

# Reclamation Manual

## Directives and Standards

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<b>Subject:</b>	Priority Placement Plan
<b>Purpose:</b>	This Directive and Standard (D&S) details the Priority Placement Plan (PPP) requirements for employees in the General Schedule or the Federal Wage System, or equivalent, who are eligible for grade and pay retention under the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978. The benefit of this D&S is ensuring consistent utilization and understanding of the plan.
<b>Authority:</b>	5 United States Code (USC) 5362, <i>Grade Retention</i> ; 5 USC 5363, <i>Pay Retention</i> ; 5 USC 5364, <i>Remedial Actions</i> ; 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 536.401, <i>Placement and Classification Plans</i> ; 5 CFR 330 Subpart F, <i>Agency Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP) for Local Surplus and Displaced Employees</i>
<b>Approving Official:</b>	Deputy Commissioner – Policy, Administration and Budget (PAB) (Policy)
<b>Contact:</b>	Human Resources Division, Human Resources (HR) Policy Office (HRPO), 84-121000

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1. **Introduction.** Title 5 USC 5364 provides that agencies are required to establish a plan under which employees receiving benefits under 5 USC 5362 or 5363 are provided with priority consideration for placement in positions which are equal to their retained grade or pay. This D&S specifically covers employees who are entitled to grade or pay retention: (1) whose positions have been reduced in grade by reclassification, (2) who are placed in a lower graded position after declining to transfer with their function when it is moved outside their local commuting area; and (3) who have been placed in lower graded positions as a result of reduction in force (RIF). For information regarding other types of priority placement please see [Department of the Interior Personnel Bulletin No: 11-06, the Career Transition Assistance Plan \(CTAP\)](#) and/or [5 CFR 330, Subpart G](#), the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP) for Displaced Employees.
2. **Applicability.** This D&S applies to all Bureau of Reclamation General Schedule and Federal Wage System employees (or equivalent), who are eligible for grade and/or pay retention under the CSRA of 1978.
3. **Coverage Under PPP.**
  - A. **Eligibility.** All career and career-conditional competitive and excepted service employees are automatically covered under the PPP when they become entitled to receive grade retention and/or pay retention.

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### B. Non-Competitive Referral for PPP Covered Positions.

- (1) All PPP registrants must be determined by their servicing human resources office (SHRO) to be at least minimally qualified and must meet any selective factors for the position before they are referred for a vacancy, detail, or temporary promotion opportunity.
- (2) PPP registrants will be referred for positions up to and including the grade they are entitled to retain when they are eligible and qualified.
- (3) All referrals will be in writing.
- (4) PPP registrants will not be referred to positions graded equal to or lower than the grade placed upon eligibility for PPP.
- (5) Positions to which PPP registrants are referred must meet the criteria for a reasonable offer. Offers of positions in locations other than the PPP registrant's local commuting area are not considered reasonable offers but may be offered to make a PPP registrant whole.
- (6) PPP registrants will be referred for positions within the same service (competitive or excepted) only.
- (7) Referral of PPP registrant(s) to the hiring official will occur before initiating other means to fill the vacancy (e.g. job announcement, non-competitive candidate, etc.).

### C. Exceptions to PPP placement. The following actions are excepted from PPP coverage:

- (1) Actions requiring compliance with regulatory or statutory provisions (e.g., actions as a result of settlement agreements).
- (2) Placement actions involving individuals listed on the Department's Special Selection Priority List.
- (3) Reassignments that can be made without reducing placement opportunities for PPP registrants entitled to assistance under this D&S, such as when an employee is reassigned from one region to another, and a second vacancy is created by the reassignment that may be filled by a PPP registrant.

