

Reclamation Manual

Directives and Standards

Subject:	Hiring Process-Merit Promotion
Purpose:	This Directive and Standard (D&S) establishes promotion and internal placement requirements for filling competitive and excepted service positions. The benefits of this D&S are to standardize the Bureau of Reclamation's systematic means of selection for promotion and internal placement to assure recruitment methods and selection procedures are equitably and consistently administered on the basis of merit and fair and open competition.
Authority:	5 United States Code (USC) 33 - <i>Examination, Selection, and Placement</i> ; 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 335 - <i>Promotion and Internal Placement</i> ; Department of the Interior (DOI) Personnel Bulletin (PB) No. 20-20 , <i>Agency Merit Promotion Plan Policy and Staffing Guidance</i> , November 10, 2020; DOI PB No. 20-14, <i>Shared Certificates Policy</i> , September 10, 2020; DOI Memorandum, <i>Efficiency 2020: Simpler, Smarter, Faster Mission Delivery</i> , February 24, 2020; DOI Departmental Manual (DM), 370 DM 312.2 , <i>Workforce and Succession Planning</i> , March 5, 2006; Executive Order (EO) 13932, <i>Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates</i> , June 26, 2020; DOI PB 20-21 , <i>Requirements for Assessment Practices During the Selection Process</i> , December 22, 2020.
Approving Official:	Deputy Commissioner – Policy, Administration and Budget (PAB)
Contact:	Human Resources Division, Human Resources Policy Office (84-12100)

- 1. Introduction.** This D&S, together with procedures outlined in the [DOI Merit Promotion Plan \(MPP\)](#) (PB 20-20), cover promotion and internal placement actions for competitive and excepted service positions. Identification, qualification, evaluation, and selection will be made on the basis of merit principles, without regard to political, religious, or labor organization affiliation or non-affiliation, marital status, race, color, sex, national origin, non-disqualifying physical or mental handicap, sexual orientation, or age and shall be based solely on job-related criteria in accordance with legitimate position requirements. A sound Merit Promotion (MP) program properly administered and fully supported by management and employees at all levels is essential to the staffing of an effective and highly motivated workforce. Servicing Human Resources Offices (SHROs) will advise and provide training to hiring officials and employees on MP practices and selection procedures as needed. The Human Resources Policy Office (HRPO) will provide clarifying guidance, implementation procedures, and determine appropriate action for MP procedural best practices and corrective actions. Procedural guidance outlined below must be followed during MP recruitment efforts to conform with the requirements of 5 CFR part 335.103.

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2. **Applicability.** This D&S applies to all Reclamation General Schedule (GS) positions up to the grade GS-15 level or equivalent and to Senior Level (SL) positions, Federal Wage System (FWS) positions, and positions in any other pay systems (e.g., Bargaining Board [BB]) unless specifically exempted by special instructions and authority governing the specific pay system involved. Where this guidance is silent, flexibilities within the DOI MPP or higher authority are preserved. Where this guidance conflicts with a negotiated agreement covering bargaining units, the agreement will prevail.
3. **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA).** Where at all possible, the MP program will utilize outreach recruitment and hiring through DEIA efforts to represent a diverse and equitable workforce. Hiring officials must consider (at a minimum) the utilization of non-competitive hiring authorities when assessing a vacancy to ensure a welcoming environment to all prospective applicants, placing a high value on diversity of experience and cultural perspectives to build a 21st Century workforce that reflects the diversity of the Nation. Sources for improving diversity will include outreach to Historically Black Colleges/Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges, schools with significant Asian Pacific Islander populations, and other academic institutions focused on underserved communities. SHROs and Diversity and Inclusion Specialists will jointly identify and utilize targeted recruitment outreach sources and advise hiring officials, as appropriate. See Reclamation Manual D&S [HRM 04-04](#), *Pre-recruitment Consultation* for more information.
 - A. **Management Directive 715 (MD-715).** The Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Commission's MD-715 requires agencies to take appropriate steps to ensure that all employment decisions, including promotion and internal placement actions, are free from discrimination. Reclamation must perform an annual self-assessment and develop action plans for the removal of barriers to equal opportunity.
 - B. **Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP).** SHROs and Diversity and Inclusion Specialists must maintain FEORP files (as appropriate) and adopt best practices to promote DEIA efforts through workforce diversity strategic plans.
4. **Strategic Hiring.** Reclamation stakeholders of the MP hiring process include (but are not limited to) the Reclamation Leadership Team (RLT), hiring officials, SHROs, EEO, personnel security, and subject matter experts (SMEs). Appropriate stakeholders will utilize strategic hiring methods during MP hiring while maintaining fair and equitable hiring practices. In order to effectively recruit and acquire top talent for Reclamation, SHROs and EEO will partner to educate and consult hiring officials on various targeted outreach and strategic hiring methods available for effectively and efficiently filling vacancies during the *Pre-Recruitment Consultation* and on an as-needed basis. SHROs will advise and counsel hiring officials on available tools and options to retain Reclamation's top talent. All stakeholders participating in the MP program have an obligation to execute effective hiring solutions most likely to best meet the Reclamation's mission objectives, contribute fresh

