



Personnel Suitability and Security Handbook

U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Service

**Personnel Suitability and Security Handbook
Supplements 430 FW 1**

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SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

1.1 HANDBOOK PURPOSE

This handbook supplements 430 FW 1, Personnel Suitability and Security Program. The handbook describes:

- The types of personnel investigations that the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) requires for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) employees, and how the Service must manage the investigations. In October 2019, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) National Background Investigation Bureau’s work was transferred to the DCSA. The DCSA now conducts, reviews, and adjudicates suitability and security background investigations.
- The standards the Service uses in making personnel suitability and security determinations from the results of employment investigations; the process for adjudicating issues that arise

during investigations; the requirements for certifying security clearances; and the requirements for reporting and maintaining personnel suitability and security records.

1.2 SCOPE

The requirements in this handbook are applicable to any position that requires a Tier 1 – 5 level of background investigation. (See [subsection 2.1C.](#)) The handbook applies to all Service employees, volunteers, Youth Conservation Corps members and students, collegiate partners, and seasonal workers regardless of the type of appointment or position.

1.3 AUTHORITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES. See 430 FW 1 for the authorities and overall responsibilities for the Service's suitability and security program.

1.4 DEFINITIONS. See [Appendix 1, Glossary](#), for the definitions of terms used in the handbook.

SECTION 2: PUBLIC TRUST AND NATIONAL SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS

2.1 TYPES OF INVESTIGATIONS

A. Initial investigations. Initial investigations must meet the requirements of 5 CFR §731, Suitability; 5 CFR § 732, National Security Positions; and 5 CFR § 736, Personnel Investigations.¹

B. Periodic Reinvestigations (PRI). PRIs must also meet the requirements of 5 CFR § 731, 5 CFR 732, and 5 CFR § 736. Positions the Service designates as Special Sensitive (SS), Critical Sensitive (CS), and Non-Critical Sensitive (NCS) (national security) and High Risk (HR)¹ and Moderate Risk (MR) (public trust) must undergo a PRI 5 years after placement and at least once every succeeding 5 years.

C. Types of background investigations. The DCSA conducts the appropriate level background investigation depending on the position's risk and sensitivity level, as follows:

- (1) Tier 1 - Non-Sensitive/Low Risk (NS/LR) positions, HSPD-12 Credential,
- (2) Tier 2 – Non-Sensitive Moderate Risk (Public Trust) positions.
- (3) Tier 3 – Non-Critical Sensitive positions requiring access eligibility (Confidential, Secret, or Top Secret).
- (4) Tier 4 - Non-Sensitive High Risk (Public Trust) positions.
- (5) Tier 5 - Critical Sensitive positions requiring Top Secret, Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) Access Eligibility.

For additional information please review the [Federal Investigative Standards Crosswalk Job Aid](#).

¹ Please note that throughout this handbook, we use the acronym "HR" to mean "High Risk." We spell out "Human Resources" each time it's used to avoid confusion.

2.2 IMPLEMENTING INVESTIGATIONS

A. Required procedures for initiating investigations. Human Resources staff should refer to the following for information about requesting investigations from DCSA:

(1) 5 CFR § 736, Personnel Investigations;

(2) [DCSA webpage “Requesting Personnel Investigations via e-QIP,”](#) and

(3) OPM’s *Guide to Processing Personnel Actions*, Chapter 26, Change in Tenure (formerly known as FPM Supplement 296-33).

B. Required forms. Service employees or others (e.g., volunteers) under investigation and their supervisors must accurately complete the investigation forms that are applicable (SF-85, SF-85P, SF-85P-S, or SF-86) before sending them to their servicing Human Resources Security Specialist. DCSA designs its investigations forms in an automated system. If there are any errors in completing the forms, they will be returned, which can cause delays in processing investigations.

(1) *SF-85 (Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Positions)*: The Human Resources Security Specialist or a designated Human Resources staff member must complete Part 1 of the SF-85 and SF-85P (public trust). Human Resources Security staff will send the forms to DCSA for processing. If errors/omissions are found, DCSA sends the forms back to the Security staff for correction.