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- (4) Reassignments and changes where a position, its associated full-time equivalent (FTE), and the person occupying the position moves from one region to another, and no actual vacancy or addition to FTE totals is created.
- (5) Subsequent career promotions or promotions within a grade-banded position after initial competition.
- (6) Non-competitive accretion of duties promotions when no additional FTE is created, and the accreted duties would not make a PPP registrant whole.
- (7) Actions that extend temporary appointments and temporary promotions when the original action was excepted from CTAP selection priority and the original announcement or notice stated that the promotion could be extended without further competition.
- (8) Conversions of employees that are currently serving under an appointment that affords non-competitive conversion eligibility to a competitive service appointment, provided that 1) the conversion would not be within the grade range to place a PPP registrant, 2) a PPP registrant would not have been minimally qualified for the position, 3) placement into the position would not change FTE totals, and 4) placement in the position would not be considered a reasonable job offer for a PPP registrant. Examples of appointments under this exception are:
  - (a) Veterans Recruitment Appointment under 5 CFR 307;
  - (b) an appointment under 5 USC 3112 and 5 CFR 316 of a veteran with a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more;
  - (c) an excepted service appointment under 5 CFR 213.3102(u) of persons with intellectual disabilities, severe physical disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities; and
  - (d) an excepted service appointment in the Pathways Program as an Intern-indefinite, Recent Graduate, or a Presidential Management Fellow. For more detailed information about the Pathways Program, please see [5 CFR 362](#).
- (9) Position changes based on reasonable accommodation.
- (10) Reassignment or change to lower grade of an PPP registrant under 5 CFR 315.907 for failing to complete a supervisory or managerial probationary period.
- (11) Reassignment or change to lower grade as a result of a performance issue covered under [5 USC Chapter 43, Performance Appraisal](#).

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- (12) Details and temporary promotions of less than 120 days.
- (13) PPP registrants will not be automatically referred for positions utilizing their own eligibility for special employment program appointing authorities such as Schedule A, VRA, Pathways, etc. If PPP registrants are interested in being considered for employment under one of these special or appointing authorities, they must apply to and compete for selection with all other interested and qualified candidates.

**D. Effective Date of Eligibility.** Employee eligibility under the PPP begins on the effective date of the action that officially decreases the grade or pay of the employee's position.

**E. Loss of PPP Eligibility Based on Loss of Grade Retention.**

- (1) All career and career-conditional competitive and excepted service PPP registrants automatically lose their entitlement to receive grade retention and therefore inclusion in PPP when they:
  - (a) have a break in service of one working day or more;
  - (b) are reduced in grade for personal cause or at their personal request;
  - (c) are placed in a position where the grade is equal to or higher than their retained grade;
  - (d) decline a reasonable offer of a position, the grade of which is equal to or higher than the retained grade;
  - (e) elect in writing to have the benefits of grade retention terminated; or
  - (f) fail to enroll in, or to comply with, written requirements established to assure full consideration under the PPP.
- (2) The effective date for loss of grade retention and therefore inclusion in the PPP will be:
  - (a) at the end of the day before separation from service if the break in service results from a termination;
  - (b) at the end of the day before placement if the PPP registrant is made whole or is placed at their request or for personal cause; or

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- (c) on the last day of the pay period for all other reasons listed for losing grade retention.

### F. **Loss of PPP Eligibility Based on Loss of Pay Retention.**

- (1) All career and career-conditional competitive and excepted service PPP registrants automatically lose their entitlement for pay retention and therefore coverage under the PPP when they:
  - (a) have a break in service of one working day or more;
  - (b) are reduced in grade for personal cause or at their personal request;
  - (c) become entitled to a rate of basic pay which is equal to, or higher than, their retained rate; or
  - (d) decline a reasonable offer of a position, the rate of which is equal to, or higher than, the PPP registrant's retained rate.
- (2) The effective date for loss of pay retention and therefore coverage under the PPP will be:
  - (a) at the end of the day before separation from service if the break in service results from a termination;
  - (b) at the end of the day before the PPP registrant becomes entitled to pay equal to or greater than the PPP registrant's retained pay (as a result of a permanent job placement, not a temporary action such as a temporary promotion); or
  - (c) at the end of the last day of the pay period for all other reasons listed for losing pay retention.

