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Bulletin

Title: Use of the Foreign Travel Information System

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Originating Office: Travel and Relocation Services Branch
Financial Management Division, AFM/ARS

Distribution: All ARS Employees

This bulletin updates ARS policy on using FTIS to obtain agency approval of foreign travel and as the source of information for reporting proposed foreign travel to the Office of the Secretary for approval. Information in this bulletin will be incorporated into Policy and Procedure 344.2, Foreign Travel Plans, at a later date.

The Foreign Travel Information System (FTIS)

The Foreign Travel Information System (FTIS) is an automated database within the Agricultural Research Information System (ARIS) that contains information about all foreign travel for Agricultural Research Service (ARS) employees as well as foreign travel for non-ARS personnel when funded by ARS. FTIS assists in planning, approving and tracking foreign travel, collecting information on the benefits of foreign travel through foreign trip report highlights and accomplishments, and tracking official passports.

ARS Foreign Travel Policy

- It is ARS policy that foreign travel, whether to attend international meetings or conduct work-related research activities, shall contribute to the goals of ARS and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) research initiatives.
- All foreign travel plans will be entered into the FTIS. This includes travel to attend international meetings and other work related travel.
- Foreign travel will be entered and approved through the Area Director in FTIS at least 45 days prior to the planned departure date.
 - In the event that a situation arises where a last minute request necessitates foreign travel within 45 days of a planned departure date, the following two exceptions will be considered:
 1. The inviting organization changes the schedule of a planned meeting/conference, or
 2. An emerging issue related to a Research, Education, and Economics (REE) or USDA priority requires unanticipated foreign travel.
 - A justification memo must be attached to the FTIS record, clearly state the reason for the short notice, and signed by the Agency Administrator's Office (OA)/Staff Director, or Area Director.
- Foreign travel entered into FTIS will be promptly reviewed and approved by the authorizing official, or returned to the travel office for more information if deemed necessary.
- Foreign travel for the purpose of attending an international meeting shall be identified with an international meeting number in FTIS so that the agency can identify all employees requesting to attend a particular meeting.
- Weekly, the Travel and Relocation Services Branch (TRSB), Financial Management Division, will compile a report of all approved foreign travel in FTIS and submit the requested travel to the Office of the Secretary for USDA approval.
- Use of FTIS does not replace the necessity to obtain a travel authorization in GovTrip or the requirements to obtain an official passport, entry visas when required, and country clearance.

Foreign Travel Excluded from the FTIS

- Travel to relocate to a permanent duty station in or from a foreign country.
- Home leave travel.
- Travel within the countries of assignment for employees stationed at overseas duty stations.
- Travel by employees working under a United States Agency for International Development Participating Agency Service Agreement.

Criteria for Approving Travel

Managers at each organizational level will screen and submit trip requests to the next management level. Managers at different levels will consider travel requests from different perspectives.

The following criteria are not inclusive, but should be used to place emphasis on the relationship and the merit of the foreign travel in accomplishing the mission of ARS.

- **Purpose of Travel.** The purpose of travel should support the program priorities as established in the ARS Program Plan and contribute either directly or indirectly to the accomplishment of priority research projects.
- **The Role of the Employee.** Employees who are approved to travel should have a high level of participation in the purpose of the travel (e.g., chairing a meeting session or presenting a scientific paper would involve a higher degree of participation than just attending a scientific meeting). The employee's assignments or areas of specialty should be directly related to the purpose of the travel. Additionally, employees should possess the necessary knowledge and skills to participate and accomplish the goals and objectives of the travel.
- **Benefits of the Travel.** The anticipated benefits of the travel should be evaluated in light of the ARS Program Plan and in terms of the specific programs on which it impacts. Benefits should be applicable to ongoing research.
- **Relationship with Requesting Organization.** The ARS Program Plan calls for close coordination with other research organizations in and out of USDA, the action agencies in USDA, and other organizations that use ARS' research findings. When making a decision to recommend or approve a travel request, approving officials should consider whether cooperating with the requesting sponsoring organization will further the goals of the ARS Program Plan.
- **Annual Leave.** Recommending and approving officials should consider the effect of the use of annual leave on the employee's research projects at his/her official duty station. Recommending and approving officials should also consider the use of excessive leave when approving foreign travel. Employees should avoid taking excessive amounts of annual leave in conjunction with official travel

and avoid the appearance that the travel has more of a personal than an official benefit. The guideline is that leave days should not exceed the number of work days when on official travel.