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ideas and new viewpoints, and meet Reclamation's affirmative action goals (5 CFR part 335.103).

A. **Hiring Flexibilities.** Hiring officials will consider leveraging flexible hiring authorities and programs during MP hiring alongside the competitive process, prior to the use of contracting with private sector temporary firms ([HRM 04-02](#), *Obtaining Private Sector Temporary Help Services*). Hiring flexibilities include (but are not limited to):

- (1) Non-competitive or special hiring authorities [e.g., Schedule A, Veterans Recruitment Authority (VRA)];
- (2) Inservice placement actions (e.g., reassignment, conversion);
- (3) Direct hire authorities (e.g., Scientific, Technical, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Cybersecurity);
- (4) Federal, DOI, or Reclamation student hiring programs (e.g., Pathways, Resource Assistant Internship); and
- (5) DOI or Reclamation-specific career developmental programs (e.g., Resource Assistance Internships, Rotational Engineers).

B. **Data Analysis.** Stakeholders will use reporting mechanisms such as the MD-715, FEORP, and Time-to-Hire (T2H) datasets to assess and evaluate areas to improve the overall MP hiring process. Hiring officials will practice data-driven decision-making to evaluate the effectiveness of previous recruitment efforts to develop hiring solutions that produce sufficient candidate pools.

C. **Workforce Planning.** Future planning is required to sustain a successful future workforce. Hiring officials will refer to [HRM 15-02](#), *Position Classification and Position Management*, to ensure position management principles are applied prior to beginning MP hiring efforts. When considering MP hiring, stakeholders will refer to workforce and succession plans and ensure recruitment efforts align with forecasted human capital needs and DEIA goals. Strategic hiring practices will align with Reclamation's strategic goals and mission objectives. Mission-critical occupation vacancies will take precedent in MP hiring efforts. Stakeholders must be proactive in planning and forecasting Reclamation human capital needs through continual assessment of current and future knowledge and skills gaps. MP hiring options will be used not only to recruit and retain, but to develop and grow the workforce.

5. **Public Notice and Job Opportunity Announcements (JOA).**

A. **Advertising MP Vacancies.** All Reclamation vacancies and temporary promotions lasting 121 days or more must be advertised using USA Staffing, Reclamation's talent

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acquisition system, and publicized on USAJOBS (www.usajobs.gov), the Federal Government's official website for posting jobs. Exceptions only apply to recruitment associated with reorganizations and budget constraints (see exceptions in paragraph 5.B.(2) below). Hiring officials must notify direct reports of MP opportunities during an approved extended period of absence of five business days or longer.

