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Route To:

Subject: 401 Series for Fire Management Specialists

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

The USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG) has conducted a succession planning audit of Forest Service fire management positions. During the course of this audit, they became concerned about the Forest Service's ability to sustain a viable recruitment pool of candidates for the GS-401 series.

Based on this concern, I met with OIG and was informed of an impending Management Alert that will cite major concerns about the use of the GS-401 series for fire management positions. In response to this information, Chief Gail Kimball issued an e-mail on October 23, 2008, directing all units to "stand down" further implementation of the GS-401 series. Any fire management positions currently planned for staffing in the GS-401 series at grades GS-9 through GS-12 must also provide for staffing in the GS-462 series in order to accommodate employees who can only currently qualify in the GS-462 series. Ongoing training in courses with college accreditation may continue.

This interim direction does not apply to fire management positions that have historically been classified in the professional GS-401 series, such as Fire Planners and Fire Ecologists. These positions will continue to be filled in the GS-401 series as they require formal education in biological sciences.

There are a number of positions at grades GS-9 through GS-12 that have historically been filled in either the GS-462 or GS-401 series. The Interagency Fire Management Program (IFPM) required that certain designated positions be established in the GS-401 series only. Therefore, we were given the latitude to concurrently announce these positions in the 401 and 462 series.

Until the final report is issued by OIG, the following non-IFPM positions are to be filled only in the GS-462 series:

- District Fire Management Officers
- District Assistant Fire Management Officers
- District level fuels/prescribed fire positions

The following IFPM positions are to be advertised concurrently in the GS-401 and 462 series:

- Forest Fire Management Officers – GS-12 and below
- Forest Deputy Fire Management Officers
- Forest Prescribed Fire positions
- Dispatch Center Managers
- Assistant Dispatch Center Managers



Concurrent announcements should not be confused with the “interchangeable” concept, which is prohibited by the Office of Personnel Management. The IFPM positions are properly classified in the GS-401 series. At the time of IFPM implementation, there was a concern that there may be a shortage of candidates that meet the GS-401 requirements. Therefore, it was determined that concurrent advertisement of GS-401 and 462 was appropriate. However, since the positions are established as GS-401, selections must be made in the GS-401 series if there are well qualified candidates. If there are no well qualified candidates, managers may select from the GS-462 referral list, and must be prepared to provide training and education opportunities to meet the GS-401 qualification requirements.

Fire and Aviation Management will work with Human Capital Management to accomplish the classification and announcement of the GS-462 positions as needed. Positions requiring new individual and/or open continuous vacancy announcements are available for issuance of referral lists 28 days following the opening date of the announcement in compliance with the Forest Service Merit Promotion Plan.

For vacancies that are in process, the following actions will be taken:

- Proceed with GS-401 selections that have been confirmed or are pending job offers
- Proceed with referral lists that have already been issued and selections are pending
- Proceed with issuing referral lists that were requested prior to the Chief’s October 23, 2008, e-mail.

Once the OIG final report is issued, we will assess the recommended actions and develop the appropriate policy and path forward. Our objective is to secure the best long term fire management organization with world-class expertise, and which is safe, proud, and efficient.

/s/ Jacqueline Myers (for)

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