



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
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## Memorandum

To: Director, Bureau of Land Management  
Director, National Park Service  
Director, Fish and Wildlife Service  
Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Bureau and Equivalent Office Personnel Officers

From: Carolyn Cohen *Carolyn Cohen*  
Director, Office of Personnel Policy

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Director, Office of Wildland Fire Coordination

Subject: Implementation of the Supplemental Qualification Standard for GS-401  
Fire Management Specialist

As you may be aware, there has been an ongoing effort between the Department of the Interior (DOI), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service to develop a supplemental qualification standard for fire management specialist positions classified in the GS-401 series. This has now come to fruition with the approval and release of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Supplemental Qualification Standard for DOI and USDA. The new standard is at attachment (1). Effective immediately, you should implement this new standard.

The supplemental standard was developed under the sponsorship of the DOI, Federal Fire and Aviation Leadership Council, composed of representatives from the BLM, NPS, FWS, BIA, the Forest Service and USDA. The goal of the supplemental standard is to ensure consistent application in qualifying and hiring employees for key fire management specialist positions in these agencies. The standard is to be used for noncompetitive actions involving reassignment and selection from another two-graded interval position or for competitive actions.

Attachments (2) and (3) are to be used in implementing this standard. Attachment (2) provides clarifying information about implementation, and attachment (3) provides a list of creditable courses from other than an accredited university or college that can be used to satisfy the educational requirement.

Your Human Resource Offices can respond to further questions you may have about implementation. Our points of contact for this matter are:

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3 Attachments

cc:

Chief of Staff  
Bureau Fire Directors  
Wildland Fire Human Resource Advisory Group  
USDA Forest Service Liaison  
DAS, Human Resources and Workforce Diversity

**SUPPLEMENTAL QUALIFICATION STANDARD FOR THE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE - FOREST SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR - BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE,  
AND NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**GS-401 FIRE MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST**

This document supplements the requirements outlined in the Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions Operating Manual published by the Office of Personnel Management and must be used in conjunction with those requirements. Additional or clarifying information can be obtained from the Operating Manual.

**Basic Requirements:**

A. Degree: biological sciences, agriculture, natural resources management, or related discipline appropriate to the position being filled.

-OR-

B. Combination of education and experience: courses equivalent to a major in biological sciences, agriculture, natural resources management, or at least 24 semester hours in biological sciences, natural resources, wildland fire management, forestry, or agriculture equivalent to a major field of study, plus appropriate experience or additional education that is comparable to that normally acquired through the successful completion of a full 4-year course of study in the biological sciences, agriculture, or natural resources.

Applicants who meet the criteria for Superior Academic Achievement qualify for positions at the GS-7 level.

**Specialized Experience:**

For positions at GS-7 and above, one year of specialized experience at the next lower grade level is required in addition to meeting the basic requirements.

For GS-7: Experience that demonstrated an understanding of fire behavior relative to fuels, weather, and topography and how fire affects natural and cultural resources. Typical assignments include:

- Participating in implementing prescribed fire or fire use plans to ensure resource objectives can be met from a fire management standpoint.
- Developing initial attack incident management strategies and tactics to meet the stated resource objectives.

For GS-9: Experience in at least two of the following three categories:

1. Experience that demonstrated understanding of fire effects on cultural and natural resources. The assignments must have shown participation in activities such as:

- Developing fire management plans to ensure resource objectives can be met from a fire management standpoint; or
- Conducting field inspections before and/or after prescribed fires or wildland fires to determine if defined resource objectives have been met.

2. Prescribed fire/fuels management - experience in activities such as:

- Professional forest or range inventory methods and procedures (e.g. Brown's planar intercept for dead and down fuels; live fuel loading assessments), or
- Analysis of fuel loadings and determination of appropriate fuel treatment methods and programming, or
- Evaluating prescribed fire plans or fire management plans to ensure fire containment is possible and identify appropriate suppression contingencies if containment is not obtained.

3. Fire management operations - analyzing and applying fire management strategies, plus experience in at least four of the following activities:

- Mobilization and dispatch coordination
- Fire prevention
- Training
- Logistics
- Equipment development and deployment
- Fire communications systems
- Suppression and preparedness

For GS-11 and above: Experience must have included all of the fire program management elements as described below:

- Reviewing and evaluating fire management plans for ecological soundness and technical adequacy;

- Conducting field inspections before and after prescribed or wildland fires to determine if resource objectives were achieved and/or evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken; and
- Developing analyses on the ecological role of fire and its use and/or exclusion, and smoke management.