- **Impact to the Unit.** No more than one-fourth of the scientists in a unit may attend the same meeting. Managers must consider the affect of the travel on the overall budget of a unit before approving foreign travel.
- **Employee Travel History.** The approving official may want to consider other qualified employees who have not attended the meeting or have attended less frequently but can represent ARS.
- **Employee Travel Current Year Plan.** Managers should consider the overall travel plan for an employee, including the amount of domestic travel when recommending or approving foreign travel.
- **Performance.** Employees on Performance Improvement Plans are not to be approved for foreign travel.

Procedures for Approving Foreign Travel in FTIS

Responsible Person/Office	Action	Timeframe
Areas/Office of National Programs	Submit international meeting names, dates, city, and country to TRSB for inclusion in the international meeting table.	Ongoing as meeting is known.
TRSB	Enter international meeting names as submitted and assign number.	Within 24 hours of request.
Traveler/Location	Submit foreign travel requests in accordance with instructions contained in the FTIS User Manual. Traveler/Location is responsible for keeping data current in FTIS.	As soon as meeting/travel request is known.
Research Leaders	Review, screen, and approve/disapprove requests according to criteria stated in this document. Approved request are prioritized and forwarded to Area Director for Approval.	No later than two weeks after foreign travel request.

Area Director	Approve/disapprove foreign travel request.	2 weeks after request is received, but no later than 45 days prior to planned departure date.
TRSB	Consolidate report of approved foreign travel.	Weekly. Submit report to DAAFM.
DAAFM	Review weekly report. Refer questions to Areas for clarification. Clear list through Associate Administrator, Research Management and Operations (AA-RMO).	
OA	Recommend approval/disapproval of foreign travel	
DAAFM	Submit final report to REE.	Upon clearance from OA.
TRSB	Enter Office of Secretary (OSEC) Approval in FTIS when received.	Within one day of OSEC notification.

Trip Reports

Upon completion of foreign travel, the employee will prepare a mandatory trip report. The report will be a brief digest highlighting the basic accomplishments of the trip and should include personnel contacted, achievements, actual cost of the trip, etc. This trip report is not in lieu of any requirement for a more detailed trip report that may be required by the Area Director or supervisor. FTIS trip reports must be entered within 15 working days of the completion of the travel.

Accessing and Using FTIS

Employees who wish to access FTIS must have supervisory approval. Their supervisor may request their access to FTIS by completing the REE from 235, *User Registration Form (ARIS, ARMPS, ATS, CATS, FDMIS, MAT, SAMS and WATS)* found on the REE eForms site.

Procedures for using FTIS are contained in Chapter 14 of the *Agricultural Research Information System Online Handbook*. This document is found at <http://www.npstaff.ars.usda.gov/ARIS/Manual/>. Chapter 14 contains instructions on the specific information that must be entered for foreign travel approval, including approval from OSEC. See Attachment 1 for specific information on the data fields in FTIS that must be completed for OSEC approval.

FTIS users should contact the ARIS Help Desk at ARIS@ARS.USDA.GOV for assistance with technical issues and password issuance and resetting passwords.

FTIS Training

TRSB offers training on using the FTIS system. Employees interested in taking FTIS training may enroll in the class through AgLearn, under the “ARIS-Foreign Travel Information System (FTIS) Training” offering. FTIS training is provided several times throughout the year.

S. M. HELMRICH
Director
Financial Management Division

Attachment 1

Required Information in FTIS for OSEC Reporting

Adding OSEC information to FTIS

Additional information to support OSEC foreign travel approval must be entered into FTIS. The following instructions and screen shots were designed to assist the travel arranger with navigating the new requirements.

New *OSEC Data* Button:

When all legs are added, click on the “OSEC Data” button on the “Trip Legs” screen to add required information and save prior to moving to other screens. OSEC information must be entered *for each leg* by selecting the OSEC Data button.

