

U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs

San Francisco Oversight Division  
120 Howard Street, Room 760  
San Francisco, CA 94105-0001

**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellants:** [Names of appellants]

**Agency classification:** Meteorologist  
GS-1340-13

**Organization:** [The appellants' organization]  
Weather Forecast Office  
National Weather Service  
National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

**OPM decision:** Meteorologist  
GS-1340-13

**OPM decision number:** C-1340-13-01

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Carlos A. Torrico  
Classification Appeals Officer

January 14, 2002  
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

**Decision sent to:**

**Appellants:**

[Name and address of the appellants' representative]

**Agency:**

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## **Introduction**

On March 27, 2001, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted classification appeals from [the appellants]. On April 20, 2001, the Division received the agency's administrative report. At the request of the appellants' representative, the appeals were suspended from May 23, 2001 to July 9, 2001, pending the outcome of an arbitrator's decision. After receiving the decision, the representative requested that OPM continue with the adjudication of the appeals. All of the appellants are assigned to the same standardized position description (PD) currently classified as Meteorologist, GS-1340-13. The appellants believe that their positions should be graded at the GS-14 level. They work at the [name of city] Weather Forecast Office (WFO), National Weather Service (NWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce. We have accepted and decided their appeals under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.), and are issuing one decision covering all of the appellants.

## **General issues**

This appeal decision is based on a careful review of all information submitted by the appellants and their agency. In addition, to help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative conducted separate telephone interviews with all of the appellants and their supervisor. Both the appellants and their supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellants' official position description (PD) [number]. However, the appellants believe the PD should also include their duties for oversight and/or preparation of the marine high seas forecast, and marine and significant sea charts. In reviewing the positions we have considered those duties.

Through their representative, the appellants make several statements regarding the proper classification of their positions. They cite a 1978 U.S. Civil Service Commission (CSC) advisory upgrading forecasters and senior forecasters at several Weather Service field offices, including [name of city]. The advisory was based on interpretation and extension of the grading criteria contained in the standard for the Meteorology Series, GS-1340, issued in February 1972. However, that standard has been replaced by the Job Family Standard (JFS) for Professional Physical Science Work, GS-1300P, reissued in HRCD 7, dated July 1999. Because of the change in standards, the 1978 advisory and interpretive guidance is no longer in effect. The appellants also make several statements comparing their work to that done at other Weather Service offices and centers. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their duties and responsibilities to OPM classification standards and guidelines, (5 USC 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellants' positions to others as a basis for deciding their appeals, and have considered their statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

## **Position information**

The appellants (senior forecasters) are responsible for the timely issuance of weather forecasts and warnings for a large geographic area in [name of state]. The forecasts and warnings cover three basic areas (public service forecasts, aviation forecasts, and marine forecasts), plus consultation with the NWS River Forecast Center covering the impact of precipitation, winds,

and temperature on river level forecasts and flood warnings. The senior forecasters lead teams of two or more journey level meteorologists and a hydro-meteorological technician. These scientists and technicians work together on designated shifts to produce the various forecast products that the office releases. In addition to being ultimately responsible for the reliability and timeliness of these products, the appellants independently consult with the river forecast offices, issue warnings, and provide technical expertise and advice to the Meteorologist-in-Charge when dealing with Federal, State, and local emergency management offices.

The public service forecasts are complicated by terrain, the affect of offshore and high seas weather systems, and the fact that information sources are often incomplete, and can be conflicting. While Doppler radar coverage is available to forecasters, it is not contiguous, thus the passage of systems and weather conditions across these “spaces” requires greater inference. Because of this, extrapolation often does not fit computer “models” without significant alteration of the resulting predictions, as well as supplementation from other sources of data. The appellants are responsible for selecting the forecasting model to be used on their assigned shifts, and advising the journey level meteorologists on issues of significant difficult or unusual nature. In addition, when the forecasters are in disagreement in their predictions of weather, or interpretation of data, the senior forecaster is responsible for determining which is the most likely choice. This decision is often reached through group discussion and consensus, but the senior forecasters add a level of expertise based on years of experience in forecasting in the same region. This background has provided them with the ability to go far beyond traditional theory and methodology in reaching the most reliable conclusions.