In addition to fire program management, appropriate experience must have included either prescribed fire/fuels management - **OR** - fire management operations as described below:

Prescribed fire/fuels management - experience in a broad range of activities such as:

- Professional forest or range inventory methods and procedures (e.g. Brown's planar intercept for dead and down fuels; live fuel loading assessments);
- Analysis of fuel loadings and determination of appropriate fuel treatment methods and programming;
- Land use planning and environmental coordination;
- Evaluation of prescribed burn plans or fire management plans to ensure fire containment is possible and identification of appropriate suppression contingencies if containment is not obtained.

Fire management operations - analyzing and applying fire management strategies, plus experience in at least five of the following activities:

- Mobilization and dispatch coordination
- Fire prevention and education
- Training
- Logistics
- Equipment development and deployment
- Fire communication systems
- Suppression and preparedness
- Aviation

Medical and physical requirements must be met for positions that have duties that are of an arduous or hazardous nature.

## Application of Education and Specialized Experience

### Creditable Education

Education, to be creditable toward the 24-semester hour requirement, must meet the requirements of the Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions Operating Manual, published by the Office of Personnel Management. The nature and quality of the education must have been such that it would serve as a prerequisite for more advanced study (graduate level or professional education).

The education must meet one of the following:

1. Conventional - Obtained from a college or university, applicable school within the college or university, or applicable curriculum at the college or university that has been properly accredited.
2. Other education - Education obtained from other than an accredited institute of higher learning, such as National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWGC) courses listed in Attachment 3.
3. Credits from the USDA Graduate School, or equivalent. Only courses in biological sciences, natural resources, wildland fire management, forestry, or agricultural coursework are creditable towards the 24 semester hours equivalent to a major field of study.

### Education Equivalent to a Major Field of Study (24 semester hours)

The **24 semester hours** must be obtained in biological sciences, natural resources, wildland fire management, forestry, or agriculture course work. Educational course work must include at least **18 semester hours** of upper division (junior/senior) course work. Course titles and numbers may help determine whether a given course is upper or lower division. For example, courses numbered 100 or 200, beginning with A or B, or entitled "An Introduction To", are almost always lower division courses. Conversely, courses numbered 300 or 400, or beginning with C or D are usually upper division courses. You can also refer to college course catalogs or consult with college advisors or officials to help you to determine the appropriate level of courses.

Attachment 3 is a list of wildland fire courses, which may also be applied to this requirement. Additional creditable education may be added to this listing after a thorough review process, involving subject matter experts from the five land management

agencies and a panel of college professors who specialize in wildland fire education. Prospective coursework will be reviewed to determine that it meets the criteria established by the Office of Personnel Management for the GS-401 series. Updated lists will be approved and issued by the Chair of the Federal Fire and Aviation Leadership Council through the respective agencies' human resources and line management channels.

### **Additional Education**

In addition to courses in the major and related fields, a typical college degree would have included courses that involved analysis, written and verbal communication, critical thinking, planning research, etc. Therefore, creditable experience should have demonstrated similar skills and abilities.

The quality of the combination of education and experience must be sufficient to demonstrate that the applicant possesses the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform work in the occupation and is comparable to that normally acquired through the successful completion of a full 4-year course of study in the fields listed in section A or B of the Basic Requirements. Experience credited under section "B" of the new GS-401 qualifications standard cannot be credited as specialized experience. Time credited for specialized experience is in addition to the time credited to meet basic qualifications.

### **Appropriate Experience to Meet Basic Requirements**

An example of appropriate experience which would be comparable to the required college coursework *may* be that of a technician, at the GS-7 grade level or above, who is working under the supervision of a professional employee and is performing duties equivalent to an entry-level professional employee, in the field of biological sciences, agriculture, natural resources management, or fire management.

### **Examples (Section "B" of Basic Requirements)**

In accordance with direction in the Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions Operating Manual, 30 semester hours (or 45 quarter hours) is comparable to one year of college and can be substituted for one year of experience.