The screenshot shows the ARIS - Agricultural Research Information System interface. The main window title is "ARIS - Agricultural Research Information System" and the application title is "Agricultural Research Information System (ARIS) - Work". The menu bar includes "File", "Edit", "Action", "Record", "Prints", and "Help". The main content area is titled "Foreign Travel Records" and displays a form for a traveler named "ADAMS, DONALD, A" with a "Begin Date" of "05/30/2010", an "End Date" of "06/05/2010", and a "Travel Year" of "2010". Below the form is a table with the following columns: "Leg Code", "Begin Date", "End Date", "Country", "Primary", and "OSEC Data". The first row of the table is highlighted in yellow and contains the values "A", "05/30/2010", "06/05/2010", "CANADA", and "N". The "OSEC Data" column has a blue arrow button pointing up. A green callout bubble with the text "Add OSEC DATA" points to this button. Below the table are three buttons: "Details", "Add Leg", and "Delete Leg". At the bottom of the screen, a status bar displays the message "FRM-40400: Transaction complete: 1 records applied and saved." and "Record: 1/1".

Selecting the OSEC Data button will display the OSEC Details Screen. Enter the Role of Traveler and the Benefit to USDA and select “Save” (Note: The Report Name/Number is “grayed out” and will be completed by TRSB when submitted to OSEC for consideration)

The screenshot shows a software window titled "DSEC Details". It contains several input fields: "Leg" (A), "Begin Date" (08/20/2000), "End Date" (08/22/2000), "City / Country of Travel" (MONTREAL), "Report Name/Number" (FY10-TEST1), and "CANADA". Below these are two larger text areas: "Role of Traveler" containing "test role" and "Benefit to USDA" containing "test benefit". A green callout bubble points to the "Role of Traveler" field with the text "Enter Role". Another green callout bubble points to the "Benefit to USDA" field with the text "Enter Benefit". At the bottom of the window are "Save" and "Cancel" buttons.

Role of Traveler

The role of the traveler should specifically state the tasks and/or responsibilities of the traveler as they relate to the individual leg of the trip.

Sufficient Response:

Technical expert on agricultural international collaborations between the US and Pakistan

Insufficient Response:

Attending conference

Benefit to USDA

The benefit to USDA must be clearly stated and concise. Simply being invited to attend an event is not sufficient; the justification must indicate how the travel or attendance at a meeting or conference will specifically benefit the mission of the Agency and USDA. Simply stating that the trip ties in to a USDA or ARS priority is not sufficient. There needs to be an explanation of how the trip ties into the priority and how it provides a benefit under that priority.

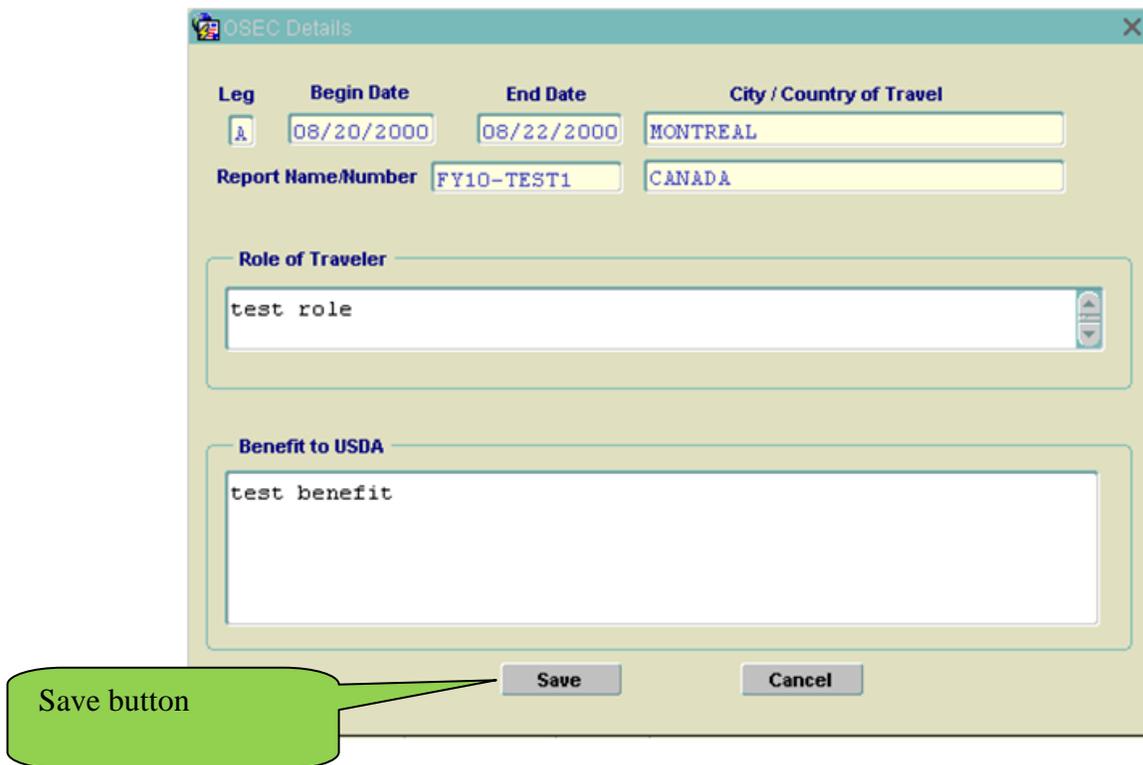
Sufficient Response:

