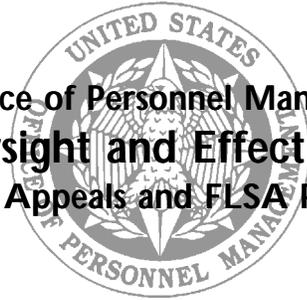


U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242

Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Hydrologist
GS-1315-11

Organization: [appellant's activity]
[a specific] National Forest
Forest Service
Department of Agriculture
[geographic location]

OPM decision: Hydrologist
GS-1315-11

OPM decision number: C-1315-11-01

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon
Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

9/28/99
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:

[appellant's name and address]

[servicing personnel office]

Director, Office of Human Resources
Management
U.S. Department of Agriculture
J. L. Whitten Building, Room 316W
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
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Assistant Director of Human Resources
Management
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Introduction

On April 15, 1999, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. [The appellant's] current position is classified as Hydrologist, GS-1315-11. However, the appellant believes the classification should be Hydrologist, GS-1315-12. He works in [a specific National Forest], Forest Service, in [geographic location]. The appellant's duty station is [a portion] of [a specific] National Forest. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

To help decide this appeal, a Dallas Oversight Division representative conducted a telephone audit of the appellant's position. The audit included interviews with the appellant and his immediate supervisor. In reaching our classification decision, we reviewed the audit findings and the information of record furnished by the appellant and his agency, including his official position description, [number]. We found the position description is adequate for classification purposes.

Position information

The appealed position is assigned to the [appellant's activity]. This [activity] consists of 10 employees in various scientific disciplines reporting to the Staff Officer, a GS-13 interdisciplinary position. The appellant is one of two GS-11 Hydrologists at the [specific] National Forest. He is assigned to [a specific area] of the Forest while his counterpart is assigned to [another specific area]. The appellant has responsibility for providing expertise on watershed management and planning and for administering the water rights program on the [specific assigned area] of the Forest. The appellant is responsible for providing standard and advanced technical advice and assistance to four Ranger Districts and the Supervisor's Office. Accordingly, the appellant performs the following duties and responsibilities:

- develops and recommends objectives, standards, and priorities for water resource management;
- characterizes runoff and sediment processes associated with a variety of resource management activities;
- recommends solutions to a variety of water resource related management problems;
- designs and implements watershed rehabilitation projects;
- designs monitoring plans to evaluate success of projects;
- supports the Region in developing protocols and methodologies for Forest Plan revision;
- provides specialized hydrologic input to Forest interdisciplinary teams and to Forest personnel;
- identifies future water needs and developments;

- provides training, coordination, and evaluation of “best management practices” implementation monitoring; and
- handles Statewide water rights adjudication process.

Series and title determination

The GS-1315 Hydrology Series includes positions that involve professional work in hydrology, the science concerned with the study of water in the hydrologic cycle. The work includes basic and applied research on water and water resources; the collection, measurement, analysis, and interpretation of information on water resources; the forecast of water supply and water flows; and the development of new, improved, or more economical methods, techniques, and instruments.

Hydrology, as used in the appealed position, is the study of water, its quality and quantity; the management effects on water resource values; and the interrelationships of water with other resources. The appellant does not question the title or series of his position. We agree with the agency’s placement of this position in the GS-1315 series. Hydrologist is the appropriate title.

Standard determination

The GS-1300P Job Family Standard (JFS) for Professional Physical Science Work is used to determine the grade of the appellant’s work. This new GS-1300P JFS superseded the standard for the GS-1315 Hydrology Series and is now used to grade work performed by hydrologists and other physical science occupations.

Grade determination

The GS-1300P standard includes appropriate language from the law and grade level criteria, i.e., the standard. These are supplemented by illustrations of work appropriate to each grade level.

At the GS-11 level, the law states that employees have wide latitude to exercise independent judgment in performing their work. The work is characterized by considerable difficulty and requires somewhat extended professional, scientific, or technical training and experience which has demonstrated important attainments and marked capacity for independent work. The GS-11 standard describes work assignments that typically involve planning and executing complex studies. These studies usually involve intensive investigations into one or more recognized phenomena. The work typically involves conventional methods and techniques that extend beyond clear precedents. The employee at this level is required to adapt methods to problems at hand and interpret findings in terms of their scientific significance. Review of finished products is for adequacy of conclusions and soundness of the procedures and methods used. Assignments generally do not involve radical departures from past practices or require the development of new, novel, or innovative approaches, methods, or techniques.