(2) *SF-86 (Questionnaire for National Security Positions)*: The Human Resources Security Specialist completes Block G, Geographic Location, and Block O, Accounting Data. Then the SF-86 (national security) is sent to the Service Security Officer for processing. The Service Security Officer completes Part 1 of the SF-86. Human Resources Security staff send the forms to DCSA for processing. If errors/omissions are found, DCSA sends the forms back to Security staff for correction.

2.3 ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATIONS. Whenever the Service Security Officer, a Human Resources Security Specialist, or another Human Resources representative receives information that indicates that retaining an employee may not be consistent with the efficiency of Federal service or interests of national security, the Service Security Officer or a servicing Human Resources Security Specialist must adjudicate it through a personal interview. The Service Security Officer, a Human Resources Security Specialist, or another Human Resources representative will initiate an additional investigation to try to resolve any potential derogatory information that cannot be adjudicated through the personal interview.

2.4 CANCELLING INVESTIGATIONS

A. National Security positions.

(1) The employee’s manager/supervisor must notify the Service Security Officer via telephone, and follow up in writing, if the subject of an investigation for an SS, CS, or NCS (national security) position:

- (a) Is assigned duties for which the investigation is no longer required,
- (b) Removes him/her/themselves from consideration for the position, or
- (c) Separates from the Service.

(2) The Service Security Officer notifies the DCSA.

B. Public Trust and non-sensitive positions. Human Resources Security Specialists are responsible for promptly notifying DCSA to cancel investigations for individuals in HR, MR (public trust), and Non-Sensitive/Low Risk positions. The Security Specialist must also notify the Service Security Officer when cancelling investigations for such positions.

2.5 WAIVERS FOR PREPLACEMENT INVESTIGATIONS

A. Special Sensitive (SS) positions. The Service may not seek or receive a preplacement investigation waiver for SS positions.

B. Critical Sensitive (CS) and HR positions. The Service may seek a waiver of the preplacement investigation requirement for individuals entering CS (national security) and HR (public trust) positions in case of an emergency, if such an action is necessary in the national interest.

(1) As part of the waiver process, the Service must still conduct the following checks before the person can begin duty (see 5 CFR § 732 and 441 DM 4.4):

- Driver's license check,
- Military records,
- National Crime Information Center,
- Security Investigation Index,
- Local law enforcement agencies,
- Credit history,
- Employment history,
- Residence history,
- Education and training,
- References, and
- Fingerprint check.

(2) The employee's supervisor and Human Resources Security Specialist must prepare a waiver request and send it to the Service Security Officer for concurrence. The Service Security Officer then sends the waiver request to the Director, Office of Enforcement and Security Management in the Department of the Interior (Department) for approval.

(3) Prior to entry on duty, the individual must have an approved waiver from the Department. The Service Security Officer will notify the supervisor/manager of the waiver decision.

(4) Granting a waiver does not authorize a person to have access to classified national security information. See 441 DM 4.4.

2.6 NO INTERIM NATIONAL SECURITY CLEARANCES. It is not Departmental policy to grant interim national security clearances.

2.7 INCIDENTS OF POTENTIAL DISLOYALTY. When investigations discover that a person may have been subject to coercion, influence, or pressure to act contrary to the interest of national security, or there is other information of possible disloyalty to the United States, DCSA refers them to the Federal Bureau of Investigation through the Service Security Officer.

SECTION 3: HANDLING RESULTS OF INVESTIGATIONS

3.1 STANDARDS USED TO MAKE DETERMINATIONS

A. Suitability standards. All positions are subject to suitability considerations based on position risk.

(1) The Service cannot employ or retain an individual in an HR, MR, or NS/LR position involving public trust unless there is a reasonable expectation that employing the individual promotes the efficiency of the Federal service (see the 5 CFR § 731 and 441 DM 5.3).

(2) The Service determines whether someone is employable (suitable) based on the criteria in 5 CFR § 731 and 5 CFR § 732.

B. Security standards. The Service cannot employ or retain an individual in an SS, CS, or NCS (national security) position involving access to classified national security information unless the employment is clearly within the interests of national security (see 5 CFR § 731, 5 CFR § 732, and FPM Chapters 731 and 732 for criteria).