One of the challenges in current mass spectrometry (MS)-based proteomics field is the rapid development cycle for new analytical tools and associated technologies. Developing and implementing the relevant technologies and skills become increasingly important to those involved with applying proteomics techniques in agricultural research. By attending this meeting, I will have the opportunity to facilitate the exchange of scientific ideas, knowledge and information to promote the application of proteomic. The meeting is an excellent forum for evaluating the latest technology because all the major mass spectrometry vendors and proteomics software supplies will present their latest development.

Insufficient Response:

The travel will benefit both USDA and ARS because it ties to REE Priority 4, Global Food Security.

Once all required OSEC information has been entered for the leg click the “Save” button. If additional legs are required for the trip, select the “Add Leg” button for each additional leg, and include the OSEC information for each leg.



New Late Justification Letter Upload:

All trips **MUST** be entered and approved in FTIS ***at least*** 45 days prior to the trip departure date. In the event that a situation arises where a last minute request necessitates foreign travel within a 45-day window, only the following two exceptions will be considered:

1. The inviting organization changes the schedule of a planned meeting/conference, or
2. An emerging issue related to an REE or USDA priority requires unanticipated foreign travel.

A justification letter from the Agency Administrator (or designee) or, for ARS, the Area Director or HQ Office/Staff Director, as applicable, is required for all travel within 45 days that meet these exceptions. The justification must clearly state the reason for the short notice. This letter must then be attached to the FTIS record by selecting the “Add Memo” button.

- Ensure that a copy of the SIGNED Late Justification letter has been saved to your computer.
- Suggested naming convention is: Travelers last name/country of travel/departure date/justification letter. *Ex: SMITH-ITALY-8.28.10-JUSTIFICATION*

Once your Foreign Travel Record has been created to include all legs and OSEC data, select the “List” screen, to display your current trip(s).

Select the “Upload Memo” button to open the add document screen.

The screenshot shows the ARIS web application interface. At the top, there's a title bar for 'ARIS - Agricultural Research Information System' and a menu bar with 'File', 'Edit', 'Action', 'Record', 'Prints', and 'Help'. Below the menu bar is a navigation toolbar. The main content area is titled 'Foreign Travel Records' and includes search filters for 'Traveler', 'Begin Date', 'End Date', and 'Travel Year'. There are tabs for 'List', 'Travel Info', 'Trip Legs', and 'Signatures'. A table with the following columns is displayed: 'Traveler's Name(Last,First,MI)', 'Trvl Yr', 'Begin Date', 'End Date', 'Modecode', 'Prt St', 'ActCd', and 'Memo'. Below the table are five buttons: 'Add Trip', 'Delete Trip', 'Multiple Approval', 'Upload Memo', and 'Delete Memo'. A green callout bubble points to the 'Upload Memo' button with the text 'Upload Memo (Justification)'. At the bottom, there's a status bar showing 'Record: 1/1' and '<OSC>'.

