

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

Natural Resources, 0401 series

This document is not meant to replace any OPM policy on the classification and qualification of Natural Resources Management positions in USACE. It is to provide some clarity and understanding of the work and qualifications of these types of positions to all audiences.

As defined in the OPM Classification Standard (Reference 2), natural resources work may involve administrative or managerial duties, such as controlling, preserving, and/or evaluating a natural resource or natural resources function, such as conservation, forest, rangeland, fisheries, and wildlife. It requires knowledge and skill sufficient to interpret and apply biological science and research. Natural resources employees exercise discretion, analytical skill, judgment, personal accountability and responsibility for creating, developing, integrating, applying and sharing an organized body of knowledge in carrying out the qualifying professional work.

Natural Resources Specialists perform a myriad of duties that can include:

- a. Recreation Management. Recreation management involves advising on, administering, supervising, or performing professional recreation work. Examples of this work include:
 - Planning and managing appropriate public access and facilities for recreation opportunities, while sustaining natural resources values.
 - Assessing the effect of recreation on wilderness, timber, range, soils, water, and wildlife.
 - Correcting damage caused by overused or unplanned recreation.
 - Assessing recreation use compatibility with commercial activities.
 - Balancing competing public and private goals for recreation development, commercial development, and natural resources preservation.
 - Guiding public recreation users on natural resources values and responsibility for land stewardship, through in part, the fields of environmental interpretation and environmental education.
 - Communicating USACE missions and accomplishments using interpretative techniques and programming.

- b. Natural Resource Management. Natural resource work involves administrative or managerial duties such as controlling, preserving, and/or evaluating a natural resource, or natural resource function such as conservation, forest, rangeland, fisheries, and wildlife. Examples of this work include:
 - Managing forests, wildlife and fisheries and protecting threatened and endangered species, sensitive plants, and sensitive habitats (aquatic plant control, invasive species, consistency with ecosystem management principles).
 - Ensuring that activities on public land are conducted in accordance with applicable laws.
 - Managing and issuing permits.
 - Preparing or advising on natural resources regulations and guidance.
 - Developing and implementing land use plans.
 - Identifying problems associated with public and private land use.

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Natural Resources, 0401 series

When determining specialized experience, it is important to determine the difference between technical or professional work. It is not always easy to differentiate between the two because some tasks are common to both. However, close attention must be paid to the level of analytical skills and responsibility required for the recruited position versus the work experience performed by the applicant at each grade level.

The HR Specialist and the Hiring Manager/Subject Matter Expert (SME) will work closely together to determine recruitment strategies, develop a well thought out job analysis/assessment and ensure that the specialized experience statement is clearly articulated, unambiguous and describes the actual and specific duties performed and the appropriate level of accountability/responsibilities at the next lower grade. Both the job assessment and specialized experience will be written in clear text, avoiding all jargon, acronyms, or other exclusionary communication shortcuts. This is a very important part of the process as this will be used to qualify candidates in conjunction with other qualification requirements.

Most jobs are classified and graded on the basis of the duties that constitute the primary reason for establishing the position. However, a position may include many other significant duties that are not grade-controlling, i.e., that are not the duties that determine the particular grade assigned to a position. Some of these duties may be similar to those performed at lower grade levels, or in positions in other series. **Applicants must have experience performing the grade-controlling work at the next lower grade level, and work experience that demonstrates possession of the other required KSA's at the appropriate level regardless of job series.**

If the 0401 series position is part of an interdisciplinary position recruitment, then it is **only** included with other Professional and Scientific Positions. Positions such as, 0025 Park Ranger series positions are not classified or included in the Group Coverage for Professional and Scientific positions. **Therefore, 0025 Park Ranger series will not be added to the recruitment to include as a parenthetical title. The announcement position title will reflect the PD title. The hiring manager must decide prior to the recruitment if the position will be filled by a 0025 Park Ranger series or a 0401 Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences series, but not both, i.e., dual announcement or both series in the same announcement.**

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Natural Resources, 0401 series

CHRA HR Specialists are reminded to use the OPM Qualifications Standards when creating assessments, announcements, and qualifying applicants for the 0401 series positions. The 0401 Series is considered a “two step” qualifications process for GS-07 grades and above. This means that the applicant **MUST** meet the “first step”, the OPM Individual Occupational Requirement (IOR).