- B. Area of Consideration (AOC).** Hiring officials, in consultation with the SHRO, will determine the AOC and the length of time a JOA will remain open. The AOC may be as large as Government-wide or as narrow as Reclamation-wide local commuting area (LCA), unless covered by an exception listed in paragraph 5.B.(2) below. AOCs must be sufficiently broad to ensure the availability of high-quality candidates and to consider the nature and level of the positions covered. All AOCs must be set to promote fair and open competition and to attract and maintain a diverse workforce.
- (1) **Requesting Approval to Restrict AOC.** An AOC more restrictive than Reclamation-wide, LCA must be approved by the Reclamation Human Capital Officer (HCO) before a position is advertised, unless the AOC is a result of an exception as listed in paragraph 5.B.(2) below. Requests must be in writing and describe the nature and level of the position, why the restrictive area of consideration is appropriate, and how the restrictive area of consideration will result in high-quality candidates, not violate fair and open competition, and consider similarly situated employees (same line of work, series, and grade level in the organizational entity). In addition, the justification for the restricted area of consideration must include information supporting the fact that there are sufficient internal candidates and must include an estimate of the number of eligible candidates within the proposed AOC.
 - (2) **Exceptions to Requesting Approval to Restrict AOC.** Hiring officials may restrict the area of consideration and the vehicle for announcing positions that are a result of reorganizations or budget constraints. The basis for the exception must be documented in the USA Staffing vacancy case file. Hiring officials must also assure adherence to local workforce diversity outreach plans, which may require mandatory areas of consideration for occupations with low participation rates. For actions that are excepted from competition, see the DOI MPP, Section 1.5.
 - (a) **Reorganization.** In a reorganization where the changed responsibilities of an office or organization require changes to existing positions and grade-levels but no increase to staffing levels, the area of consideration may be restricted to the employees within that organizational entity for competition or selection without competition where appropriate.
 - (b) **Budget Constraints.** If budget constraints prevent a manager from hiring for a new position or increased responsibility, the existing employees within that

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organization may be exclusively considered for promotion to accommodate the new tasks and responsibilities.

- C. **Career Assistance Transition Programs.** Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP) and Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP) program requirements may affect the AOC and open period of the JOA. Priority consideration must be given to any surplus/displaced DOI employee in the LCA. The provisions for granting special selection priority are those described in 5 CFR part 330, Subpart F and G and DOI [PB No. 11-06](#). Receiving SHROs are responsible for adhering to proper clearance procedures when receiving a shared certificate from an Originating SHRO.
- D. **Open Period.** A typical JOA open period (i.e., the duration of the USAJOBS JOA application acceptance timeframe) is ten business days, however, the minimum open period for a MP JOA is five business days. In partnership, SHROs and hiring officials will establish an adequate open period based on the recruitment strategy developed during the *Pre-Recruitment Consultation and Strategic Recruitment Discussion* (refer to [HRM 04-04](#)). Considerations when determining the JOA open period include (but are not limited to) the job analysis, assessment strategy, nature of the position, promotion potential, duty location, previous recruitment efforts, and/or available labor market. Where Standing Registers (or “Open Continuous”) JOAs are used when *many* vacancies exist, or future personnel forecasting approves proactive recruitment, the JOA must clearly specify the nature of the open period.
- E. **Shared Recruitments.** Hiring officials must consider the use of shared recruitments/certificates when seeking candidates for positions that are commonly filled or mission critical. Originating and Receiving SHROs will provide procedural guidance to hiring officials in order to coordinate with internal Reclamation offices or other DOI bureaus for sharing certificates.
6. **Accepting Applications.** Candidates must comply with application procedures as outlined on the JOA to be considered under MP procedures. Application materials [resume, supporting documentation, and responses to the technical questionnaire (TQ)], must be submitted by the closing date of the JOA and by the method(s) specified in the JOA. Candidates must also meet all qualification and eligibility requirements for consideration by the closing date of the announcement, unless the JOA specifies otherwise. Candidates that do not comply with required application procedures as indicated on the JOA will be considered ineligible for further consideration. Hiring Officials and SHROs must assist employees with application submission procedures appropriately, upon request.
- A. **Positions with a Minimum Education Requirement.** Where certain positions require possession of a minimum education, applications will be accepted for candidates that cannot provide proof of degree completion by the close date of the JOA, but instead provide sufficient supporting documentation as proof of degree (e.g., letter from

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University Registrar confirming degree completion date). Official transcripts must be received prior to sending any selectee an official job offer.

