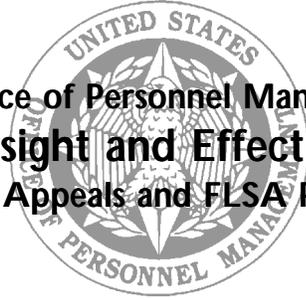


U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



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-462-7

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

OPM decision: Forestry Technician
GS-462-7

OPM decision number: C-0462-07-02

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon
Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

2/7/2000

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]

Director
Office of Human Resources Management
U.S. Department of Agriculture
J.L. Whitten Building, Room 316W
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, DC 20250

Introduction

On September 13, 1999, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted an appeal from [the appellant]. In January 2000, the appeal was transferred to OPM's Dallas Oversight Division for adjudication. The appealed position is assigned to the [appellant's activity], Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, [geographic location]. The agency has classified the position as Forestry Technician, GS-462-7. The appellant believes his position should be classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-9, and has filed an appeal with OPM under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

The appellant certified to the accuracy of the duties described in his current position description (PD), dated August 4, 1999. 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.

To help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative conducted telephone interviews with the appellant and his immediate supervisor. In reaching our classification decision, we reviewed the information obtained during these interviews and all information submitted in writing by the appellant and his agency, including the official PD. 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 (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112).

General issue

Both the appellant and his agency discuss his position by comparison to Forest Service internal guidance based on the position classification standard for the Forestry Technician Series, GS-462. However, we must classify positions solely by comparing the duties and responsibilities of the appellant's position to OPM standards and guidelines. Therefore, we could not use the Forest Service guidance in deciding this appeal.

Position information

The appellant's primary duty is to provide technical support for forest fire, fuels, and aviation management programs. In this capacity, the appellant develops support data and integrates long-range fire and fuel management considerations into the Forest land use planning process; provides fuel recommendations for use in preparing environmental assessments; assures compliance with [a specific state's] smoke management program; maintains and monitors the Fuels Appraisal Process and the National Fire Management Analysis system budget by tracking allocations and recommending alternatives; and provides support in fire computer systems. Also, the appellant develops and enforces Project Aviation Safety Plans; coordinates interagency fire training; adapts course materials to meet the Forest's training needs and conducts training; develops the Forest's hazardous spill response plan; and coordinates spill training and reporting. The appellant is supervised by the Assistant Fire Management Staff Officer, a Supervisory Forestry Technician,

GS-462-11. The appellant's PD and other material of record furnish much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant does not question the series or title of his position. We concur with the agency's determination that the duties performed by the appellant and the knowledge required for the position are best covered by the Forestry Technician Series, GS-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 Evaluation Guide for Aid and Technical Work in the Biological Sciences, GS-400. Therefore, the appellant's position is properly assigned to the GS-462 series, titled Forestry Technician, and evaluated using the GS-400 Guide.

Grade determination

The GS-400 Guide uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES) which places positions in grades by comparing their duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements with nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule positions. A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor level descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated levels. For a position factor to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor level description in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

The appellant does not disagree with his agency's evaluation of factors 2 and 4 through 7. We therefore discuss these factors briefly, while discussing factors 1, 3, 8, and 9 more thoroughly. Our evaluation with respect to the nine factors follows.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

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

The appellant's position meets Level 1-5. That level addresses knowledge of the technical methods and procedures related to the professional field(s) supported, of management practices, and of the agency's policy and programs to lay out, schedule, organize, and execute the details

of either: (1) a wide variety of types of limited operational projects incorporating diverse technical knowledges, e.g., limited projects requiring the application of appreciably dissimilar specialized methods, procedures, and/or techniques; and/or (2) one-at-a-time multiphased projects, at least some of which have nonstandard technical problems that the technician must coordinate with others to resolve, e.g., technical problems requiring the use of specialized, complicated techniques. At this level, technicians apply a practical knowledge of basic theories and practices of the scientific discipline(s) supported and must be adept at combining this knowledge with resourcefulness, initiative, and independent judgment in locating precedents and resolving the details inherent to application.