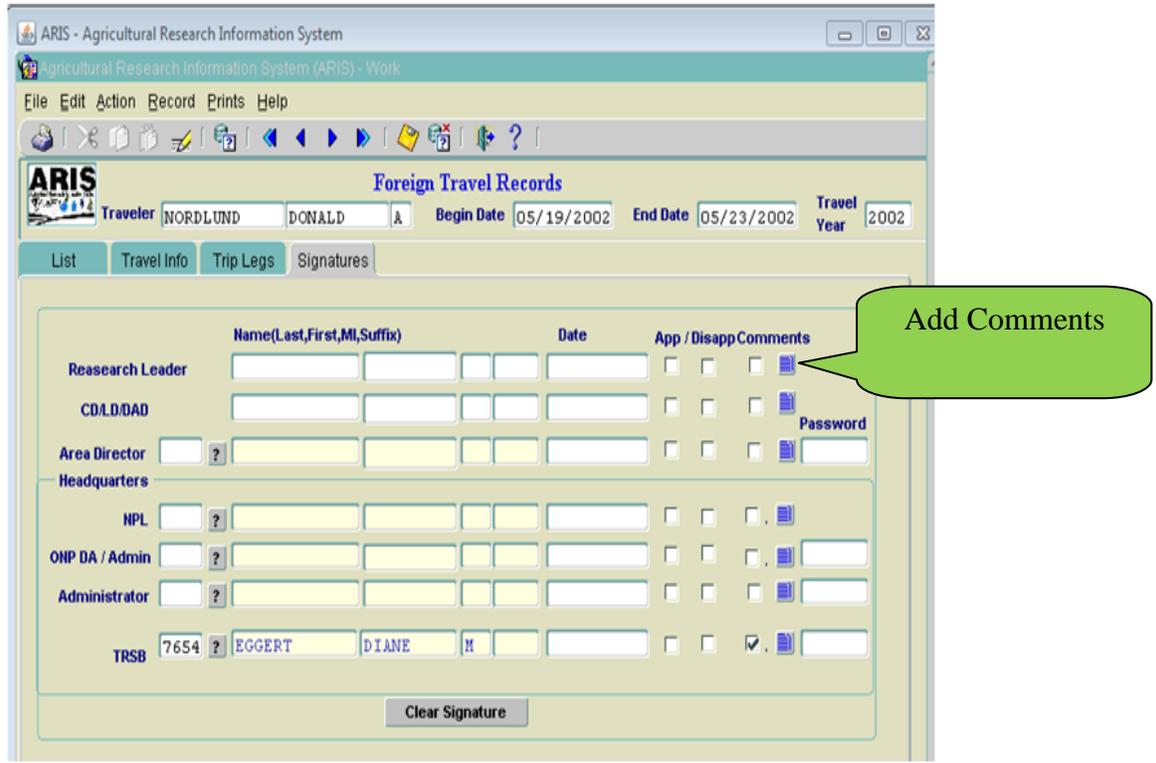
Select the “Browse” button to locate and upload the late justification letter from your computer.

The screenshot shows a window titled "Add Document" with a "Travel Document" section. It contains four input fields: "Seq No Ftis", "File Name", "Date", and "Description". A "Browse" button is positioned to the right of the "File Name" field. A green callout bubble points to the "Browse" button with the text "Browse for your saved justification memo". At the bottom of the window are "Save & Exit" and "Cancel" buttons.

You will receive a confirmation that the file has uploaded successfully and the file will be displayed. Add a description and select “Save & Exit”.

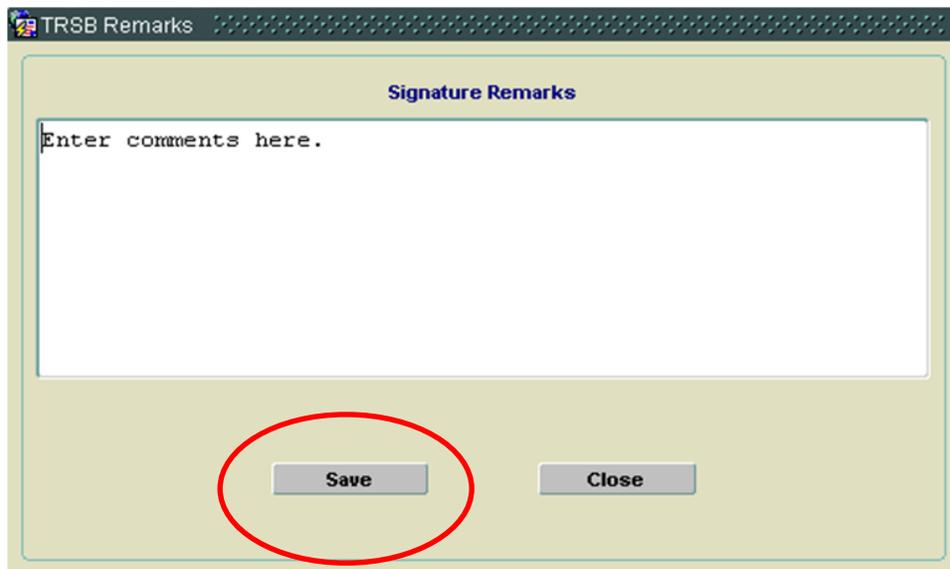
The screenshot shows the same "Add Document" window, but now with data entered in the input fields: "Seq No Ftis" is 9917647, "File Name" is Abbas-Italy 8.28.10 late, and "Date" is 05/27/2010. The "Description" field is empty. A green callout bubble points to the "Save & Exit" button with the text "Save your uploaded document".