These two qualification requirements should not be combined, substituted, or used interchangeably. See example below:

First Step: IOR

The first step is the education **OR** the combination of education and experience that an applicant possesses that demonstrates their ability to perform the work of Natural Resources Specialist at the grade level (or equivalent) that you are recruiting for. The applicant does not need to meet both A & B below, just the ONE; A or B. <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-standards/0400/general-natural-resources-management-and-biological-sciences-series-0401/>

- A. Applicant has a bachelor's degree (or higher degree) in biological sciences, agriculture, natural resource management, chemistry, or related disciplines appropriate to the position. Verify that the applicant's transcript is a bachelor's degree (or higher degree) in one of those areas **OR** a related discipline. If the transcript meets this requirement, the applicant has successfully met this first step; then, move to the second step.

OR

- B. Applicant has a combination of education and experience which includes courses (See Table below) equivalent to a major in an acceptable degree field (usually 24 semester hours), plus appropriate experience. Then you will need to determine the applicant's total qualifying experience as a percentage of the experience required for the grade level. For more information on Crediting Combinations of Education and Experience visit: [General Schedule Qualification Policies \(opm.gov\)](https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-standards/0400/general-natural-resources-management-and-biological-sciences-series-0401/).

Where specific course requirements are not indicated in paragraph A, the number of semester hours required to constitute a major field of study is the amount specified by the college or university attended. If this number cannot be obtained, 24 semester hours will be considered as equivalent to a major field of study. The nature and quality of this required course work must have been such that it would serve as a prerequisite for more advanced study in the field or subject-matter area. Related course work generally refers to courses that may be accepted as part of the program major.

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Natural Resources, 0401 series

If the applicant meets the requirements in the first step, they are deemed qualified at the GS-5 level. If the applicant does NOT meet A or B above, then they have not met the First Step IOR requirement and will no longer receive consideration for the position. A note should be added to their applicant record in explaining why they did not meet the IOR.

Second Step: Group Qualifications Standard for Professional & Scientific Group.

In addition to meeting the First Step, applicants may qualify based on additional education, specialized experience or a combination of **directly related** education and experience for GS-7 positions and above.

A. For education at the GS-7 and above:

GS-7 – 1 year of graduate-level education or a Bachelor's degree with Superior Academic Achievement.

GS-9 – 2 years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a master's degree or equivalent graduate degree.

GS-11 – 3 years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a Ph.D. degree or Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree.

When qualifying applicants based on years of graduate education in lieu of an advanced degree, care must be exercised in determining credit for post-baccalaureate education. Such education must show evidence of progress through a set curriculum or program leading to an advanced degree. Extra credit for graduate education should not be given because a person has taken longer than the usual time to complete the educational program. It is OPM's intent that 2 years of graduate study be substantially equivalent to a master's degree, and 3 years be substantially equivalent to a Ph.D. degree. Graduate-level credit should not be given for undergraduate level course work unless it is a requisite part of the graduate-level curriculum. If an applicant had to complete under-graduate course work as a prerequisite for pursuing an advanced degree, that undergraduate-level study should not be credited as graduate education.

B. One-year specialized experience. For GS-7 and above, the qualification standards for most occupational series call for 1 year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the next lower grade level in the normal line of progression. Applicants need not meet any cumulative years of experience requirements or general or lower-level specialized experience requirements to qualify. To be creditable,

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Natural Resources, 0401 series

an applicant's 1 year of specialized experience must demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for successful job performance.

The HR Specialist will review the applicant's resume to see if it meets the specialized experience. For more information on crediting experience, see Qualification Standards Operating Manual for General Schedule Positions for experience requirements: General Schedule Qualification Policies (opm.gov).

C. Directly related education and experience can be combined to meet the minimum qualification requirements, as allowed in the applicable standard. To combine education and experience, determine the applicant's total qualifying experience as a percentage of the experience required for the grade level. Then determine the applicant's education as a percentage of the education required for the grade level. Finally, add the two percentages. The total percentage must equal at least 100 percent to qualify an applicant for that grade level. In doing so, the applicant will have met the second step requirements for the position. If they do NOT meet this requirement then they will no longer receive consideration. A note should be added to their applicant record in explaining why they did not meet the second step.