## 4. **Procedures and Processes.**

### A. **Employee Action.**

- (1) Obtain information provided by their SHRO to educate them about the PPP, including program eligibility and termination.
- (2) Provide complete and accurate information, as requested, to their SHRO.
- (3) Within three working days of being notified of program eligibility, PPP eligible employees must provide their SHRO with a resume/application and any supporting information they wish to provide to support their eligibility and

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qualifications for position(s). Extensions may be granted by servicing HR Officers.

- (4) Ensure that the information and documentation they have submitted to their SHRO remains complete and accurate over the entire time they are a PPP registrant. PPP registrants are free to revise or update this information as needed/necessary.
- (5) PPP registrants who are given written reasonable job offers must provide a written decision accepting or declining that job offer to their SHRO within three working days of receipt of the offer. Extensions may be granted by servicing HR Officers.
- (6) Non-receipt of a written decision to a job offer from a PPP registrant, within the timeframe established in Paragraph 4.A.(5), will be considered a declination which will result in the PPP registrant losing entitlement to pay or grade retention and being removed from the SHRO's PPP list.
- (7) PPP registrants are not entitled to pick which locations, offices, supervisors, etc. in which they wish to be referred or not referred.

**B. Hiring Official's Action.** Hiring officials must:

- (1) Submit written documentation to their SHRO regarding vacant positions, detail positions, accretion action, and temporary promotion and placement opportunities that they wish to fill.
- (2) Actively work with their SHRO to make PPP registrants whole by giving appropriate consideration of PPP registrants to fill vacant PPP covered positions, details, temporary promotions, and other opportunities.
- (3) Provide PPP registrants selected for positions training opportunities to become better qualified for their positions.
- (4) Consult with the SHRO on accretion of duties actions to determine if the additional duties could be assigned to and performed by a PPP registrant.
- (5) Not request advance review of a PPP registrant's qualifications prior to providing their SHRO with information regarding the vacant positions, details, accretion actions, and, temporary promotion and placement opportunities they wish to fill.
- (6) Not ask the SHRO the names of PPP registrants.

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- (7) Request their SHRO apply selective factors, if required for the position, when making qualification determinations.
  - (8) Not initiate other means to fill PPP covered positions (e.g. job announcement, non-competitive candidate, etc.) for which PPP registrants are being considered until a final official decision is made regarding the PPP referrals.
  - (9) Consider conducting interviews and reference checks when PPP registrants are tentatively selected to fill a position within their organization.
  - (10) Submit justification packets to the SHRO regarding non-selection of PPP registrants. Justification must include job and mission-related rationale associated with the position.
  - (11) Work with SHROs to make considerable effort to retain PPP registrants that lack specialized knowledge in a program area when they possess skills or potential to perform in other positions.
- C. **SHRO Action.** (Please note: Steps 8 through 13 must be accomplished in order and each step must be completed before the next step is undertaken. Steps 8 through 13 occur prior to initiating other means to fill the vacancy, such as advertising a job announcement or reviewing a non-competitive candidate). SHROs must:
- (1) Notify PPP eligible employees, in writing, of placement on grade or pay retention and register them appropriately.
  - (2) Notify PPP registrants, in writing, of pay or grade retention termination.
  - (3) Obtain the most recent and available copy of the eligible PPP employee's resume from the automated hiring system, or Electronic Official Personnel Folder when the employee (whose grade retention entitlement was not based on 5 CFR 536.202, optional grade retention) does not provide updated information to their SHRO within three working days of being notified of program eligibility.
  - (4) Maintain a file of current PPP registrants in their region.
  - (5) Consult with hiring officials on possible accretion of duty actions to address whether the duties could be assigned to and performed by a PPP registrant.
  - (6) Ensure managers and supervisors give priority consideration to PPP registrants referred to them for placement in vacant positions in accordance with this D&S.