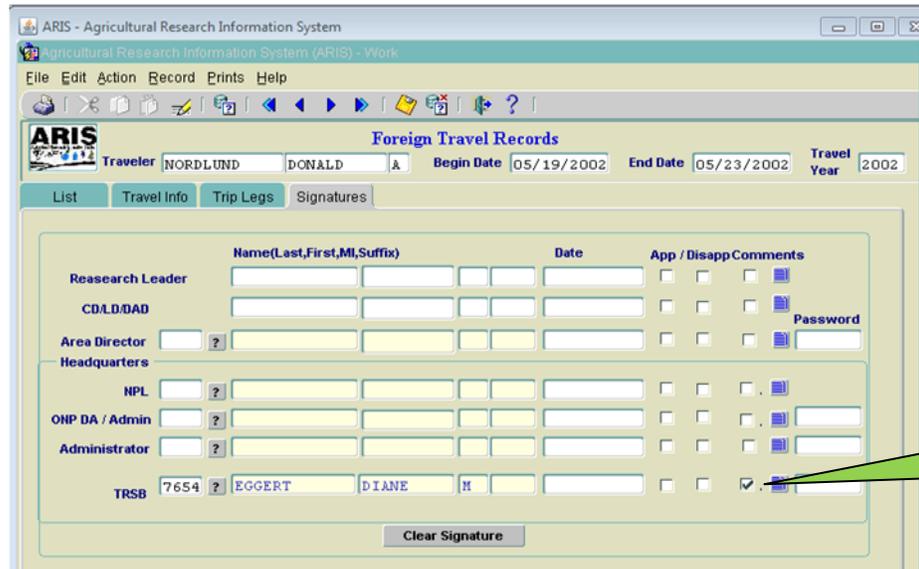
Each signature level has the ability to enter comments into FTIS. Select the “Comments” button (next to your level) to display the Signature Remarks window.



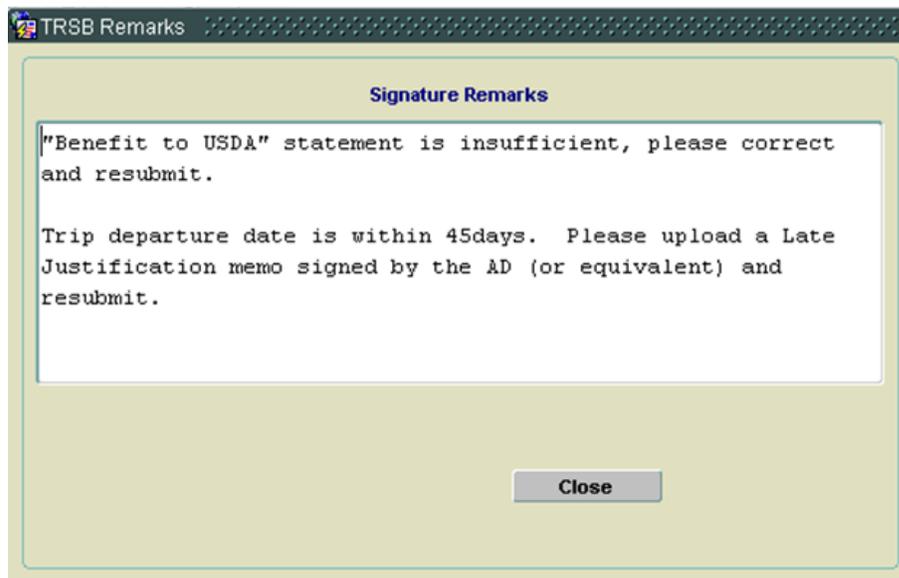
A signature Remarks window will be displayed, enter comments as necessary and select “Save”.

To view comments select the “Comments” button.





