

POSITION MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

Applicability

Through the development of Benchmark Position Descriptions, Resources Careers defines resources management professional and technician positions as they need to exist in the NPS today to deal with demands placed on both the resources and the people responsible for providing specialized advice about park natural and/or cultural resources. The PDs are designed to be used primarily in parks and equivalent units of the National Park System.

The Benchmark PDs for *professional* resources management positions at the GS-11 full-performance level describe positions in a variety of occupations. The occupations require a similar depth of knowledge and skill necessary to: contribute effectively to a changing organization; provide for staff advice on resource matters in the context of park programs within the incumbent's field (and related fields in some cases); and deal with multiple and complex resources management functions, problems, and issues. Professional positions already at or above the GS-11 level are *beyond* the career ladder and are not included in the Resources Careers initiative.

The Benchmark PDs for *technical* resources management positions are developed at a range of grade levels and each is described at the full-performance level. They do not cover all of the possible grades or series, however. They are developed as guidance for the most commonly used grades in the most commonly used technician series. They are not meant to imply that technicians graded higher than GS-7 do not exist, any more than the professional series PDs are meant to imply that grades higher than GS-11 do not exist.

The intent is to ensure that, to the greatest extent practicable, PDs for employees serving in resources management positions are uniformly described and classified throughout the Service. It is up to management to hold itself accountable and assure that these Benchmark PDs are used appropriately and consistently.

Fire Management

FIREPRO-funded positions are *not* covered by the Resources Careers initiative, since there are separate benchmark PDs for fire management personnel. Non-FIREPRO funded positions (e.g., Fire Ecologist) that have fire management responsibilities as part of a resources management program may be covered if they meet the criteria.

Grade and Series Coverage

Benchmark PDs cover employees in 24 selected professional individual series and interdisciplinary positions from GS-5 to GS-11 in a career ladder, as well as 9 technician series at the GS-5, GS-6, and GS-7 levels. See the *Occupational Series and Interdisciplinary Positions covered by Resources Careers* list on the previous page.

All professional resources management jobs are complex, and involve planning work, interpreting data, and refining methods and techniques. The full-performance level PDs at the GS-11 level reflect the normal degree of complexity found in most resources management

positions in the NPS. In contrast, GS-12 positions are distinguished by greater responsibility, a broader (or deeper) range of program activities or themes, and greater complexity and sensitivity. These positions exceed the GS-11 full-performance level, and are less common in the NPS. A more detailed comparison between the two grade levels, with examples, is provided in Appendix 1: Comparing the GS-11 and GS-12 Benchmark PDs.

Term and Temporary Positions

While the full-performance level (i.e., technician series PDs at grades 5, 6, and 7, and professional series PDs at grade 11) of any of the Benchmark PDs is targeted for permanent positions, it may be used for term or temporary positions, if appropriate. Developmental level (i.e., professional series at grades 5, 7, and 9) PDs as part of the career ladder may only be used for term or permanent positions. Temporary appointments confer no promotion eligibility so use of developmental PDs is not appropriate for temporary appointments. Temporary professional positions can be established at any appropriate grade but local PDs must be developed if below the GS-11 level, since the professional Benchmark PDs at the 5, 7, and 9 levels are developmental.

Professional or Technician? One-Grade vs. Two-Grade Intervals

Forty-six fact-finding reviews by human resource specialists and subject matter experts of 125 positions in 19 classification series in 14 parks and one center in all 7 regions were conducted in 1995 and 1996. Those reviews examined the *type* of natural and cultural resources management work performed in NPS areas and the *grade level* of the work. Positions and parks were selected to get a broad representation of positions, park complexity, and regions. The results confirmed that professional resources management work exists in every park, whether or not it is recognized, and that the appropriate grade for full performance, at its lowest level, of that work is GS-11.

No professional Benchmark PDs were developed below GS-11 (except for generic GS-5 and 7 PDs and statement of differences GS-9 PD) because, as noted above, the appropriate grade for full performance resources management work, at its lowest level, was determined to be GS-11. Permanent resources management positions at the GS-5, 7, and 9 levels are developmental and are to be used as part of the career ladder that leads to the GS-11 full-performance level.

According to OPM's Introduction to the Position Classification Standards (TS-107, August 1991) professional work requires knowledge in a field of science or learning characteristically acquired through education or training equivalent to a bachelor's or higher degree with major study in, or pertinent to, the specialized field, as distinguished from general education. Work is professional when it requires the exercise of discretion, judgement, and personal responsibility for the application of an organized body of knowledge that is constantly studied to make new discoveries and interpretations, and to improve data, materials, and methods.

