

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:** [The appellant]

**Agency classification:** Forestry Technician  
GS-462-6

**Organization:** [District and Region in a  
National Forest]  
U.S. Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
[City, State]

**OPM decision:** Forestry Technician  
GS-462-6

**OPM decision number:** C- 0462-06-01

/s/  
Bonnie J. Brandon  
Classification Appeals Officer

7/09/98  
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:**

[the appellant's name  
and address]

Director of Personnel  
Forest Service  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
517 Gold Avenue SW  
Albuquerque, NM 87102

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 February 10, 1998, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. His position is currently classified as Forestry Technician, GS-462-6. However, the appellant believes that the duties performed warrant the position being upgraded and the title changed to Supervisory Forestry Technician. The position is assigned to the Capitan Work Center, Smokey Bear Ranger District, Lincoln National Forest, Region 3, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. The appellant's duty station is Capitan, New Mexico. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

To help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative conducted phone audits of the appellant's position on May 14 and 15, 1998. The audits included interviews with the appellant and the immediate supervisor. In reaching our classification decision, we have reviewed the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and the agency, including the official position description (PD), number 03085405. The position description was found to be adequate for classification evaluation.

## **Position information**

The appellant's position is assigned to perform several tasks at the Capitan Work Center. The primary duties are to provide leadership and direction of a fire engine crew. In this capacity, the appellant directs the initial attack on wild land fires, many of which threaten structures in the Capitan area. He also represents the agency in contacts with local volunteer firefighters and with firefighters from other Federal agencies throughout the course of the fire season. The appellant currently oversees the activities of two temporary full-time employees for a period of five to six months a year. His duties associated with these employees include direction of work, approving leave, evaluation and counseling, etc. The appellant serves as the station manager for the work site. In this capacity, he assumes responsibility for ensuring that physical facilities and equipment are properly maintained and accounted for. In addition, the position has duties associated with public recreational uses of forest resources, such as patrolling activities to check for compliance of recreational laws, rules and regulations. The appellant *does not* perform snow ranger duties. The appellant is supervised by the District Fire Management Officer (Supervisory Forster, GS-460-11). 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 guide determination**

GS-462 Forestry Technicians provide practical technical support in forestry research efforts; in the marketing of forest resources; or in the scientific management, protection and development of forest resources. The appellant does not question the series of his position and we agree with the agency's determination that the position is properly assigned to the GS-462 series.

The agency titled this position Forestry Technician; however, the appellant disagrees with this determination. He believes the appropriate title should be Supervisory Forestry Technician.

Guidance in the GS-462 standard indicates that “Supervisory Forestry Technician” is the authorized title for supervisory positions that meet the criteria in the appropriate supervisory guide. The appropriate supervisory guide is the General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG). The statement of coverage provides that the GSSG is to be used to grade GS supervisory work and related managerial responsibilities that: (1) require accomplishment of work through combined technical and administrative direction of others; and (2) constitute a major duty occupying at least 25 percent of the position’s time; and (3) meet the lowest level of Factor 3 in the GSSG. The appellant currently supervises two temporary seasonal employees. The seasonal employees work full time five to six months out of the year. The appellant also maintains that he supervises another fire engine crew located at the Capitan Work Station. This separate crew consists of three members. Through our fact finding, we determined the second engine crew is supervised by the District Fire Management Officer (DFMO), and the appellant has no supervisory duties over the crew. The appellant estimates his total time spent on supervisory duties at 30 percent. The agency and the immediate supervisor estimate the time spent at 17 percent. Based on these facts and our own analysis, it is apparent that the appellant does not spend 25 percent of his time on activities such as preparing written performance appraisals, handling employee grievances, writing weekly work plans, and so forth. Therefore, the position does not meet the criteria described by the GSSG and would not be titled “supervisory.” The title of “worker leader” is not appropriate for this position. According to the General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide, Part I, the title “lead” is only appropriate when the position is required to lead three or more employees in accomplishing work in clerical or other one-grade interval occupations. The appellant’s position is properly titled Forestry Technician.

### **Grade determination**

The position classification standard for the GS-462 series does not contain grade level criteria. The Grade Level Guide for Aid and Technical Work in the Biological Sciences GS-400 is used to determine the grade of the appellant’s position. The 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 following is our evaluation of the position in terms of the criteria.

*Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which 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 those knowledges. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

At Level 1-4, employees use knowledge of technical methods and procedures to carry out a variety of duties common to the speciality area. These duties require a knowledge of the basic principles of the science to assess readings and measurements taken, tests executed, observations made, work completed, samples collected, etc., to understand and relate the significance of the results to the higher objectives of the activity. Also at this level, employees must have the knowledge required to operate complex equipment systems such as those with numerous components or parts which must be calibrated and synchronized to achieve desired results.