#### **Example 1:**

An applicant has 60 semester hours of creditable education, which includes the required 24 semester hours equivalent to a major field of study, (of which at least 18 are upper division). The applicant still must have 2 years of appropriate experience to meet the basic requirements. This combination equals 100%.

Example 2:

An applicant has only the 24 semester hours of creditable education, which includes the required 24 semester hours equivalent to a major field of study, (of which at least 18 are upper division). The applicant still must have 3 years, 2 1/2 months of appropriate experience to meet the basic requirements. This combination equals 100%.

Example 3:

An applicant has 24 semester hours of creditable general education from a local university and 24 semester hours of NWCG coursework, (of which at least 18 of are upper division). This applicant will be credited with a total of 48 semester hours of education. The applicant still must have 2 years, 5 months of appropriate experience to meet the basic requirements. This combination equals 100%.

Example 4:

An applicant has earned an Associate Degree in Fire Science Management, and has taken other coursework which together totals 75 semester hours of education. However, he/she has only earned 10 semesters hours of upper division credit. In addition, the applicant has 3 years of appropriate experience. The applicant is still short 8 semester hours of upper level coursework; thus would not meet the basic requirements.

**Note:** In any case where NWCG coursework duplicates college or university coursework, duplicate credits cannot be granted.

### **Specialized Experience**

According to the Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions Operating Manual, one-grade interval experience may be qualifying for two-grade interval positions, provided that the experience demonstrated the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities required to perform the work successfully. This is true for either lateral or promotion actions. The basic requirements for the type and level of experience and/or education apply to all applicants, whether their experience has been in the same occupation as the position being filled or in related occupational field. Since two-grade interval positions may differ significantly in the nature of the work, it is important that applicants be evaluated on the “knowledge required to do the work.”



**Other Education Creditable Towards 24 Semester Hours Requirement**

Creditable education includes education from other than an accredited institute of higher learning that meets the requirements of the qualifications standards. To meet the 24 semester hour requirement, the other education must be equivalent to course work in a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree in biological sciences, natural resources, wildland fire management, forestry, or agriculture. Therefore, most technology type coursework will not meet this requirement.

**Technical Fire Management<sup>1</sup> - Upper Division 18 semester hours**

All modules must be successfully completed before the 18 semester hours is credited.

Module I/IA	Statistics/Computers & Math
Module II	Economics
Module III	Fuels Management
Module IV	Fire Ecology and Fire Effects
Module V	Fire and Land Management
Module VI	Final Project Reviews

**National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Courses<sup>2</sup> - Upper Division**

FIEM	Fire in Ecosystem Management	1 semester hour
FML	Fire Management Leadership	1 semester hour
FPM	Fire Program Management	1 semester hour
LFML	Local Fire Management Leadership	1 semester hour
NFMAS	National Fire Management Analysis System	1 semester hour
RX-450	Smoke Management Techniques	1 semester hour
RX-540	Applied Fire Effects	1 semester hour
RX-590	Prescribed Fire Behavior Interpretation (to be combined with S-590)	2 semester hours
S-490	Advanced Wildland Fire Behavior Calculations	1 semester hour
S-491	National Fire Danger Rating System	1 semester hour
S-492	Long Term Fire Risk Assessment	1 semester hour
S-493	Fire Area Growth Simulation	1 semester hour
S-520	Advanced Incident Management	2 semester hours
S-580	Advanced Fire Use Applications (National Parks & Wilderness Fire Mgmt)	1 semester hour
S-590	Fire Behavior Interpretation	2 semester hours
S-620	Area Command	1 semester hour

**National Wildlife Coordinating Group (NWCG) Courses<sup>3</sup> - Lower Division**

P-151	Wildfire Origin and Cause Determination	1 semester hour
RX-300	Prescribed Fire for Burn Bosses	1 semester hour
RX-340	Introduction to Fire Effects	1 semester hour
S-190/290	Introduction to Fire Behavior combined with Intermediate Wildland Fire Behavior	1 semester hour
S-390	Intro. to Wildland Fire Behavior Calculations	1 semester hour

1 – Per Colorado State University

2 – Per Colorado State University/Utah State/Northern Arizona University

3 – Per University of Idaho/ Colorado State University/University of Montana