Comparable to Level 1-5, 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 portions of well-precedented projects related to the fire management program. The work includes a wide variety of programs (e.g., fire and fuel management planning; smoke management compliance; aircraft operation policies and standards enforcement; timber sale brush disposal bid appraisal review for fire concerns; fixed-wing rental agreements and regional helicopter review for fire concerns) requiring specialized methods, procedures, and techniques.

The appellant's participation on interdisciplinary teams is also comparable to the illustrative assignments described at Level 1-5. The work on these teams involves developing management concerns and opportunities for draft environmental impact statements and reviewing public issues for possible fire management considerations. The appellant provides input on fuel and fire management to support the team in evaluating and ranking issues, concerns, and opportunities on the basis of their importance to the resource management process. The interdisciplinary team recommends the appropriate fire planning intensity needed to adequately respond to identified issues, concerns, and opportunities and proposed land management goals and objectives. Guidelines are provided to help establish planning intensity. Similar to technicians at Level 1-5, the appellant uses knowledge of technical methods and procedures to assist in developing planning criteria that facilitate the resolution of the identified issues, concerns, and opportunities.

The appellant does not have the responsibility for design, coordination, and execution of projects typical of Level 1-6. Technicians at Level 1-6 are recognized experts in a narrow specialty area of a scientific field, and they have administrative and/or technical assignments, projects, and responsibility which are hard to distinguish from those assigned to the less experienced (but post-trainee) scientists employed in the same organization to perform standardized professional level research studies, projects, or assignments or to perform routine administrative or professional work in support of higher level research scientists or program/project managers.

The GS-400 Guide explains that *all* technician positions cannot realistically be structured to reach Level 1-6 because of a variety of organizational reasons, including the amount and type of high level work available in the organization; the organization's willingness to delegate authority and controls for programs and projects; the availability, number, and/or assigned responsibilities of on-site professional workers, technician supervisors, or work leaders; ability of the technician; and other such limiting factors. Well-defined processes and procedures limit the appellant's authority and control. Although the appellant works on some plans and projects independently, the supervisor uses knowledge of management practices and the agency's policies and programs to serve as the final authority for the administrative aspects of the fire management program.

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

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

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

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

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 techniques and methods within established guidelines to resolve problems and deviations. He refers problems that do not have clear precedents to the supervisor. 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.

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

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

At Level 3-2, procedures for doing the work have been established and a number of specific guidelines are applicable. Guides may range from complex, standardized, codified regulations to maps, blueprints, standing operating procedures, oral instructions, equipment or instrument manuals, or standard scientific or technical texts. Judgment must be used in selecting appropriate

guidelines because of the number, similarity, linkage, and overlapping nature of the guides. Guidelines contain criteria to solve the core question contained in the assignments, although the applicability may not be readily apparent. Further, technicians may also need to be especially resourceful in searching assigned guides; locating the controlling criteria; and applying it as specified, although the process of locating and selecting the applicable rule may be taxing and time consuming.

The appellant's position meets and does not exceed Level 3-2. Guidelines used by the appellant include Forest Service manuals, handbooks, and procedures developed to handle unique problems. Although the appellant is not co-located with the supervisor, the supervisor is available to answer questions by telephone and during weekly visits to the appellant's work site. The appellant's fire planning support to [a specific district] of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and his activities concerning compliance with [a specific state's] smoke management plan fully meet Level 3-2 where the employee must use judgment in selecting the appropriate guideline because of the number, similarity, linkage, and overlapping nature of the guides, e.g., when State law, Federal law, and agency regulations address the same issue. Although the fire planning can be complicated because of the scarcity of information (such as fuel model, risk maps, and fire behavior), the appellant selects, modifies, and combines accepted practices to the plans. The work for BLM requires the appellant to modify planning guides to make them site specific to situations in the Forest.

