



USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management Frequently Asked Questions



Topic: Wildland Firefighter Occupational Series Template for FAM Positions

Q: WHY DID THE FOREST SERVICE ISSUE NEW DIRECTION?

A: Audits in 2008 and 2009 by OIG and OPM require the Forest Service to comply with OPM regulations and OIG findings. In response, the FS convened a summit of FAM, HRM, and NFFE-FSC to seek immediate near-term and long-term solutions.

Q: HOW MANY POSITION DESCRIPTIONS NEED TO BE RECLASSIFIED TO IMPLEMENT THE OCCUPATIONAL SERIES TEMPLATE

A: There are a total of 40-50 positions that will need to be re-classified in the GS-0301 series. 14 NSPDs for seven positions have already been re-classified and submitted to USDA for firefighter retirement coverage determination. These seven positions were critical to maintaining firefighter safety.

Q. WHAT ARE THE PRIORITY POSITION DESCRIPTIONS THAT WILL REQUIRE RECLASSIFICATION?

A: FAM and HRM are currently in the process of establishing priorities for reclassification. The initial group of fourteen NSPDs covering seven positions that were initiated in April 2011 were selected because of concerns with the classification of GS-12 positions in the GS-0462 series. The seven positions are:

- ✓ Forest FMO-High (GS-12/13)
- ✓ Forest FMO-High (GS-11/12)
- ✓ Forest FMO-Moderate (GS-11/12)
- ✓ Forest AFMO-High (GS-11/12)
- ✓ Geographic Area Coordination Center Managers (GS-12/13)
- ✓ Geographic Area Coordination Center Deputy Managers (GS-11/12)
- ✓ Smokejumper Base Managers (GS-11/12)

Additional NSPD development will be prioritized based on:

- Position is essential to provide for safety (i.e. critical leadership positions) or is critical for essential operations, and where the GS-0462 or GS-0401 series is not appropriate.
- IFPM and FS-FPM positions that have already been established as being key fire management positions that significantly influence the safety chain; there are five positions in IFPM and four positions in FS-FPM that are intended to be evaluated for classification in the GS-0301 series.

- Position is deemed high priority for re-classification in the GS-0301 series in order to be compliant with OPM regulations.

Examples include:

- ✓ Forest FMO-Moderate (GS-11)
- ✓ Forest AFMO-High (GS-11)
- ✓ Forest Fire Planner (GS-11)
- ✓ Forest Prevention and Mitigation (GS-11)
- ✓ District/Zone FMO-High (GS-11)
- ✓ District/Zone FMO-Moderate (GS-11)
- ✓ Smokejumper Asst Base Manager (GS-11)
- ✓ Smokejumper Managers-Loft/Training/Operations (GS-11)
- ✓ GACC Coordinators (GS-11)
- ✓ Dispatch Center Manager (GS-11)

Additional positions that will be evaluated for re-classification in the GS-0301 series include:

- ✓ Forest Prevention and Mitigation (GS-9)
- ✓ District FMO-Low (GS-9)
- ✓ District/Zone AFMO (GS-9)
- ✓ District/Zone Fuels AFMO (GS-9)¹
- ✓ GACC Assistant Coordinators (GS-9)
- ✓ Dispatch Assistant Center Manager (GS-9)

¹GS-09 District Fuels Specialists that have been historically classified in the GS-0462 series are intended to be evaluated for re-classification in the GS-0301 series and re-titled District Fuels AFMO to create a distinction from District Fuels Specialist positions that are classified in the GS-0401 series. The GS-0401 series for Fuels Specialists is to be re-instated per Chief Tidwell's July 8, 2011 memo, and local units will have the flexibility to determine if the work being performed by their GS-09 Fuels management personnel fit into the District Fuels AFMO or District Fuels Specialist position descriptions. The occupational series selected must be based on the home unit's organizational structure (i.e. professional work is assigned to a GS-0401 or GS-0460 employee), and reflected on an approved organization chart (see IFPM/FS-FPM Crosswalk for additional information).

Q. WHEN WILL THESE POSITIONS BE RECLASSIFIED AND FILLED?

A: The process has begun and is on-going. Key vacancies and positions most affected by OPM regulations are being addressed first.

Q: WHAT OPTIONS EXIST FOR FIRE MANAGEMENT TECHNICIANS THAT WERE HIRED UNDER FORMER CHIEF KIMBELL'S "INTERIM DIRECTION"?