Illustrations representing the complexity, depth of independence, and scope of assignments at the GS-11 level follow.

- Leads or independently performs a multiyear study to assess the occurrence of an important industrial ore as part of a comprehensive land assessment project. Studies background data, analyzes and resolves conflicts in archival information, and locates and obtains substantive unrecorded data from sources such as mine owners and state officials. Evaluates findings to determine the grade of ore, tonnage, quantity of reserves, production, and milling costs and environmental measures. Prepares the geologic portion of the report for publication.
- Analyzes and prepares river volume and flood forecasts for varied river basins with unstable conditions. Reviews completed forecasts and adjusts, modifies, or develops complex procedures to improve forecasting accuracy.
- Reviews timber harvesting plans to determine the potential impact on a watershed area or river basin. Applies conventional water and soil sampling techniques to assess current conditions, including water yield, sediment transport, and soil types and stability. Studies records of how the basin or watershed area has reacted to land management activities in the past. Applies the collected data and the parameters of the harvesting plan (e.g., amount and type of timber to be cut) to a standard watershed model to simulate the effect harvesting will have on the river basin.
- Plans and coordinates projects involving the analysis and evaluation to the flow and transport of sediment or pollutants in a river basin. Analyzes basin conditions, including varying channel sizes; sediment types and densities; water volumes and velocities; and municipal, agricultural, and industrial influences. Searches out, adapts, and applies various sampling procedures, schedules, equipment, and analysis methods throughout the study to assess and evaluate diverse conditions. Correlates the data, adapts and applies computer modeling techniques to simulate the hydrologic processes of the river basin, and writes reports and findings.
- Plans and conducts projects of considerable scope and variety with numerous complications. Establishes, investigates, and reestablishes land and property boundaries and prepares plats and legal descriptions for tracts of land. Projects require extensive study, search, and adaptation of records, history, and precedents. Work is reviewed for attainment of objectives, compliance with policies, and soundness of judgment.

At the GS-12 level, the law describes positions which are under general administrative supervision with wide latitude for the exercise of independent judgment. Positions are characterized by professional, scientific, or technical work of marked difficulty and responsibility requiring extended professional, scientific, or technical training and experience which demonstrate leadership and attainment of a high order of professional, scientific, or technical research, practice, or administration. The standard at the GS-12 level depicts work assignments that

typically involve planning, executing, and reporting on original studies or ongoing studies requiring a fresh approach to resolve problems. The complexity of assignments requires extensive modification and adaptation of standard procedures, methods, and techniques and development of totally new methods and techniques to address problems for which guidelines or precedents are not substantially applicable. Assignments typically include considerable breadth, diversity, and intensity; varied complex features; and novel or obscure problems. Completed work is reviewed primarily for general acceptability and feasibility, and scientific recommendations are normally accepted as sound without close review unless matters of policy or program resources are involved.

Illustrations representing the GS-12 level are listed below.

- Performs scientific and technical evaluation, correlation, synthesis, and presentation of important data in a complex field of science, such as wave action in the Indian Ocean. Assures that special equipment is procured, modified as necessary, and installed on research vessels or at shore installations. Plans, coordinates, and implements tests and conducts significant surveys. Makes significant technical and scientific recommendations and decisions in a broad but highly specialized field of oceanography. Generally, conclusions and publication material are accepted as final unless matters of agency policy are involved.
- Develops long-range hydrologic plans, programs, and/or precedents of an authoritative and state-of-the-science nature. Develops and modifies hydrologic river forecast procedures for a wide variety of basins when existing procedures are not supplying results that are sufficiently accurate and usable. Develops procedures for specialized forecasts for which procedures do not exist (e.g., snowmelt, river ice formation and dissipation, minimum flow, and flash floods). Makes significant technical and scientific recommendations and decisions. Exercises considerable initiative and resourcefulness in carrying out these assignments to completion. Plans projects and makes changes without securing prior technical approval. Represents the agency before public bodies on complex problems that are noncontroversial in nature.
- Determines the condition and restoration needs of multiple watersheds over a diverse forest-wide area. Surveys and inspects the watershed areas for adverse conditions, such as landslides or eroded gullies. Utilizes data on water temperature, instream flow and discharge, and soil stability and study records of previous watershed conditions and land and water management activities in the area. Analyzes and evaluates the collected data in relationship to desired conditions and regulatory requirements to determine the cumulative effects of previous land management practices on current watershed conditions. Develops, modifies, and recommends extensive plans, treatments, and projects for restoring conditions and monitors and evaluates the results to ensure achievement and maintenance of healthy conditions.
- Reviews and studies proposals for remediating contaminated groundwater when little information on the type and nature of the contaminant and composition of the geographic areas is known.