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- (7) Create an activity log for tracking PPP referral activity that includes, at a minimum:
  - (a) PPP registrant(s) name, position title, series, retained grade and/or salary;
  - (b) PPP registrant(s) geographical location;
  - (c) referral actions accomplished for each PPP registrant (date referred, position, office and geographic location, results of each referral including any non-selections that were upheld); and
  - (d) any other information pertinent to explain the activities that occurred and the opportunities for which the PPP registrants were considered.
- (8) Upon official receipt of vacant PPP covered position information, review PPP registrant resumes/applications to determine qualifications and eligibility (e.g. selective factors, suitability).
- (9) Forward resume/application packets of PPP registrants, by non-competitive priority referral, to hiring officials for PPP covered positions which the individuals are eligible, meet any selective factors, and are minimally qualified.
- (10) Review referral information for PPP registrants received back from hiring officials to determine whether justifications and activities follow PPP procedures.
- (11) Forward all priority referrals and justifications received from hiring officials that result in non-selection of a PPP eligible to the servicing HR Officer for review and approval.
- (12) After the servicing HR Officer has issued the official decision referenced in Paragraph 4.C.(11) above, depending upon the outcome, the SHRO will:
  - (a) complete normal placement activities for the selectee;
  - (b) if a non-selection of a PPP registrant was not approved, return the vacant position to the originating hiring official without action; or
  - (c) if a non-selection of a PPP registrant was approved, continue the recruitment process by posting a job opportunity announcement or initiating a non-competitive action.
- (13) If applicable, the SHRO will provide a copy of the approved non-selection justification to the individual PPP registrant that was referred but not selected.



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- (14) Provide the outcome of qualification determinations and reconsideration requests, in writing, to PPP registrants.
- (15) Work with hiring officials to make considerable effort to retain PPP registrants that lack specialized knowledge in a program area when they possess skills or potential to perform in other positions.
- (16) Forward requests to except a vacancy from being filled by PPP registrants to the servicing HR Officer for review and approval.
- (17) Submit a copy of SHRO logs for PPP to the Supervisor, HRPO, at the end of each fiscal year. The Supervisor, HRPO, may request more frequent reporting for an extended period of time, if needed (for example, an ongoing RIF is being conducted).
- (18) Establish or review current written operating procedures within 120 calendar days from the date of this release to ensure compliance and implementation of this D&S within their region or offices, including partnerships with unions.

D. **Records.** Records must be maintained by SHROs, covering all placement and referral activities related to the PPP and must be made available for Department and Reclamation accountability. These records shall not be destroyed until they are reviewed as part of a Human Capital Accountability review conducted under the Department's policy on human capital accountability and program evaluation ([Personnel Bulletin No. 19-10](#)). Other records to be maintained include:

- (1) a listing of all PPP registrants (by fiscal year) under the PPP, showing whether they are on grade or pay retention, the reason for that retention, and the dates they became eligible for or were terminated from the plan;
- (2) a listing of positions for which PPP registrants were referred that shows date of referral, title, series, grade of the position, and indicates how the vacant position was filled;
- (3) a copy of all justification packets received and approved where valid non selection of a PPP registrant was allowed by the servicing HR Officer; and
- (4) a copy of all requests that were approved by the servicing HR Officer to except a vacancy from being filled by a PPP covered registrant.

