

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

Classification Appeal Decision
Under Sections 5103 and 5112 of Title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [The appellant]

Agency classification: Supervisory Hydrologist
GS-1315-12

Organization: [The appellant's organization]
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of the Interior

OPM decision: Hydrologist
GS-1315-12

OPM decision number: C-1315-12-02

Carlos A. Torrico
Classification Appeals Officer

April 27, 2000
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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).

Since this decision changes the classification of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of this decision (5 CFR 511.702). The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

Decision sent to:

[The appellant's address]

[The appellant's servicing personnel office]
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of the Interior

Ms. Carolyn Cohen
Director of Personnel
U.S. Department of the Interior
Mail Stop 5221
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Introduction

On April 15, 1999, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. His position is currently classified as Supervisory Hydrologist, GS-1315-12. However, he believes the grade level should be GS-13. The appellant works in the [appellant's organization], Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), U.S. Department of the Interior. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant makes various statements about his agency and its evaluation of his position. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of his position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing his current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and his agency, including his official position description (PD) 0065201, a telephone audit with the appellant, and telephone interviews with his supervisor and a subject matter specialist. Both the appellant and his supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellant's current position description.

Position information

The appellant exercises regional responsibilities and technical authority for water quality planning, implementation, monitoring, and technical assistance activities, and is the primary point of contact and liaison for the [name of laboratory]. In addition, he assists in making resource management policies, plans, and decisions related to water quality and pollution abatement. The audit and other material of record furnish much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency has classified the appellant's position in the Hydrology Series, GS-1315, and the appellant does not disagree. We concur with the agency's determination. As the water quality coordinator, the appellant's work requires a professional knowledge of hydrology in order to exercise regional responsibilities and technical authority for water quality planning, implementation, monitoring, and technical assistance activities; and to serve as the point of contact and liaison for the [name of laboratory]. Like positions in the GS-1315 series, the appellant's work includes analysis and interpretation of information on water resources.

The appellant provides general administrative supervision of laboratory and water quality employees, including one GS-1320-12 and one GS-1320-11 permanent full-time chemists and up to three GS-1311-04 temporary, part-time, physical science technicians. In addition, he supervises one GS-1315-11 employee. In order for any position to be titled as "supervisory" and evaluated

by the General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG), the position must meet the minimum criteria for classification by the guide. One of the coverage requirements specified in the GSSG is that the supervisory work constitutes a major duty occupying at least 25% of the position's time. Since the appellant's supervisory work only occupies 10-15% of his time, it is not covered by the GSSG. Thus, we have not considered the appellant's supervisory work in either the titling or grading of the position. The proper title of this position is *Hydrologist*. The addition of a parenthetical title to the authorized title (e.g., Water Quality Coordinator) is at the option of the agency.

The Job Family Standard (JFS) for Professional Physical Science Work, GS-1300P (reissued in HRCD-7 dated July 1999) is used to determine the series, title, and grade of the appellant's work. Our application of the grading criteria in that standard to the appellant's position is discussed below.

Grade determination

At the GS-12 grade level (pages 20-23), assignments typically involve planning, executing, and reporting on original studies or ongoing studies requiring a fresh approach to resolve new problems. Examples of the appellant's work that meet this level include such things as planning alternatives for resolving total dissolved gas problems at [a local] Dam, research programs to address the fate and transport of mercury in reservoir ecosystems, wastewater reuse programs to plan and implement drain water management projects, and special studies to develop alternative approaches to water temperature management in [name of a state].

As required at the GS-12 level his projects require him to extensively modify or adapt standard procedures, methods, and techniques to address problems for which guidelines and precedents are not substantially applicable. His assignments typically include considerable breadth, diversity, and intensity; varied, complex features; and novel or obscure problems.

At the GS-12 level, employees receive general administrative supervision and exercise independent judgment in performing their assignments. Completed work is reviewed primarily for general acceptability and feasibility in relation to the overall program. Comparably, the appellant works under general supervision as the supervisor makes assignments in terms of broadly defined missions and functions. The appellant has wide latitude for independent initiative and action in managing activities. His work is reviewed only from an overall standpoint in terms of compatibility with and accomplishment of program objectives and preestablished performance standards.

The standard provides illustrations representing GS-12 level work on pages 20-23 of the JFS. Two of these best characterize the appellant's work:

- Plans very significant projects, advises on improvement of instrumentation or procedural methods, and ensures that special equipment is procured, modified, and installed. Plans, coordinates, and implements tests and conducts the projects. May serve as an advisor to other scientists, such as, a specialist on polar ice surveillance studies or a specialist on

improving complex instruments for measuring and studying ocean phenomena. May also serve as a team leader. Uses initiative, resourcefulness, and past personal experience to deviate from established approaches and precedents to develop methods and procedures and to apply basic principles and theories. Often develops new methods, techniques, or precedents to plan and carry out assignments. Work and conclusions are accepted as technically authoritative and are reviewed only for meeting the assignment's objectives.

- 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.

As described in the illustrations above, the appellant has taken the lead for planning and developing very significant projects such as the dissolved gas issue of the [name of river] River. These projects have required the appellant to advise scientists from Federal, State, and local governments as well as Canadian and private organizations whose activities impact the water quality of the [name of river] River and other waterways within the [appellant's region]. As the BOR lead for such projects, he has developed tasking documents to be carried out by the technical staff of the BOR [name of office]. The dissolved gas project is an excellent example of the appellant's use of initiative, resourcefulness, and past personal experience to deviate from established approaches and precedents to develop methods and procedures and to apply basic principles and theories. While the project requires input from a wide variety of resources, it is the appellant who has overall responsibility for planning the project, for approving changes to the project and representing the BOR before public bodies on the complex problems associated with this project.

The appellant's position does not meet the GS-13 level of the standard (pages 24-27). The GS-13 grade level differs significantly from the GS-12 level in that evaluations and recommendations are accepted by others as those of a technical expert. 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 solving 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. Characteristically, GS-13 scientists represent their organizations or programs or the Government's interests, in cases including representing the agency before public bodies on controversial projects.

While we realize that the appellant is viewed as a technical expert in the region, his achievements are not as extensive as those envisioned by the standard at the GS-13 level. His publications are limited to water quality assessments of the region's reservoirs published by the agency mainly for

water users and water quality managers in the regional area. Likewise, the consultation he provides is primarily to professionals involved with projects that impact regional projects such as area managers and irrigation district managers.

Based on the preceding analysis, we find that the GS-12 grade level of the standard and the relevant illustrations are most comparable to the overall work of the appellant's position.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Hydrologist, GS-1315-12.