- B. **Multiple Hurdle Assessments.** For those JOAs that include multiple hurdle assessments, applicants must comply with assessment procedures as outlined on the JOA and any follow-on instructions and deadlines provided to further evaluate candidate qualifications. This may require candidates to submit further supporting documentation to SHROs after the JOA open period.
 - C. **Late Applicant Filers.** Preference eligibles and non-competitive candidates that request to apply to a JOA after the open period will be directed to apply via USAJOBS under the same Vacancy Identifying Number (VIN) using the “Invite Late Applicant” function. SHROs will initiate the Late Applicant Filer procedures using the applicants’ name and email and grant them access to the online application for 48 hours.
7. **Evaluating Candidates.** SHROs will conduct an initial eligibility and qualification determination for all candidates against predefined evaluation criteria (minimum qualifications, specialized experience, education, selective placement factors, etc.) SMEs will participate in assessment panels as needed to contribute to diverse and holistic evaluation practices when assessing the technical and general competencies of potential candidates and making selections for hire. Hiring officials must ensure interviews are consistent, structured, and that all questions are job-related. Reference checks must be timely, properly conducted, and strive to obtain the same information consistently of each candidate. All stakeholders involved in MP candidate evaluation will adhere to the requirements EO 13932. Refer to the DOI [Assessment Practices Guide](#) for procedural guidance in assessing candidate best practices.
8. **Issuing a Certificate of Eligibles.** SHROs will issue certificates for 30 calendar days to hiring officials, allowing no more than two 30-calendar-day extensions to make candidate selections.
- A. **Approval for Extensions Beyond Initial 90 Days.** HR officers will approve reasonable extension requests beyond the initial 90 days in increments of two weeks at a time, not extending beyond a total of 120 days from the original certificate issuance date. Shared certificates extensions are allowed for up to 240 calendar days from original certificate issuance date. All extension requests and approvals beyond the initial 90 days must be in writing and maintained in the USA Staffing vacancy case file.
 - B. **Reissuing Certificates.** Certificates will be reissued to the originating hiring official by request to allow additional selections to fill subsequent vacancies of identical positions up to 120 days of the initial certificate issuance date. Certificates returned unused cannot be reissued for the same position vacancy; a new certificate attached to a new hiring action request will be issued to a hiring official requesting shared certificate

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access. Certificates will be reissued to hiring officials for 30 days in the case of a candidate withdrawal or declination.

9. **Returning a Certificate of Eligibles.** Hiring officials are responsible for returning certificate reviews to human resources to include a selection justification or non-selection explanation. This will be documented in the certificate review notes or in writing otherwise and filed as an official record in the recruitment case file. Referred candidates will be assigned the appropriate Audit Code on the certificate before returning to the SHRO. If a certificate is to be returned unused and the vacancy is filled through an alternate source, the non-selection explanation and Audit Code will be included and assigned appropriately for recordkeeping, quality review, and auditing purposes.
10. **T2H Reporting Requirements.** Stakeholders will adhere to DOI T2H reporting requirements and collaborate to continually improve MP processes to strengthen the hiring process. SHROs will ensure all data fields are key entered appropriately into USA Staffing for accurate data collection, to include the requirements for reporting on DOI Key Performance Indicators and any other data fields as directed by the HRPO to streamline efficiencies. Refer to [PB 20-09, Time-to-Hire Reporting Requirements](#) and [PB 20-12, Strengthening Departmental Hiring and Vetting Practices](#) for DOI requirements.
11. **Recordkeeping.** SHROs must maintain an electronic case file record for all MP hiring actions and personnel associated through maximum utilization of USA Staffing. Competitive hiring recruitment records will be maintained in the VIN case file documents and non-competitive hiring action records will be maintained in the New Hire case file documents, appropriately. New Hire records must reflect a status of “Complete” within 60 days of a New Hire’s entrance on duty date, to include any required documentation transmitted to the employee’s electronic Official Personnel File (eOPF). Records not authorized to be maintained in an appropriate personnel system or database will be filed and managed in accordance with the Information Management Handbook ([RCD 05-01, Information Management](#)).
12. **Corrective Actions.** SHROs must take immediate action to correct a violation or program deficiency. In order to ensure that actions are processed in accordance with regulatory and/or procedural requirements, corrections of errors will be made as soon as discovery is made.
 - A. **Records.** Case file documentation will include all relevant and sufficient historical data to enable a third-party reviewer to reconstruct a case file.
 - B. **Priority Consideration.** Priority consideration is an effort to correct a prior MP plan violation, such as missed consideration. In accordance with 5 CFR part 335.103(c)(3)(vi), consideration of a candidate not given proper consideration in a competitive promotion action is an exception to competition. The candidate must be notified in writing that they are eligible for a one-time priority referral for a like