The appealed position meets Level 1-4 in that the appellant's primary duties are as fire engine foreman. The appellant assumes full responsibility for operation of a medium size fire engine. This includes directing the engine to the fire location, making initial evaluation of the fire situation and determining appropriate suppression methods. The position requires knowledge of standard forestry practices, methods and techniques, including fire behavior, organization, containment, equipment and line construction to suppress and direct suppression of fires. This position requires a thorough knowledge of fire engine hydraulic systems, including effect of elevation, friction loss, pressure, foam application systems, pumping mechanisms, hose thread and apparatus differences, etc., to operate equipment for peak utilization.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 1-5 which requires knowledge of the technical methods and procedures related to the professional field 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 and/or (2) one-at-a-time (often long range) multiphased projects, some which have nonstandard technical problems that must be coordinated with others to resolve. Besides the normal speciality area of fire engine leader and fire suppression duties, which clearly meet Level 1-4, the appellant cited projects that he felt would meet Level 1-5 including Land Line Location, Timber/Forest Thinning and Prescribed Burning. After review of the appellant's duties associated with these projects and after consideration of information obtained during the phone interview with the direct supervisor, it was determined that the DFMO and/or his staff performs the initial planning, scheduling and organizing of these limited, infrequently occurring projects. The appellant handles the execution of the plans as instructed by the DFMO. The knowledges required of this position fall short of Level 1-5.

Level 1-4 and 550 points are credited.

### *Factor 2, Supervisory controls*

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibilities and the review of completed work. Controls are exercised by the supervisor in the way assignments are made, instructions are given to the employee, priorities and deadlines are set and objectives and boundaries are defined. Responsibility of the employee depends on the extent to which the employee is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work, to modify or recommend modification of instructions and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives. The degree of review of completed work depends upon the nature and extent of the review (e.g., close and detailed review of each phase of the assignment, detailed reviews of the finished assignment, spot-check of finished work for accuracy, or review only for adherence to policy).

At Level 2-3, the supervisor initially provides direction on the priorities, objectives and/or deadlines. Review is usually in the form of an assessment as to how the technician resolved technical and related administrative problems encountered. Completed work is customarily accepted without detailed review.

The appealed position meets and does not exceed Level 2-3. The appellant exercises considerable freedom in planning and carrying out his work and keeps the supervisor informed of controversies or major issues. Unusual situations and problems are resolved through consultation with the supervisor. The appellant keeps the supervisor informed on matters related to the operation of the Capitan Work Center. Completed work products are reviewed for technical soundness and conformity to agency policy and acceptable practices.

To meet Level 2-4, employees are required to handle most of the controversial problems that arise and only have their work reviewed from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements or expected results. Supervisory controls of this position fall short of meeting Level 2-4.

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.

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 appellant's position meets and does not exceed Level 3-2. Procedures for doing the work have been established in such handbooks and manuals as the Fireline Handbook, Guides of Fire Organization, Forest Service Health and Safety Code and Fire Business Management Handbook. In our phone audit, the appellant stated that most answers to technical questions can be found in the above-mentioned manuals and that more complex questions or procedural problems would be referred to the supervisor. Specific fire fighting questions would be fielded to the Forest Fire Staff Officer located in Alamogordo, New Mexico. This is consistent with Level 3-2.

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.

At Level 4-2, assignments consist 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.

At Level 4-3, the work requires the performance of various technical duties which involve differing and unrelated processes and methods. The decision regarding what needs to be done depends upon the analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment, and the chosen course of action may have to be selected from many alternatives.

The agency credited Level 4-2. Through our fact finding and interviews with the appellant and immediate supervisor, we find Level 4-3 is more appropriate. The appellant's position requires the performance of a variety of technical duties and has ongoing responsibility for limited technical and administrative concerns for the Capitan Work Station. The appellant makes decisions regarding the best procedure to fight fires based on the analysis of the situation. He must insure safe and effective utilization of equipment, crew and effective fire suppression methods in order to minimize loss of natural resources and property. The appellant independently executes portions of District projects such as Land Line Location, Timber/Forest Thinning and Prescribed Burning.

Duties in this position do not meet Level 4-4 as the work does not involve such a wide variety in assignment that a solution requires in-depth analysis and evaluation prior to carrying out the project. The complexities of the appellant's position warrant Level 4-3.

Level 4-3 and 150 points are credited.

*Factor 5, Scope and effect*

Scope and effect cover the relationship between the nature of the work (i.e., the purpose, breadth and depth of the assignment) and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization. In General Schedule occupations, effect measures such things as whether the work output facilitates the work of others, provides timely service of a personal nature, or impacts on the adequacy of research conclusions. The concept of effect alone does not provide sufficient information to properly understand and evaluate the impact of the position. The scope of the work completes the picture, allowing consistent evaluations. Only the effect of properly performed work is to be considered.

At Level 5-2, 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 constitute an entire 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.