The group coverage standard contains examples of how to combine education and experience. Note that only graduate education in excess of the amount required for the next lower grade level can be combined with the appropriate level of experience to qualify applicants for positions at grades GS-9 and GS-11.

Some examples (not all inclusive):

- If a school's requirement for 1 year of graduate study is 18 semester hours, only graduate education beyond the first 18 semester hours or 27 quarter hours can be combined with GS-7 level experience to qualify for a GS-9 level position.
- An applicant with 6 months of appropriate experience equivalent to GS-7 (50 percent of the experience requirement for GS-9) and 27 semester hours of appropriate graduate education (50 percent of the education requirement for GS-9, in excess of that required for GS-7) would be qualified for a GS-9 position (assuming that there is no evidence that the attended college or university requires more than 18 semester hours as equivalent to a year of graduate study).

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Natural Resources, 0401 series

College/University Qualifying Coursework:

Below are examples of qualifying course work for the GS-0401 Natural Resources Management occupation as identified in the OPM 0400 Professional and Scientific Series for Natural Resource Management and Biological Sciences. Additional courses have been added applicable to the USACE GS-0401 Natural Resources Management Program positions, typically referred to as “Natural Resources Management Specialists” and “Natural Resources Management Managers”. This list is *not* all inclusive as colleges and universities may name their courses differently. Refer to the specific college or university catalog description to determine if qualifying, using the skills required for the position.

Table – Example of Qualifying Courses

Air Resources	Environmental, Natural Resources and or Regulations and Policy	Natural Resource Recreation Management
Agriculture	Environmental Interpretation	Outdoor Recreation Activities, Policy and Management
Agronomy	Environmental Sciences	Parks and Recreation Management
Arboriculture	Fire Science	Parks and Recreation Planning
Animal Science	Fisheries Biology	Pharmacology
Anthropology	Forest Mensuration	Physical Geography
Archeology	Forestry	Physics
Biochemistry	General Fish and Wildlife Administration	Physiology
Biodiversity	Genetics	Plant Pathology and Physiology
Botany	Geology	Plant Protection and Quarantine
Biological Sciences	Geographic Information System	Rangeland Management
Biometrics (includes Applied Forestry)	Horticulture	Silviculture
Chemistry	Hydrology	Soil Conservation
Conservation Education	Interpretation of Natural and Cultural Heritage	Soil Science
Dendrology	Interpretive Methods	Toxicology
Earth Sciences	Land Use Planning	Visitor and Resource Protection
Ecology	Landscape Architecture	Wildland Fire and Management
Entomology	Mammalogy	Wildlife Biology
Environmental and Cultural Interpretation	Meteorology	Wildlife and Natural Resources Law Enforcement
Environmental and Outdoor Education	Microbiology	Wildlife Refuge Management
Environmental and/or Natural Resources Law	Natural Resources Management	Wildlife Techniques
		Zoology

Note: Review the “Transcripts” section of the CHRA DRAFT Business Rules for more information on transcripts.

United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Natural Resources, 0401 series

References:

1. OPM General Schedule Qualification Standards, “General Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences Series, 0401”, <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-standards/0400/general-natural-resources-management-and-biological-sciences-series-0401/>
2. OPM Position Classification Standards “Professional Work in the Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences Group 0400 series”, dated September 2005, <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/classifying-general-schedule-positions/standards/0400/gso400p.pdf>
3. OPM Group Coverage Qualification Standards, “Group Coverage Qualifications Standards for Professional and Scientific Positions”, <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-standards/#url=GS-PROF>
4. OPM General Schedule Qualifications Policies, <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-policies/#url=General-Policies>
5. USACE Engineer Regulation 1130-2-540, “Environmental Stewardship Operations and Maintenance Policies”, dated November 15, 1996, https://www.publications.usace.army.mil/Portals/76/Publications/EngineerRegulations/ER_1130-2-540.pdf?ver=KzJR_Ak_wu7egBng96JGDA%3d%3d
6. USACE Engineer Regulation 1130-2-550, “Recreation Operations and Maintenance Policies”, dated November 15, 1996, https://www.publications.usace.army.mil/Portals/76/Publications/EngineerRegulations/ER_1130-2-550.pdf?ver=PIX75vOpr3pc-G4VqP9H8g%3d%3d
7. CHRA DRAFT Business Process Rules for Recruiting with USA Staffing UPGRADE.

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