In aviation weather forecasts, the [name of city] WFO provides ground level forecasts (including visibility) of weather conditions for the immediate areas surrounding 17 airport facilities in [name of state]. The office also reports and predicts upper air wind shear for the same areas. The terrain and impact of arctic air make the prediction of fog and “icing” conditions less certain, and the same factors increase the likelihood that weather conditions, visibility, and wind shear will change more frequently and quickly. As with public service forecasts, the senior forecaster is responsible for insuring quality and timeliness of forecasts, and consulting with forecasters on highly unusual phenomena or situations that make forecasts conflicting or highly problematical.

In marine forecasts, the meteorologists’ work is complicated by the interaction of two large bodies of water, i.e., [their names]. Moreover, tropical storms, originating in the South Pacific and East Asia, travel north and provide an additional impact on the reliability of forecasting models. Weather observation points are usually aboard ships, and ships doing this reporting are normally closer to shore, leaving some “high seas” weather data missing. Because of this, forecasters have less data and greater uncertainty in most marine forecasts. Senior forecasters perform the same functions and exercise the same responsibility in these forecasts as they do in the public service and aviation forecasts, described above.

In river forecasting, the appellants normally take a more direct role. They consult with the River Forecast Center staff (hydrologists) in coordinating the river level forecast produced by that office with the precipitation forecasts produced by the Weather Forecast Office. This coordinated effort results in glacial ice predictions, glacial dam burst warnings, and flash flood

warnings. These forecasts, alerts, and warnings result in a significant commitment of resources by Federal, State, and local Government emergency management organizations. Disagreements on the kind and intensity of effects predicted by the WFO for river levels, glacial dam burst potential, and flash floods do occur, and the senior forecasters are charged with representing the position of the WFO in these instances.

The results of our interviews, the appellants' PD, and other material of record provide more information on their duties and responsibilities.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The agency classified the appellants' positions in the Meteorology Series, GS-1340, titling the positions as Meteorologist according to the instructions in the JFS for Professional Physical Science Work, GS-1300P. The appellants do not disagree with the agency's title and series determination, and we concur. Like positions classified in the GS-1340 series, the appellants' positions involve professional work in meteorology, the science concerned with the earth's atmospheric envelope and its processes. The work includes basic and applied research into conditions and phenomena of the atmosphere; the collection, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of meteorological data to predict weather and determine climatological conditions for specific geographical areas; the development of new or the improvement of existing meteorological theory; and the development or improvement of meteorological methods, techniques, and instruments.

The appellants' PD indicates that they serve as shift leaders "supervising" other professional and technician employees on designated work shifts. However, we find that their positions do not meet the coverage requirements of Part II of the General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide (GSLGEG) reissued in HRCD-7, July 1999, or the General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) also found in HRCD-7. In order to be evaluated under Part II of the GSLGEG, a position must spend at least 25% of the time leading a team of other GS employees in accomplishing two-grade interval work (or one-grade interval work at GS-9 or higher), and must perform all of the first seven coaching, facilitating and mentoring duties, and a total of fourteen of the twenty duties listed in the GSLGEG. The appellants serve as senior forecasters on the shifts, responsible for ensuring that required weather forecasts and advisories are issued during the shift, and for providing interpretive guidance on the most complex weather issues. However, they do not perform all of the first seven, and a total of fourteen of the twenty duties listed in the guide, and thus cannot be evaluated by reference to the GSLGEG. For instance, they do not ensure that the organization's strategic plan, mission, or vision is communicated to the team and integrated into the work plan, or train or arrange for training of team members in the methods and techniques of team building. In addition, given that the full performance GS-12 level Meteorologists working on the shifts operate with considerable independence and freedom from supervision, and generally need little or no guidance on technical matters, we doubt that the appellants' "lead" duties would consume at least 25% of their time, and that there would be much need to coach the team in the selection and application of appropriate problem solving methods.