3.2 HANDLING OF INVESTIGATIVE REPORTS

A. Reports for HR, MR, and NS/LR positions.

(1) The servicing Human Resources Security Specialist or Service Security Officer handles reports for HR, MR, and NS/LR positions, including any issues or unresolved information.

(2) The Human Resources Security Specialist or Service Security Officer must adjudicate issues in accordance with FPM Chapter 731 and 5 CFR § 731. When there are potentially derogatory issues or unresolved information, DCSA attaches a copy of the INV Form 79A, Report of Agency Adjudicative Action on OPM Investigations (or an OPM replacement form) to the report.

B. Reports for SS, CS, and NCS (national security) positions. The servicing Human Resources Security Specialist or Service Security Officer handles reports for SS, CS and NCS positions. They send the servicing Human Resources office the original OPM Certification of Investigation so that it can be included in the person's electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF).

(1) The Human Resources Security Specialist or Service Security Officer should make a note in the individual's eOPF to reflect the results of the adjudication. All other investigative report material must be destroyed once it has served its purpose.

(2) If the final adjudication is favorable, the Service Security Officer may use the investigation as the basis to grant a national security clearance. The Service Security Officer will issue a Clearance Certificate for Top Secret and Secret Clearances after briefing the individual (see subsection 3.3 for more information).

(3) If the final adjudication is unfavorable, the Service Security Officer must follow 5 CFR § 731.402, Notice of Proposed Action, to ensure the applicant/employee is given due process.

C. Disqualification from appointment.

(1) *Suitability:* When someone is disqualified from appointment because of a suitability issue(s) identified in a DCSA investigation, Human Resources staff must follow the procedures in 5 CFR § 731.303, 5 CFR § 315, and 5 CFR § 752.

(2) *Security:* When someone is disqualified from appointment because of a security issue(s) identified in a DCSA investigation, the Service Security Officer and Human Resources Security Specialists must follow the procedures in 5 CFR § 732 and 441 DM 5.5.

3.3 BRIEFINGS AND DEBRIEFINGS

A. Briefing before getting access to classified information. Prior to granting an applicant access to classified information, the individual's supervisor, Human Resources Security Specialist, or Service Security Officer must brief the individual.

(1) The individual must complete a Classified Information Nondisclosure Agreement (NDA) Standard Form (SF)-312. His/her/their supervisor or Human Resources Security Specialist must witness his/her/their signature on the form and send it to the Service Security Officer.

(2) The individual also must receive a copy of all the chapters in Part 431 of the Service Manual on information security.

B. Debriefing.

(1) For employees who have a security clearance, whenever one of the following events occurs, the Human Resources Security Specialist or Service Security Officer must debrief the employee:

- (a) Termination of employment,
- (b) Transfer to a position where access is no longer required,
- (c) Access authorization is administratively withdrawn,
- (d) The employee plans to be on leave for more than 3 months,
- (e) Transfer to another agency, or
- (f) Access is no longer required.

3.4 MANAGEMENT OF NUMBER OF NATIONAL SECURITY CLEARANCES

A. The Service Security Officer continually reviews national security clearances to ensure the number of clearances is the minimum the Service needs to meet operational requirements.

B. Supervisors must notify the Service Security Officer or servicing Human Resources Security Specialist in writing (email is sufficient) as soon as practicable when a subordinate of theirs who holds a clearance leaves the Service or his/her/their position no longer requires access to classified national security information.

C. Based on the continual reviews and supervisor notifications of positions or individuals no longer needing access to national security information, the Service Security Officer will administratively downgrade or terminate clearances that are no longer required.

3.5 NATIONAL SECURITY CLEARANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

A. Employee certification. Only employees who have a national security clearance can attend a meeting that requires that clearance. The employee's supervisor must notify either the servicing Human Resources Security Specialist or the Service Security Officer in writing (email is sufficient) as soon as possible about the upcoming event. The Service Security Officer prepares and sends the

necessary certification to the hosts of the meeting/conference.

B. Visitor certification. If the Service plans to host such a meeting:

(1) The program/Region must notify the Service Security Officer about their plans as soon as possible.

(2) The Service Security Officer will help the program/Region to prepare information for prospective attendees requiring that the attendees have their security officers send certifications of their national security clearances and investigation record information to the Service Security Officer.