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position, i.e., same grade, minimum qualifications, and geographic location of the original competitive announcement. The candidate will be referred, non-competitively, after any available CTAP candidate but before any other candidates. The hiring official is not required to select an individual referred under this corrective action but must give the candidate proper consideration. The hiring official must also provide to the SHRO documentation detailing the reason why the priority candidate was not selected before another certificate of eligibles will be issued.

13. **Accretion of Duties.** In rare circumstances, a non-competitive promotion is a result of the gradual addition of responsibilities to an employee's position. For promotions based on accretion of duties, the requirements and criteria described in the [DOI Position Management and Position Classification Policy Handbook](#), Section 2.17, Accretion of Higher-Graded Duties, must be applied (HRM 15-02). Refer to DOI MPP, Section 10 and Appendix D to verify eligibility and procedural guidance for potential accretion of duties situations.
14. **Interest Announcements (IA) for Temporary Assignments of 120 days or less.** Where timing and budget allows, hiring officials must consider the use of IAs to fill vacancies temporarily (120 days or less) with internal employees while such MP vacancy public notice requirements are being conducted. IAs will be distributed to all Reclamation employees to afford interested, eligible, and qualified candidates such growth opportunities. SHROs will survey internal employees, capture the applicant pool, refer candidates, and coordinate temporary assignments (the use of USA Staffing functions is permitted). Candidates must provide a supervisory endorsement with their application to be considered for the temporary assignment. Hiring officials must coordinate temporary assignments with the supervisor of record for those candidates selected for IA opportunities. Time spent on detail or temporary promotion based on a selection from an IA does not afford non-competitive eligibility for promotion to the permanent vacant position of record.
15. **Definitions.**
 - A. **Accretion of Duties.** The non-competitive promotion of an employee whose position has expanded in responsibility over time and is reclassified at a higher grade due to the additional duties and responsibilities.
 - B. **Area of Consideration.** The organizational and/or geographic boundaries within which eligible candidates may apply to be considered for a specific merit promotion and placement action.
 - C. **Career Transition Assistance Plan.** A legally required Federal program that provides eligible displaced Federal employees with intra-agency selection priority and placement assistance for agency eligible employees who have been identified as surplus and/or displaced due to downsizing or restructuring.

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- D. **Certificate of Eligibles.** A certified document issued to a hiring official containing the names of referred qualified candidates eligible for selection in compliance with appropriate MP procedures. Otherwise referred to as “certificate” or “referral list.”
- E. **Competitive Service.** All civilian positions that are (a) in the executive branch of the Federal Government not specifically excepted from civil service laws (Excepted Service) by or pursuant to statute, the President, or the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and not in the Senior Executive Service; and (b) in the legislative and judicial branches of the Federal Government and in the government of the District of Columbia specifically made subject to the civil service laws by statute.
- F. **Extension of a Certificate.** A request to extend the date a certificate is considered valid beyond the 90-day life of the certificate duration when more time is needed to make a selection.
- G. **Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan.** A legally required Federal program that provides eligible displaced Federal employees who have been identified as surplus and/or displaced due to downsizing or restructuring with interagency selection priority and placement assistance when agencies are recruiting for vacancies outside their respective permanent competitive workforce.
- H. **In Writing.** A form of communication that can be recorded and verified (i.e., email or electronic notification).
- I. **Job Opportunity Announcement.** Public notice of a vacancy that describes all requirements of the vacant position and instructs applicants how to apply to the position. JOAs must be posted on the USAJOBS website as a means of satisfying the competitive procedure requirement. Otherwise referred to as “vacancy announcement.”
- J. **Local Commuting Area.** The geographic area that usually constitutes one area for employment purposes. It includes any population center (or two or more neighboring ones) and the surrounding localities in which people live and can reasonably be expected to travel back and forth daily to their usual employment, (5 part CFR 351.203).
- K. **Mission-Critical Occupations.** Positions that must be filled in order for an agency to perform its core mission.
- L. **Originating SHRO.** The SHRO that initiated a hiring action of a shared recruitment/certificate.
- M. **Pre-Recruitment Consultation and Strategic Recruitment Discussion.** The holistic process for assessing a vacant position through the sharing of statistical workforce data, discussing strategic and targeted recruitment options, and developing assessment and