The comments will be displayed in a new window. Once comments have been read, select “Close”.



There is various submission levels in regard to Foreign Travel, this information can be viewed under “Status”, “Foreign Travel Records”.

- RL Level-Original point of entry and/or waiting approval by RL
- CD/LD/DAD- Original point of entry and/or waiting on approval by CD/LD/DAD
- Area-Waiting approval by Area Director
- NPS level-Original point of entry for NPS and/or waiting on approval by HQ

TRSB- Approved through Area or HQ Admin and waiting on submittal to OSEC
TRSB-Sent to OSEC-Collected by TRSB to send to OSEC for consideration
Approved-Approved by OSEC in FTIS, will move to the Active file overnight

Foreign Travel Records

End Date: 08/10/2010
 Traveler: BOLSTER CARL H Begin Date: 07/31/2010 Travel Year: 2010

Traveler's Name(Last,First)	Travel Yr	Begin Date	End Date	Modecode	Submission Level	Memo
BOLSTER CARL	2010	07/31/2010	08/10/2010	64 45 05 00	Approved	
SIGNA DONNA	2010	08/01/2010	08/28/2010	64 02 50 00	Area Level	✓
ADAMS DONALD	2010	05/30/2010	06/05/2010	64 02 10 00	Area Level	✓
ABBAS HAMED	2008	08/23/2008	09/04/2008	64 02 15 00	Area Level	✓
LOUGHRIN JOHN	2010	07/31/2010	08/07/2010	64 45 05 00	Area Level	✓
COOK KIMBERLY	2010	06/18/2010	06/26/2010	64 45 05 00	Area Level	✓
DAVIS JR KENNETH	2010	07/31/2010	08/07/2010	64 02 35 00	Area Level	✓
LOVANH NANH	2010	07/31/2010	08/03/2010	64 45 05 00	Area Level	✓
LOVANH NANH	2010	09/05/2010	09/14/2010	64 45 05 00	Area Level	✓
ARIAS DE ARE RENEE	2010	06/20/2010	06/25/2010	64 02 50 00	Area Level	✓
ABBAS HAMED	2006	07/29/2006	08/02/2006	64 02 15 00	Area Level	✓
SISTANI KARAMAT	2010	08/15/2010	08/21/2010	64 45 05 00	TRSB-Sent to OSEC	✓

To determine the status or Submission Level of your travelers, select “Status”, “Query Screen”.

Foreign Travel Records

End Date: 08/02/2006
 Traveler: HAMED K Begin Date: 07/29/2006 Travel Year: 2006

Traveler's Name(Last,First)	Travel Yr	Begin Date	End Date	Modecode	Submission Level	Memo
ABBAS HAMED	2006	07/29/2006	08/02/2006	64 02 15 00	Area Level	✓
ABBAS HAMED	2008	08/23/2008	09/04/2008	64 02 15 00	Area Level	✓
ADAMS DONALD	2010	05/30/2010	06/05/2010	64 02 10 00	Area Level	✓
ARIAS DE ARE RENEE	2010	06/20/2010	06/25/2010	64 02 50 00	Area Level	✓
BOLSTER CARL	2010	07/31/2010	08/10/2010	64 45 05 00	Approved	✓
COOK KIMBERLY	2010	06/18/2010	06/26/2010	64 45 05 00	Area Level	✓
DAVIS JR KENNETH	2010	07/31/2010	08/07/2010	64 02 35 00	Area Level	✓
LOUGHRIN JOHN	2010	07/31/2010	08/07/2010	64 45 05 00	Area Level	✓
LOVANH NANH	2010	07/31/2010	08/03/2010	64 45 05 00	Area Level	✓
LOVANH NANH	2010	09/05/2010	09/14/2010	64 45 05 00	Area Level	✓
SIGNA DONNA	2010	08/01/2010	08/28/2010	64 02 50 00	Area Level	✓
SISTANI KARAMAT	2010	08/15/2010	08/21/2010	64 45 05 00	TRSB-Sent to OSEC	✓

You can query for an individual traveler, or for a period of time. If searching for a travel period enter into the “Begin Date” field the date of travel you are looking for (ex. 6/1/10:12/31/10) and enter.

Returned Documents from TRSB

TRSB will notify the Area Transportation Assistant via e-mail to include an attachment of the FTIS Foreign trip record. Once received the ATA must access the document via “Work” and display the comments on the signature page.