3.6 HANDLING OF SECURITY FILES. Security staff must maintain personnel suitability and security files for SS, CS, NCS (national security), HR, and MR (public trust) positions.

A. Files must include copies of any actions affecting the status of an individual's suitability and security adjudication and security clearance. Files must include (as applicable), but are not limited to, the following:

(1) Requests for any waivers of preplacement investigative requirements for CS and HR positions.

(2) SF-50s or SF-52s showing designation of position risk or position sensitivity.

(3) SF-85P or SF-86, Questionnaires for Public Trust or Sensitive Positions.

(4) OPM Certification of Investigation.

(5) Clearance Certificates (for national security clearances).

B. Disposition. Human Resources offices, Human Resources Security Specialists, and the Service Security Officer must dispose of personnel security records in accordance with the National Archives and Records Administration's General Records Schedule. See 283 FW 2 for more information.

SECTION 4: RECIPROCITY OF INVESTIGATIONS

4.1 RECIPROCITY STANDARDS

A. The Human Resources Security Specialist or Service Security Officer must conduct appropriate checks of indices and databases to validate whether there is an existing investigation that meets current needs.

B. Investigations that meet the requirements specified for a given tier must be reciprocally accepted for that tier and for lower tiers subject to reciprocity guidance issued by the DCSA.

C. Employees who change positions and whose new positions require a higher investigation tier, are subject to the investigative requirements of the higher tier. However, the new investigation does not have to repeat elements if they were conducted in prior investigations and the results are not expected to change (e.g., education degree). Copies of prior investigative files must be provided to the requesting investigative agency in a timely manner.

D. When the Service obtains new information that calls into question the employee's suitability for Federal employment, eligibility for a sensitive position, eligibility for access to classified information, or a fitness determination, a new investigation must be conducted in accordance with 430 FW 1.

Appendix 1: GLOSSARY

A. Background Investigation. A personnel fact-finding exercise conducted to meet the requirements of 5 CFR § 731 and 5 CFR § 732.

B. Consultant/Contractor. An individual performing a service under an agreement or contract with the Service.

C. Derogatory Information. Information that indicates a person's employment or continuing employment may not promote the efficiency of Federal service or may not be consistent with the interests of national security.

D. National Security Clearance. An administrative determination based on the results of an investigation that an individual is trustworthy so that the Service may grant him/her/them access to classified national security information required to perform his/her/their assigned duties. There are three clearance levels: Top Secret, Secret, and Confidential.

E. National Security Position Sensitivity Designation. The categorization of a position by the Service based on the potential damage a person occupying that position could do to national security if he/she/they mishandled information or duties. The Service makes this designation to ensure appropriate screening under Executive Order 13467. There are three levels of sensitivity:

(1) Special Sensitive (SS),

(2) Critical Sensitive (CS), and

(3) Non-Critical Sensitive (NCS).

F. Physical and/or Logical Access Investigation. A type of background investigation necessary to obtain a personnel identification badge to access Government facilities and electronic information. Personnel must pass a National Agency Check with Written Inquiries (NACI)/Tier 1: physical or logical access investigation, or both, to get a personnel identification badge for long-term access to a Government facility and to access electronic information. This is not a security clearance.

G. Position Risk Levels. The Position Designation System (PDS) evaluates the duties and responsibilities of a position to determine the degree of potential damage to the efficiency or integrity of the Service that could result based on potential misconduct of an incumbent of a position. This establishes the risk level of that position. There are three levels of position risk: High Risk (HR), Moderate Risk (MR), and Low Risk (LR). In this handbook we use "HR" only to mean "High Risk," and we do not use it as an acronym for Human Resources, which we always spell out.

H. Post-placement Investigation. A fact-finding exercise conducted after a person is hired or assigned to a specific position.

I. Preplacement Investigation. A fact-finding exercise conducted before a person is hired or assigned to a specific position.

J. Public Trust Position. A position that is considered either HR or MR.

K. Suitability Position Risk Designations. Risk designations are commensurate with the public trust responsibilities and attributes of the position as they relate to the efficiency of Federal service. Suitability risk levels are ranked according to the degree of adverse impact on the efficiency of Federal service that an unsuitable person could cause.