E. **Requests for Reconsideration and Appeals and Complaint Information.**

- (1) **Requests for Reconsideration of Qualification Determination.**

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- (a) PPP registrants may request a reconsideration of their qualification determination from their SHRO when they do not agree with the qualification determination that the initial HR Specialist made related to registration and/or possible referral. The first reconsideration will be conducted by an alternate HR Specialist that did not make the initial determination.
  - (b) PPP registrants may request a second reconsideration of their qualification determination, from the HR staffing supervisor or servicing HR officer, when they do not agree with the first reconsideration of qualification determination made by the alternate HR Specialist.
  - (c) For a reconsideration of qualification determination (first or second) PPP registrants must request the reconsideration and explain, in writing, why they feel the rating decision was improper. PPP registrants are not allowed to provide new or additional information if the reconsideration is in reference to a current referral action.
  - (d) The decision arrived at by the HR staffing supervisor or servicing HR officer will be in writing and may not be appealed to higher HR authority or OPM.
- (2) **Appeal of Termination of Grade or Pay Retention.**
- (a) A PPP registrant, whose grade or pay retention benefits are terminated on the grounds of having declined a reasonable offer, may appeal the termination to OPM, in writing, no later than 20 calendar days after being notified that grade or pay retention benefits have been terminated.
  - (b) Appeals based on termination of grade or pay retention must include the reasons why the individual believes the job offer is not a reasonable offer.
  - (c) Decisions issued by OPM regarding appeals of termination of grade or pay retention are final. OPM, at its discretion, may reconsider a decision only when new and material information is presented in writing that established doubt as to the appropriateness of the original action.
  - (d) A request for reconsideration of an original appeal decision from OPM must be submitted within 30 calendar days of the date of the original decision.
- (3) **Other Appeals and Complaint Information.** Depending upon the issue covered, PPP registrants must address the matter by:
- (a) discussing the issue with their SHROs;

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- (b) utilizing the Department's formal or informal administrative grievance procedures ([370 DM 752](#));
- (c) following the guidance contained in the negotiated grievance procedures section of their negotiated bargaining unit agreement, if applicable;
- (d) contacting the [Merit Systems Protection Board](#);
- (e) filing a complaint with the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#); or
- (f) filing a complaint with the [Office of Special Counsel](#).

### 5. 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. **Break in Service.** For purposes of PPP and grade/pay retention, a break in service is a separation from Federal service of one working day or more before an employee is reemployed in a Federal civilian service position.
- C. **Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP).** A Federal placement program that provides priority consideration for job opportunities to certain individuals who have been or will be adversely impacted by Federal downsizing activities.
- D. **Classification.** A determination to establish or change the title, series, or grade and pay system of a position based on application of published position classification standards or guides. For this D&S, the classification actions specifically covered would have resulted in a loss of grade or pay. Also referred to as "reclassification."
- E. **Competitive Area.** A competitive area establishes the geographic or organizational boundaries within which employees compete for retention under the RIF regulations. Refer to OPM's *Workforce Reshaping Operations Handbook* dated March 2017, and PB No. 12-09, *Establishing and Maintaining Competitive Areas*.
- F. **Grade Retention.** An employee entitlement to retain the grade held immediately before being placed in a lower-graded position under the same or a different covered pay system when the position has been reduced in grade as a result of a reclassification process or RIF. Depending upon the situation, payment of grade retention may be mandatory or optional. For more information see 5 CFR 536, Subpart B.

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- G. **In Writing.** A form of communication that can be recorded and verified (i.e. email or electronic notification).
- H. **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 CFR 351.203).
- I. **Make Whole.** An action that places a PPP registrant into a position similar or equivalent to the position encumbered directly before becoming eligible for the PPP.
- J. **Pay Retention.** An employee entitlement to retain the rate of basic pay held immediately before a management action that would otherwise reduce that pay, such as automatic expiration of grade retention, a classification or reclassification action that places an employee in a lower-graded position when the employee does not meet the eligibility requirements for grade retention, a management action that places an employee under a different pay schedule, or RIF. Depending upon the situation, payment of grade retention may be mandatory or optional. For more information, see 5 CFR 536, Subpart C.
- K. **Position of Record.** An employee's official position, as documented on the employee's most recent Notification of Personnel Action and current position description. Detail and temporary promotion actions are not considered to be an employee's position of record.
- L. **PPP Covered Position.** A vacant position that is not subject to an action listed in Section G of this D&S.
- M. **PPP Eligible Employee.** An employee that has become eligible for placement in the PPP, but has not yet been registered by the SHRO.
- N. **PPP Registrant.** An employee that is currently eligible and registered on the regional SHRO PPP list.
- O. **Priority Consideration.** The referral and consideration of candidates who are entitled (based on the three conditions described in Section 1 of this document), before considering other candidates.
- P. **Qualification Determination.** A decision regarding whether or not a candidate meets the minimum qualification requirements for positions as prescribed by OPM at the time of PPP registration and/or possible referral.