The appellants' positions also do not meet the coverage requirements of the GSSG. In order to be evaluated by that guide, positions must carry out both technical and administrative direction of others; the supervisory duties must occupy at least 25% of the position's time; and the position must meet at least the lowest level of Factor 3 in the guide, based on supervising Federal civilian employees, Federal military or uniformed service employees, volunteers, or other noncontractor personnel. We find that the appellants do not meet the criteria in that they do not have full technical and administrative authority over shift members, and are not delegated the lowest level of supervisory and managerial authorities (i.e., Factor Level 3-1) described under Factor 3 of the GSSG. Those authorities are retained by their supervisor.

The JFS for Professional Physical Science Work, GS-1300P, contains appropriate grading criteria to evaluate the appellants' duties, which are discussed below.

### **Grade determination**

The grading criteria contained in the JFS for Professional Physical Science Work, GS-1300P, describe the nature of assignments and level of responsibility at each grade, along with qualification requirements. Positions are graded by comparing them to descriptive material provided for each grade level. The criteria include appropriate language from the law, supplemented by more specific material, including some occupation-specific work illustrations.

As described beginning on page 24 of the GS-1300P standard, GS-13 level assignments for meteorologists involve work at the senior expert level, for which technical problem definitions, methods, and/or data are highly incomplete, controversial, or uncertain. Typically, scientists at this level represent an authoritative source of consultation for other scientists and program specialists, and are called upon to perform a key role in resolving issues that significantly affect scientific programs. They make long-range and controversial proposals and defend their findings and recommendations in public or high level forums.

The appellants' work favorably compares to the GS-13 level. As senior forecasters they act as technical experts, providing guidance to journey level forecasters, and resolving issues of unusual uncertainty or those involving conflicting results. Similar to the GS-13 level, they coordinate their work with that performed in other programs and agencies, often representing their agency's position in discussions having significant impact on resource allocation, e.g., with Federal, State, and local Government emergency management organizations. While the standard does not provide occupation-specific work illustrations for meteorologists at the GS-13 level, two of the illustrations provide descriptions of hydrologist and geologist positions at that level. These examples describe work situations where the scientists provide leadership to fellow scientists, cover an expanded geographic area of responsibility, and provide expertise in extending the existing state of the science to meet unusual and even unprecedented situations. These characteristics are also typical of the appellants' work.

At the GS-14 level (page 28) in the GS-1300P JFS, scientists typically serve as "senior consultants" to other senior level technical experts. This level differs from the GS-13 level in that the GS-14 scientist is one that other senior technical experts turn to for advice and counsel, not only because of the position, but also because of the incumbent's personal reputation in the field.

At the GS-14 level, the work typically has special significance for the success of the organization in that it may have significant direct effect over a wide region or over multiple programs of the agency, or may include responsibility for a new technology especially critical to the organization's programs. GS-14 assignments include a wide area of responsibility carried out under only administrative direction in terms of broad agency policies, objectives, and mission statements. GS-13 assignments, on the other hand, generally involve project or program responsibility of a lesser scope that is covered by general guidance such as precedents, recent work, and developments in a specialty area.

Unlike the GS-14 level, the appellants' work involves responsibility for only one area of [name of state] rather than affecting a wide region. While they have developed expertise in their field relative to [name of state] land and marine weather patterns, we did not find that they are a source of advice to other senior technical experts, nor does their work significantly affect multiple programs of the agency. In addition, their work is more closely reviewed by the supervisor than simply for compliance with administrative or agency policies and mission statements. In contrast to the GS-14 level, their duties involve immediate projects of lesser scope covered by general guidance and precedents.

By application of the grading criteria in the GS-1300P JFS, we find that the appellants' duties and responsibilities equate to the GS-13 level.

### **Decision**

The appellants' positions are properly classified as Meteorologist, GS-1340-13.