In contrast, technicians support professional work and carry out tasks, methods, procedures, and/or computations that are covered by established precedents or guidelines. Depending upon the level of difficulty of the work, these procedures often require a high degree of technical skill, care, and precision. A positive education requirement, however, does not apply to technician positions. Professional positions advance from grades GS-5 to GS-11 in two-grade intervals. Technician positions are one-grade interval jobs.

Currently, some parks have their only resources management positions in technician series, despite the fact that the field reviews found that even the smallest parks have the analytical workload in resources management to warrant professional skills and positions. With implementation of Resources Careers, parks must review their resources management organizations. *Parks must have a full performance (GS-11 or higher) resources management subject-matter professional*

available to provide technical supervision to any technician position or professional position below GS-11. The full-performance level professional providing the supervision may be either on-site or shared with another NPS unit.

Career Ladders

The career ladder for professional resources management positions in the identified series has been established as GS-5/7/9/11. In accordance with merit promotion principles, entry may occur at any level for which the applicant is qualified. After having entered a career ladder, employees may advance in grade up the ladder through successive noncompetitive promotions to the full performance level.

Currently, there are many professional resources management positions below GS-11 and not on a career ladder to the GS-11 level. In every case examined, it was found that those positions that were below GS-11 were undergraded for work described, or the PDs did not describe either the actual work performed or the work, which needed to be performed. *With implementation of Resources Careers, there is now a career ladder of GS-5/7/9/11 with benchmark GS-11 PDs for 24 professional resources management positions (including 5 interdisciplinary positions). This career ladder will now be the norm throughout the Service.*

Servicewide career ladders have not been established for technician positions. Technician positions, however, can be at full performance at a variety of grades, depending on local needs. Technician positions can be filled below the full-performance level through the use of "Statement of Differences" PDs developed locally. Use sound position management when reviewing technician positions for potential conversion into the professional career ladders because technical work is still likely to exist.

But Our Park Can't Support a GS-11!

Some parks will be faced with difficult choices. These choices should not be made without seriously examining the nature and scope of the resources management work that exists and needs to be done in the park. Extensive field reviews across all seven regions confirmed that professional resources management work exists in every park, whether or not it is currently recognized. The reviews also found that the appropriate grade for full performance, of the majority of that work is GS-11. If the existing park organizational structure does not seem to support GS-11 positions, review the position descriptions and then reexamine the work that should be part of a professional, comprehensive resources management function. Restructuring the workload or reorganizing the workforce should be considered.

So How Do We Proceed?

Review existing resources management positions against one or more Benchmarks. If the position is already in a series covered by a Benchmark, start your comparisons with that Benchmark. Other Benchmarks could be more applicable, however. Look carefully at positions that are doing a substantial amount of resources management work but are not currently classified in one of the identified occupational series (e.g., GS-0025).

If the 80% criterion (see below) is met, assign that position to one of the Benchmarks according to the detailed implementation instructions which follow. Assuming that the incumbent qualifies by OPM standards for that series, competitive or non-competitive conversion of the position into that series and, if applicable, career ladder may be appropriate. Subsequent promotions within the career ladder, as always, are contingent upon satisfactory performance, time-in-grade, and the meeting of any identified competencies.

What Does the 80% Criterion Mean?

The PDs describe 80-100% of the job. At least 80% of the non-supervisory duties described in a Benchmark PD must be performed at least 80% of the time over the course of a typical year in order for the Benchmark PD to apply. Therefore, up to 20% of an individual's time may be spent on non-supervisory responsibilities other than those in the PD -- these will not be grade-determining.

However, if Attachment 1 documenting supervisory responsibilities is attached to the Benchmark Position Description (see below for more information on classification as a supervisor), this 80% rule must be modified. If a position is officially classified as a supervisor, then by definition the position is carrying out supervisory responsibilities for 25% or more of the time. It is typical for such positions supervising a small to medium-sized staff to spend a quarter to a third of the time on supervisory duties. For benchmark positions, this means that the incumbent will be performing the benchmark duties for less than 80% of the time. In the single instance where the incumbent is supervising work directly related to professional resources management disciplines, use of the Benchmark Position Description (with Attachment 1 affixed) is appropriate as long as at least 80% of the non-supervisory duties are performed (for less than 80% of the time).

But the Benchmark Isn't a Precise Fit for the Job!

It rarely will be. Remember that PDs do not need to describe all duties, just the major duties. Attachment 2: Amendment to Benchmark Position Description--Other Duties (in the *Implementing Instructions*) is used with the Benchmark PD to list park-specific, non-grade-determining duties. If after management review and position restructuring (if any), duties still do not meet the 80% criterion, do not use the Benchmarks. Parks should examine those positions to ensure that the grade and series are in accordance with the appropriate OPM classification standard.