At Level 5-3, the work involves applying conventional technical and administrative solutions and practices to a variety of problems. 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 position meets but does not exceed Level 5-2 in that the work of presuppression and suppression of forest fires involves the execution of specific methods, techniques and procedures which are commonly found in fire management manuals and handbooks. Completed assignments or tasks usually constitute a completed assignment. The appellant is responsible for the day-to-day operation of a small work station which includes an informal visitor's center. Successful performance of this position will result in the preservation of natural resources and property in Capitan and the surrounding area.

Level 5-2 and 75 points are credited.

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

Factors 6 and 7 are evaluated together matching the level of regular and recurring personal contacts with the purpose of that contact.



According to the guide, personal contacts at Level 2 include contacts with employees in the agency, inside and outside of the immediate organizations, e.g., personnel from higher level organizational units, or, occasionally, resource persons from State or local government units or other Federal agencies. Contacts may also be with the general public, contractor personnel, private landowners or business persons. Specifically, the appellant's contacts are with crew members, fire suppression personnel from other local, state and Federal agencies, and with forest visitors. The contacts are usually established on a routine basis, though the employee's authority may not be initially clear to the person contacted, e.g., the identity, role and authority of the parties may have to be outlined before conducting business. The personal contacts of the appealed position clearly meet Level 2. They do not meet Level 3 where contacts are *regularly* established with: (a) a variety of noted subject matter experts from other Federal agencies, universities, private foundations and professional societies; (b) influential local community leaders; (c) newspaper, radio and television reporters; (d) legal representatives of private landowners; or (e) representatives of organized landowner or special interest groups.

At Level b, the guide indicates that the purpose of contacts may include planning and coordinating work efforts; explaining the need to adhere to laws, rules, contracts or lease provisions; discussing inspected work and contract requirements with monitoring activity of contractors; discussing technical requirements of equipment with manufacturers and resolving problems concerning the work or the peculiar needs of the organization; interpreting data obtained and explaining its purpose and significance; or reaching agreement on operating problems. The persons contacted are usually working toward a common goal and generally are reasonably cooperative. The purpose of the appealed position's contacts is to coordinate suppression activities, to request reinforcements, to report on fire situation and potential for rapid spread, etc. The position meets Level b. The position does not meet Level c where the purpose of contacts is to influence, motivate, interrogate or control persons or groups who are characteristically fearful, skeptical or uncooperative.

Level 2b and 75 points are credited.

#### *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 (e.g., specific agility and dexterity requirements) and the physical exertion involved in the work (e.g., climbing, lifting, pushing, balancing, stooping, kneeling, crouching, crawling or reaching). To some extent, the frequency or intensity of physical exertion must also be considered (e.g., a job requiring prolonged standing involves more physical exertion than a job requiring intermittent standing).

The appellant's position meets Level 8-3, the highest level described in the guide. At this level, the work requires regular and protracted periods of considerable and strenuous physical exertion such as carrying or lifting heavy objects (over 50 pounds); hacking passages through dense vegetation; or climbing ladders or scaffolds carrying heavy equipment used to install, maintain or repair installations.

The appellant's field work requires walking and climbing over rocky, steep terrain. Fire emergencies may require long irregular hours and carrying heavy fire fighting equipment.

Level 8-3 and 50 points are credited.

*Factor 9, Work environment*

This factor considers the risk and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. Although the use of safety precautions can practically eliminate a certain danger or discomfort, such situations typically place additional demands upon the employee in carrying out safety regulations and techniques.

This position meets Level 9-2 which states that work involves regular and recurring moderate risks or discomforts which require special safety precautions. At this level, employees are required to use protective clothing or gear such as hard hats, masks, gowns, ear plugs, coats, boots, glasses or shields. The appellant's work is in a forest environment with steep terrain where surfaces may be extremely uneven, rocky, covered with thick, tangled vegetation, etc. Temperatures are frequently extreme, from either the weather or fires. Smoke and dust conditions are frequently severe. The hazardous nature of the work requires that protective clothing to be worn.

Level 9-3 describes the work environment as one that involves high risks with regular and recurring exposure to potentially dangerous situations or unusual environmental stress where high risk factors exist which cannot be reasonably controlled. Examples cited in the guide include working at great heights under extreme weather conditions, subject to possible physical attack or mob conditions or similar situations where conditions cannot be controlled. The appellant's position does not meet Level 9-3. His position does involve high risks; however, due to the various fire fighting techniques and safety precautions utilized, the environment rarely (not regular and recurring) has conditions that cannot be reasonably controlled by appropriate means.

Level 9-2 and 20 points are credited.

*Summary*

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

	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Points</b>
1	Knowledge Required of Position	1-4	550
2	Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
3	Guidelines	3-2	125
4	Complexity	4-3	150
5	Scope and Effect	5-2	75
6&7	Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts	2-b	75
8	Physical Demands	8-3	50
9	Work Environment	9-2	20
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>			<b>1320</b>

The appellant's position warrants 1320 points. Therefore, in accordance with the grade conversion table in the GS-400 guide, the position is properly graded at GS-6.

**Decision**

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