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selection strategies prior to a position being advertised. Stakeholders involved are HR, EEO, hiring officials, and budget (as applicable).

- N. **Priority Consideration.** The referral of candidates who are entitled to consideration (such as being affected by a reduction-in-force) before other candidates are referred.
- O. **Promotion.** The change of an employee to a higher grade or to a position with a higher representative rate of pay.
- P. **Qualification Determination.** A decision regarding whether an individual is minimally qualified for a particular position.
- Q. **Receiving SHRO.** The SHRO that requests a Certificate of Eligibles (i.e., a shared certificate) from an Originating SHRO.
- R. **Reclamation Leadership Team.** Reclamation's Executive Schedule, Senior Executive Service, and Senior Leaders positions comprise the RLT.
- S. **Reissuing of a Certificate.** A request to reissue a certificate to allow additional selections to be made for other positions after a selection being made. The initial certificate is audited and closed out by the SHRO and may be reissued only for selections to fill new vacancies of identical positions or in the event of a declination or withdrawal.
- T. **Shared Recruitments.** A process allowing multiple hiring managers across different organizational functions to select candidates from one (shared) recruitment source if a vacancy recruitment meets eligibility criteria to be shared; otherwise referred to as "Shared Certificates."
- U. **Subject Matter Expert.** A person with bona fide expert knowledge about what it takes to do a particular job. Former and current first-level supervisors are normally good SMEs. Superior incumbents in the same or very similar positions and other individuals may also be used as SMEs if they have current and thorough knowledge of the job's requirements. An SME may provide input on qualifications determinations if they are not the Selecting Official and if all applicant identifying information has been removed. An SME who provides input on qualification determinations should not be a panel member.
- V. **Temporary Promotion.** A promotion to a higher-graded position for a specified period of time to accomplish project work; temporarily fill positions pending recruitment, reorganization, or downsizing; or meet other temporary needs.
- W. **Technical Questionnaire.** An assessment method used to screen and rate job applicants' technical capabilities through self-ratings of training and experience. The

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TQ is also used to screen-out candidates that self-report to lack eligibility or minimally qualifying experience requirements; otherwise referred to as “Occupational Questionnaire” or “Assessment Questionnaire.”

- X. **Time-to-Hire.** A term for the data metrics used to track the time it takes to recruit and hire vacancies, measure the quality and speed of hiring, and report results to OPM annually.
 - Y. **USA Staffing.** Reclamation’s talent acquisition system used to recruit, evaluate, assess, certify, select, and onboard talent.
 - Z. **Workforce Planning.** A systematic process used to align the mission and goals of an organization with the personnel needed to meet those goals.
16. **Review Period.** The originating office will review this release every 4 years.

RECLAMATION MANUAL TRANSMITTAL SHEET

Effective Date: _____

Release No. _____

Ensure all employees needing this information are provided a copy of this release.

Reclamation Manual Release Number and Subject

Summary of Changes

NOTE: This Reclamation Manual release applies to all Reclamation employees. When an exclusive bargaining unit exists, changes to this release may be subject to the provisions of collective bargaining agreements.

Filing instructions

Remove Sheets

Insert Sheets

All Reclamation Manual releases are available at <http://www.usbr.gov/recman/>

Filed by: _____

Date: _____