Filling Vacant Career Ladder Positions

Supervisors and managers may fill a vacancy by promotion, change to lower grade, noncompetitive conversion, reassignment, transfer, reinstatement, appointment from a delegated examining unit or Office of Personnel Management (OPM) list of candidates, or other appropriate sources of applicants. Applicants may be considered concurrently or consecutively from any recruitment sources. Regardless of how you choose to fill a position, you must follow appropriate merit staffing rules and procedures.

Supervisors and human resources staff are encouraged to use the *Essential Competencies* from the

NPS Employee Training and Development Career Planning and Tracking Kit¹ when developing knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and crediting plans for advertised positions. Positions responsible for managing *both* natural and cultural resources should generally be classified and advertised as interdisciplinary positions. *When advertising an interdisciplinary position, a maximum of 4 series can be selected (see instructions under Remarks on the Optional Form 8: Position Description coversheet for Interdisciplinary positions). A review of the position should be made to determine which occupational series would be most appropriate to include based upon the nature and extent of the resources in that park.*

Supervisory Duties

The grade of the Benchmark GS-11 PDs are based on the knowledges and other classification factors required to do the professional work of the jobs. To be classified in these Benchmark PDs, an employee does not need to be a supervisor. This initiative may impact the grade of existing supervisory positions in the identified resources management series. Each first-level supervisory position in these series must be reviewed against the OPM General Schedule Supervisory Guide (TS-123, April 1993) and Attachment 1: Amendment to GS-11 Benchmark Position Description-- Supervisory Duties and Evaluation Factors (in the *Implementing Instructions*). Decisions will need to be made regarding administrative vs. technical supervision² for all technicians and less-than-full-performance level professional positions.

Implementation of Resources Careers will result in a number of supervisory positions being upgraded as a result of upgrades to sufficient numbers of subordinate staff. In addition, a number of supervisory positions may be eliminated as the workforce and workload are reorganized. In order to ensure equity and consistency during this transition period, proper merit promotion procedures must be applied. Most promotions should be carried out competitively. This is particularly true when the position to be filled would provide upward mobility opportunity for staff who would otherwise not have such an opportunity. Use of the authority to carry out noncompetitive promotions must be balanced with the general requirement for fair and open competition.

Law Enforcement and Resources Management Positions

The primary purpose of the professional Benchmark PDs is to accomplish resources management duties that require specialized expertise. It is recommended that only in rare cases should Superintendents seek to accomplish law enforcement with resources management personnel, however, benchmark PDs *must not* be used for law enforcement. A hybrid position combining professional resources management duties and a law enforcement commission has inherent conflicts and is strongly discouraged. However, if a park seeks to pursue that course a PD must be written and locally classified in consultation with the servicing personnel staff, using the Benchmark PD as a basis but adding the appropriate language about law enforcement. This should *only* be considered in cases where an employee already holds a law enforcement commission and is being considered, by nature of the required duties, for conversion into one of the Benchmark resources management PDs.

The decision to continue or recall an existing law enforcement commission held by an employee converting into a resources management career ladder must be made by the Superintendent and be consistent with NPS law enforcement policy and guidelines. The Superintendent must consult with the appropriate regional office and WASO Ranger Activities Staff to discuss the park's law

¹ Also available on the Internet at <http://www.nps.gov/training/npsonly/npscom.htm>.

² The definition of technical supervision is in Attachment 3: Amendment to Benchmark Position Description – Technical Supervision Agreement (in the *Implementing Instructions*).

enforcement needs assessment and to obtain concurrence necessary for a "Type 2" commission.

Position Management Opportunity

This may be an opportunity for the park to restructure its resources management workload and positions. If the park chooses to establish new positions with the Benchmark PDs and/or career ladders, or significantly change responsibilities of existing staff, the existing staff may have to compete for the new positions. (See *Implementation Instructions* for further guidance.) In order to use the Benchmark PDs, remember that the position must meet the 80% criterion. Just as in Ranger Careers, it may be appropriate to restructure work so that one position does resources management $\geq 80\%$ of the time and another does the different work not described in the Benchmarks.

In keeping with the National Performance Review recommendations and Departmental and NPS streamlining initiatives, we must seriously attempt to reduce the number of supervisory positions. In conducting your position management reviews, look closely at your supervisory positions. Because there are no adverse actions or appeal rights associated with the elimination of supervisory duties when it does not adversely affect the position's grade, you may never have a better opportunity to organize the distribution of work more effectively.

Equal Opportunity Impact Analysis

The Washington EO Office has reviewed impact of the Resources Careers initiative on the current workforce and no negative impacts are anticipated. To the contrary, implementation is expected to result in promotions and entry into career ladders for the women and minorities who, in many series, have a higher representation in the lower graded resources management positions in the Service. Establishment of career ladders should make entry into National Park Service resources management careers more attractive to a wider, more diverse applicant pool.