- Plans and conducts investigations or studies of problems affecting the organization's geodetic program. Receives general instructions concerning the objective of the study and the time, facilities, and manpower available. Plans and organizes the work, applies extensive guidelines, and improvises where guidelines do not apply. Applies geodetic principles and techniques in developing systems, procedures, and methods to meet new or unusual needs in the agency's programs. Trains or advises scientists and engineers from other organizations regarding the employee's particular area of work.

The appellant's work entails designing and implementing watershed rehabilitation projects on the [specific assigned area] of the Forest. Due to his level of experience and historical knowledge, he may occasionally be given some assignments that cross over to the [area assigned to the appellant's counterpart]. The appellant's work covers 7 mountain ranges, approximately 270 different watersheds, and about 7 major rivers that have waters in the [specific] National Forest. The appellant uses a knowledge of hydrology; familiarity with engineering, fisheries, plant science, and forestry concepts; and knowledge of the interaction of these disciplines in providing input, advice, and assistance on many projects requiring that expertise. The appellant uses Forest Service policy and standards, agency regulations, laws, and technical literature to solve conventional problems of considerable scope. The appellant uses ingenuity and resourcefulness in adapting standard practices or developing new approaches to fit specific problems.

The [appellant's National Forest] hosts a diversity of uses, for example, grazing, timber harvest, road building, mining, and motorized recreation. The appellant spends a substantive amount of time with the range part of hydrologic work (e.g., grazing activities). Cattle grazing in riparian areas has significant impact on water quality. Stream banks are trampled by cattle causing localized erosion and sedimentation. The appellant developed a new approach to reduce trampling of vegetation and to restore damaged watersheds. The appellant makes determinations about the movement and reduction in the number of cattle which may result in controversy with individual ranchers and grazing associations. The appellant's work resulted in co-authorship of a published article and development of a new procedure for moving livestock. These new riparian guidelines affect the way the appellant's Forest, and possibly other Forests, conducts its grazing program. Also, the appellant used and adapted an existing stream riparian classification system to determine functional capability of waters within the [specific National Forest] area. The appellant applied established stream classification guidelines to riparian issues to decide the levels at which streams are functioning. By adapting and modifying these standards, the appellant initiated an improved approach to describing and accessing riparian areas. The appellant developed reference reaches as benchmarks to decide better which streams require management changes. Some of the appellant's projects require a joint effort with professional employees in other disciplines where the appellant is responsible for collecting, compiling, and analyzing data to prepare final reports. In some instances, the appellant may contribute data for incorporation into reports prepared by others. The appellant operates similarly to the GS-11 level, where employees are expected to extend beyond clear precedent and adapt methods and approaches to address immediate problems.

The appellant receives general administrative supervision on objectives and policy issues for a specific geographical area. When there are several ongoing projects, the supervisor may discuss with the appellant priorities that impact program resources (e.g., budget, cost overruns). The appellant performs his assignment with considerable latitude. He selects the appropriate methods for resolution of complex issues or problems. His work does not receive technical review and is generally accepted without change. The level of supervision and review received by the appellant is similar to the GS-12 level.

Although the controls over the appellant and the independence with which he handles assignments are similar to the GS-12 level, the actual assignments are more comparable to those described at the GS-11 level. The appellant's assignments are not typified by marked difficulty with continuing responsibility for leadership as described at the GS-12 level.

The appealed position does not meet the GS-12 level of the standard which describes work assignments that typically involve planning, executing, and reporting on original or ongoing studies. The record reveals that the appellant operates on his own initiative to research and create better methods of operation. However, such modifications and improvements are not equivalent to GS-12 assignments that regularly require the development of totally new methods and techniques or innovative approaches. His work does not involve the *radical* departure from past practice and methods, which is typically seen at the GS-12 level. Nor does the appellant's work involve dealing on a regular basis with the novel or obscure problems found at the GS-12 level.

Contributions at the GS-12 level depict formulation of productive research ideas, leadership of a productive research team, or highly productive personal performance of research of such originality, soundness, and value as to have marked the scientist as a significant contributor in his or her field. The recurring nature of assignments handled by the appellant falls short of the GS-12 level description.

We find that the GS-11 level of the standard and its illustrations are most comparable to the overall work of the appellant's position.

Summary

By comparison to the law and the standard, the appealed position is best evaluated at the GS-11 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Hydrologist, GS-1315-11.