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- Q. **Reasonable Offer.** A reasonable offer is defined as an offer that meets all of the following conditions:
- (1) the offer is in writing and includes an official position description for the offered position;
  - (2) informs the PPP registrant that entitlement to grade or pay retention will terminate if the offer is declined and the PPP registrant may appeal the reasonableness of the offer as provided in [5 CFR 536.402](#) and Section 4.E(2)a of this D&S;
  - (3) is of equal tenure to the PPP registrant's position held before the action resulting in entitlement to grade or pay retention (i.e., permanent PPP registrants are only considered for permanent positions);
  - (4) has the same work schedule as the position held before the action resulting in entitlement to grade or pay retention (part-time PPP registrants are only considered for positions with a part-time work schedule or full-time PPP registrants only considered for positions with a full-time work schedule); and
  - (5) is in the same local commuting area, within the boundaries of the SHRO region, as the PPP registrant's position held immediately before the offer.
- R. **Reduced in Grade or Pay at the Employee's Request.** A reduction in grade or rate of basic pay that is initiated by the employee for personal benefit, convenience, or personal advantage, including the voluntary reduction in grade or pay of an employee in response to a management action directly related to personal cause. This is also referred to as a voluntary change to lower grade.
- S. **Reduced in Grade or Pay for Personal Cause.** A reduction in grade or rate of basic pay based on the conduct, character, or unacceptable performance of an employee. In situations in which an employee is reduced in grade or pay for inability to perform the duties of the position because of a medical or physical condition beyond the employee's control, the reduction in grade or pay is no considered to be for personal cause. This is also referred to as an involuntary change to lower grade.
- T. **Regional, Directorate, and Office Operating Procedures.** Regional, directorate, or office operating procedures that establish requirements for implementing this D&S, address situations where competitive areas with overlapping geographic areas, and specify any exceptions allowed, such as whether PPP registrants may be considered for positions that may require relocation.

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- (1) Deputy Commissioners and Denver/Washington Directorates will establish joint operating procedures that will be applicable to all directorate offices regardless of where the offices are headquartered.
  - (2) Regions will establish operating procedures that will be applicable to all offices that are officially assigned to that region.
  - (3) Deputy Commissioners, directorates, and regions will provide a copy of their operating procedures to the Supervisor, HRPO for retention.
- U. **RIF.** A management process that may be required for such reasons as reorganization, lack of work, shortage of funds, insufficient personnel ceiling, or the exercise of certain reemployment or restoration rights. A furlough of more than 30 calendar days or of more than 22 discontinuous calendar days is also a RIF. Agencies must follow the mandatory operational procedures issued by OPM to ensure compliance with merit systems laws and regulations before separating or reducing an employee's grade. For additional information on RIF procedures, see [5 CFR 351](#).
- V. **Selective Placement Factor.** Mandatory knowledge, skills, and abilities that are essential for successful performance in the position to be filled, in addition to the basic qualifications outlined in OPM Qualification Standards. Applicants and/or employees not meeting this factor are ineligible for further consideration. Selective placement factors must be job related and their validity documented through job analysis and the position description.
- W. **Suitability.** A term defined by OPM used to refer to an individual's character, and conduct sufficient to decide whether employment, or continued employment, would protect the integrity or promote the efficiency of the service (5 CFR part 731).
- X. **Work Schedule.** The period of time within a 2-week period when an employee is regularly scheduled, in advance, to work.

## 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: \_\_\_\_\_