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

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

Factor 4, Complexity

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

The appellant's position meets Level 4-3. Similar to that level, the appellant is responsible for a variety of assignments that involve differing and unrelated processes and methods. The appellant's responsibilities include planning and completing assignments, determining the best methods for executing assignments, and coordinating work with others. The appellant determines which data are applicable to the Forest, 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 history of fires in the area, ignition sources, frequency, previous control problems, damages incurred, and benefits gained. The appellant individually structures the analysis for the Forest by determining what program alternatives will ensure the most efficient use of its limited budget and resources. The appellant's position fully meets Level 4-3 where there are a number of possible courses of action for planning and executing the work; the employee is given leeway or otherwise expected to exercise discretion when choosing among the courses of actions; and judgment is required in applying a wide range of conventional, established approaches, methods, techniques, and solutions to new situations.

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

Factor 5, Scope and effect

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

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 fire and fuel management expertise for Environmental Impact Statements, Environmental Assessments, and Late Successional Reserve planning. 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 fire management program. The appellant's work also affects the Forest's ability to protect the government's property in relation to prescribed burns and to protect and maintain the environmental balance in the forest. The scope and effect of the appellant's position is comparable to Level 5-3 where the work products directly affect the operation of programs or the adequacy of such activities as long-range work plans.

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

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

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

The appellant has contacts with individuals both within and outside the agency, including Forest, Regional and agency fire planning personnel; representatives from other Federal, state and local agencies; subject matter specialists in areas outside of fire and fuel planning; contractors; and the general public. 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.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts are at Level b. The appellant's contacts are for the purpose of exchanging technical and operational information, developing activities, monitoring certain activities, resolving issues, ensuring protection of forest lands, and receiving input on assigned projects. 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 reach agreement on operating problems such as recurring submission of inaccurate, untimely, incomplete, or irrelevant data. Like Level b, the persons contacted by the appellant are usually working toward a common goal and generally are reasonably cooperative. The appellant's contacts require tact and sensitivity in dealing with individuals having differing concerns and demands. The appellant's contacts do not require the skill necessary at Level c where the purpose is to influence, motivate, interrogate, or control persons or groups.

These factors are evaluated at Level 2b and credited with 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.

The agency evaluated this factor at Level 8-1 where the work is sedentary. Typically, the employee may sit comfortably to do the work. However, there may be some walking; standing; bending; carrying of light items such as papers, books, or small parts; or driving an automobile. At this level, no special physical demands are required to perform the work.

The appellant's work is mostly sedentary; however, field work done by the appellant requires driving over mountainous roads and considerable walking and climbing over steep, uneven terrain. Long periods of physically demanding work may be required when the appellant is engaged in fire

suppression activities. Physical demands for the appellant's position meet Level 8-2 where the work requires some physical exertion, such as regular and recurring running, walking, or bending; or walking or climbing over rocky areas, through plowed fields or other uneven surfaces, through dense vegetation, and in mountainous terrain.

Regular and recurring duties may not always be performed in an uninterrupted, continuous manner. They may be performed at recurring intervals. The intervals between the recurrences, within reason, are not as important as the fact that the duties will occur within a frequency that, to a degree, can be anticipated. The appellant's field work occurs with a frequency that must be considered in evaluating the physical demands for the position. Consequently, the appellant's position fully meets the intent of Level 8-2.

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

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

Factor 9, Work environment

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

The agency evaluated this factor at Level 9-1 where the environment involves everyday risks and discomforts that require normal safety precautions typical of such places as offices, meeting and training rooms, libraries, residencies, or commercial vehicles, e.g., use of safe work practices with office equipment, avoidance of trips and falls, observance of fire regulations and traffic signals. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

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

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

Summary

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

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

The appellant's position warrants 1565 total points. In accordance with the grade conversion table provided in the GS-400 Guide, the position is properly graded at GS-7.

Decision

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