A: As described in Chief Tidwell's July 8, 2011 memo: Employees that were hired into IFPM or FS-FPM fuels management positions (PFFS, DFPFM, or DFAFM-P) using a GS-0462 NSPD following issuance of former Deputy Chief Kashdan's November 5, 2008 memo or former

Chief Kimbell's May 29, 2009 memo may be non-competitively re-assigned into a GS-0401 Fuels Management NSPD, provided:

- The current GS-0462 incumbent possesses the positive education and specialized experience requirements contained in the GS-0401 Supplemental Qualification Standard.
- If the current GS-0462 incumbent does not possess the positive education and specialized experience requirements contained in the GS-0401 Supplemental Qualification Standard, they may remain in their position using the GS-0462 position description in which they were originally hired. However, managers must ensure that the professional duties requiring knowledge that uniquely comes from positive education in biological, natural resource, forestry, chemistry or agricultural sciences are assigned to a professional GS-401 or GS-460 position in their organization.
- If or when the position becomes vacant, the position should be filled using the appropriate GS-0401 NSPD (see IFPM/FS-FPM Crosswalk).
- The IFPM implementation deadline of October 1, 2010 only applied to the attainment of the required Primary and Secondary Core NWCIG Incident Management Qualifications and Additional Required Training. No deadlines are imposed for reassignment to the GS-0401-series.
- Managers of the FS-FPM GS-09 District Fuels AFMO position may continue to fill this position in the GS-0462 series NSPD, or the GS-0301 series NSPD when developed and approved.

In the future, the majority of FAM managerial positions will be classified in the GS-0301 occupational series. Employees hired as a GS-0462 prior to or during the interim period following Chief Kimbell's May 29, 2009 memo should be eligible for reassignment or promotion into the GS-0301 series - provided they possess specialized experience in program management and coordination.

Similarly the Occupational Series Template shows that current GS-0401 employees may also be eligible for reassignment or promotion into the GS-0301 series provided they possess specialized experience in program management and coordination.

Additional guidance for reassignment into the GS-0301 series will be released once the NSPDs have been approved by USDA and OPM.

Q: WHAT EFFECT WILL REASSIGNMENT TO THE GS-0301 SERIES HAVE ON HIGHER GRADED GS-0462 FORESTRY TECHNICIANS?

A: There should be no apparent effects to current GS-9 and above GS-0462 employees. Re-classification and conversion to the GS-0301 series is expected to be fairly transparent provided incumbents can demonstrate creditable experience in program management and coordination. The position descriptions have been re-described to demonstrate that they are administrative / managerial in nature.

Q: WHAT EFFECT WILL CONVERSION TO THE GS-0301 SERIES HAVE ON LOWER GRADED GS-0462 FORESTRY TECHNICIANS?

A: We believe there will be no impact to lower graded Forestry Technicians.

As displayed in the Occupational Series Template, firefighting positions ranging from GS-02 through GS-08 will remain in the GS-0462 series. This also includes GS-09 positions such as IHC Superintendent, Helitack Crew Supervisor, and Smokejumper Assistant Managers.

When the new GS-0301 NSPDs are developed and approved for GS-09 and higher managerial positions, the lower graded Forestry Technician employees should be able to progress into the GS-0301 series provided they can meet the one year of specialized experience requirements for the GS-0301 series such as program management, coordination, and program oversight.

In some cases, program management experience can be gained through performance of forestry technician duties (i.e. management of an IHC or Helitack program), or in other cases through details or special assignments during the off-season such as fuels implementation coordination, managing a training program, performance as a SME for regional or national issues development...etc. However, it should be noted that it may require multiple years as a GS-8 or lower grade Forestry Technician to accumulate the required one year of specialized experience in program management to qualify for a GS-0301 position. It will be critical to carefully document the experience in the application process with the appropriate percentages of time spent managing or administering a program.

Q: HOW MANY POSITIONS ARE AFFECTED BY THE DECISION TO NOT USE THE GS-0462 SERIES FOR GS-11 AND 12 POSITIONS?

A: Approximately 350-400 positions. Once the GS-0301 NSPD's are developed and approved for use, current and future vacancies may be filled using the new NSPD.

Q: WILL FIREFIGHTER RETIREMENT COVERAGE BE APPROVED FOR THE GS-0301 SERIES?

A: Firefighter retirement coverage is based on performance of firefighting or fire management duties, and is independent of the occupational series. Currently the FS is awaiting final approval by USDA and OPM on the initial 14 NSPD's that were submitted for review prior to releasing them for use.