the best methods for executing assignments, and coordinates work with others. The position clearly meets, but does not exceed Level 4-2.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 4-3 where the technician is responsible for a variety of assignments that involve differing and unrelated processes and methods. For example, the technician shifts frequently from one type of responsible technical assignment to other types which are substantially different in terms of equipment, techniques, and methods used; has ongoing or long term responsibility for limited technical and administrative concerns in a limited program or operating function; and/or independently executes defined portions of more comprehensive long-range projects or assists with several complex experiments, which extend over several weeks. At this level, there exist a number of possible courses of action for planning as well as executing the work and the employee 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 technician: (1) identifies and recommends resolution of discrepancies in data based on a study of how the data interrelate; (2) adjusts work methods to accommodate unusual conditions; and/or (3) recommends or determines what data to use, record or report.

Unlike positions at Level 4-3, the appellant's work is relatively routine and new or unusual situations rarely occur where he would be required to apply the wide range of techniques and methods characterized at this level. The appellant's work does not typically involve situations where there are several courses of action to choose from. Information provided by the appellant shows that the variety of the different duties performed by the appellant are different in the type of activity, but not in the types of methods used.

Level 4-2 is credited for 75 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.

The appellant's position is comparable to Level 5-2, where the work involves execution of specific rules, regulations, or procedures such as those found in common technical manuals, handbooks, and administrative manuals. Typically, completed assignments constitutes a complete segment of assignments with broader scope, e.g., on a day-to-day basis runs a visitor center or collects data for use by others involved in research, administrative planning or program/project operations. The work process affects the accuracy, reliability or acceptability of further procedures, processes or services. The appellant's position is responsible for presale timber activities, such as laying out timber sale boundaries, determining timber volumes, and marking timber for harvest; which involves the execution of specific methods, techniques and procedures, which are commonly found in prescribed plans from his supervisor or generally already established in agency manuals and handbooks. Typical of Level 5-2, the appellant performs repetitive tasks that are associated with broader assignments that are the responsibility of his supervisor and other employees. As at this level, his work constitutes a portion of the assignments necessary to support the timber management program. The accuracy of his work directly affects the volume, value of timber removed and available for sale. His work affects the quality of day-to-day operations of the timber management program.

The appellant's position does not fully meet Level 5-3, where the technician applies conventional technical and administrative solutions and practices to a variety of problems. At that level, work products 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. The appellant's day-to-day duties are fairly routine, and the appellant does not routinely confront the variety of problems envisioned at Level 5-3. Although the appellant's work affects the timber management program,

his work's influence on the overall effectiveness of the District goals or objectives is not comparable to Level 5-3.

Level 5-2 is credited for 75 points.

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

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

The appellant believes that Factor 7 should be credited at Level b. He states that his duties as District check cruiser, working with sale administrators, orienting new crewmembers, and checking on their work progress and quality meets Level 7b.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts meets Level 7a where contacts are established to exchange information about procedures, schedules, or operating problems; clarify information on records, report on the results of studies; explain steps involved in operating equipment; explain the reason the work is being performed; or other similar exchanges of information. At this level, factual information, ranging from easily understood to highly technical, is exchanged. As discussed previously, the appellant provides technical guidance to other technicians and reviews their work. The appellant occasionally establishes contact with sale administrators on a social basis, and interacts with and answers general questions from forest visitors.

Personal contacts at Level 7b are 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 and significance; or reach agreement on operating problems such as recurring submission of inaccurate, untimely, incomplete or irrelevant data. However, the overall objective of the appellant's contacts is to provide and exchange factual information. This compares favorably with the intent of 7a.

Factors are evaluated at Levels 6-2/7a and credited with a total of 45 points.

Summary

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. and 7. Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts	2a	45
8. Physical demands	8-2	20
9. Work environment	9-2	20

Total

1185

A total of 1185 points falls within the GS-6 grade level point range of 1,105-1,350 points in the PCS's Grade Conversion Table.

Decision

The position is properly classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-6.