

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

Appellant: [Appellant's Name]

Agency classification: Hydrologist
GS-1315-12

Organization: [Appellant's Unit and Branch]
[Appellant's Organization and Location]
U.S. Department of the Interior
[Appellant's Location]

OPM decision: Hydrologist
GS-1315-12

OPM decision number: C-1315-12-03

Robert D. Hendler
Classification and Pay Claims
Program Manager
Center for Merit System Accountability

7/22/08

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate which 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 (Introduction)*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[Appellant's Name]
[Appellant's Address]
[Appellant's City and sTate]

[Name]
Human Resources Officer
U.S. Department Of Interior
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Introduction

The Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [Appellant's Name] on February 25, 2008. His/her position is currently classified as Hydrologist, GS-1315-12. The appellant believes his/her position should be classified at the GS-13 or possibly the GS-14 grade level because of the complexity of additional duties and responsibilities he/she performs which are not covered in his/her current position description (PD) of record. He/she works in the [Unit and Branch], [Organization and Location], U.S. Department of Interior, in [City and State]. We received the agency's complete administrative report on June 5, 2008. We have accepted and decided his/her appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant emphasizes his/her position requires significant expertise as program specialist and hydrologist for the [Location] in coordinating and providing professional advice, guidance, and services to the parks. He/she asserts he/she performs additional duties and responsibilities 20 percent of the time assigned by his/her immediate supervisor not included in his/her current PD which add to the knowledge requirements and complexity of his/her work and thereby support an upgrade. He/she believes the added complexity of air and water quality duties and responsibilities performed are outside of the scope of the hydrology field further support a higher grade.

Important to the appellant's rationale is the change in program procedures and the tasking of new functions he/she performs, e.g., coordinating climate change projects to include coordinating Climate Change Presentations and Regional Climate Change Summaries, serving as program leader for Air Tour Management-Acoustic Monitoring Fund Source, and reviewing permits and rendering expert recommendations in support of the [Location] River National Recreational Area. The assigning of more or different work, however, does not necessarily mean the additional work is more difficult and complex. In addition, each grade level represents a band of difficulty and responsibility. Performing more difficult work than previously performed may still fit within and support the same grade level previously credited to the position.

The appellant makes various statements about his/her working conditions, his/her agency, and its evaluation of his/her position. In adjudicating this appeal, our responsibility is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of this position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing his/her 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. Because our decision sets aside all previous agency decisions, the appellant's concerns regarding his/her agency's classification review process are not germane to this decision.

The appellant discusses the large volume of work and high quality of work he/she performs. However, neither the volume nor the quality of work can be considered in determining the grade of a position (*The Classifier's Handbook*, chapter 5).

The appellant points to projects he/she worked on for a three week period in 2007 and 2008, performing non-hydrological duties in support of the [Location] River National Recreational Area by reviewing, researching, and responding to Air Emissions and coal-fired power plant permits and conducting site visits to review and monitor requirements and emission standards. However, duties which are not regular and recurring cannot affect the grade of a position (*Introduction*, section III.F.2). He/she also cites duties he/she performed three years ago. However, we can consider only current duties and responsibilities in classifying positions, as indicated in 5 U.S.C. 5112. OPM guidelines and previous decisions show in evaluating positions such as the appellant's, current duties are those that have occurred in about the past year. Therefore, we may not consider duties performed over a year ago in deciding this appeal.

The appellant mentions his/her personal qualifications, including his/her Master's Degree in Environmental Chemistry. Qualifications are considered in classifying positions only to the extent they are required to perform current duties and responsibilities of the position. Therefore, we have considered the appellant's personal qualifications only insofar as they are required to perform his/her current duties and responsibilities along with all other information furnished by the appellant and his/her agency.

We conducted an on-site job audit with the appellant on April 14, 2008, and an on-site interview with the appellant's second-level supervisor on June 3, 2008. In deciding this appeal, we fully considered the audit findings and all other information of record furnished by the appellant and his/her agency, including his/her current assignments, and his/her official PD #[Number].

Position information

The appellant is assigned to an Interdisciplinary PD classified as Water/Air Coordinator, Interdisciplinary, Physical Scientist (Water/Air), GS-1301-12 or Hydrologist, GS-1315-12. The appellant did not certify the accuracy of his/her official PD for the reasons indicated previously. His/her supervisor certified the current PD is an accurate description of the appellant's duties. We find the PD of record contains the major duties assigned to and performed by the appellant, and we incorporate it by reference into this decision.

[Appellant's Organization and Location] is responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing natural resources programs in the [Location] which are of broad service-wide importance. The staff provides expert scientific, planning, implementation, and evaluation assistance in support of management actions at the park, regional, or headquarters level on projects related to ecological resource management.

[Appellant's Organization and Location] is headed by a Program Manager (GS-401-14), and consists of three Branches: [Appellant's Unit and Branch], where the appellant works, the [Serviced Unit], and the [Serviced Unit]. [Appellant's Unit and Branch] is responsible for implementing service-wide laws, policies, guidelines, directives, regulations and other requirements relevant to the field of natural resources protection, conservation, and management. The [Appellant's Unit and Branch] multi-disciplinary natural resources staff directly serves Southeast Region parks in the field of natural resources management. The [Appellant's Unit and Branch] Chief's position (Supervisory Resource Management Specialist, GS-0401-13), is

currently vacant; therefore, all subordinate positions report directly to the [Appellant's Organization and Location] Chief for day-to-day supervision and direction. The appellant's position primarily serves as [Location's] Water and Air Quality Coordinator, senior Hydrologist, and program specialist in the physical sciences which includes providing professional advice, guidance, and services to the parks. The appellant advises on hydrological matters for water and air resources program management. Some cooperative activities extend the appellant's responsibilities beyond the [Location] and agency boundaries. He/she develops and prepares major portions of park resource management plans, action plans, research plans, project statements, proposals, and scopes of work with emphasis on his/her application of physical science principles and knowledge. This work includes developing plans for the inventory, evaluation, documentation, preservation, research and interpretation of physical resources and other natural resources, and providing guidance and assistance to parks on the implementation of plans.

The appellant deals with complex region-wide water and air resources program and related activities involving sensitive and complex issues which have significant impact on parks, neighboring lands, and inter-Governmental relations. In developing park, cluster, and regional water and air resources program, he/she identifies program needs, develops strategies and tactics to address needs, and studies water and air resource issues and problems. His/her assignments involve sensitive and complex physical science issues and require his/her to solve problems concerned with novel, undeveloped, or controversial aspects of physical science and related disciplines.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency has classified the position using the Job Family Position Classification Standard (JFS) for Professional Work in the Physical Science Group, GS-1300, and allocated it as Hydrologist based on GS-1300 JFS titling practices and instructions for the treatment of interdisciplinary positions in the Introduction. The appellant agrees and, after careful review of the record, we concur. Therefore, the position is allocated properly as Hydrologist, GS-1315.

Grade determination

The GS-1300 JFS describes, in a narrative format, grade-level criteria for evaluating non-supervisory positions from GS-5 through GS-15. Work at various grade levels of professional physical scientist positions is described in terms of the typical types of assignments and level of responsibility. Work illustrations at each grade level are provided to show the nature of assignments and responsibility in specific occupations and work situations.

Assignments at the GS-12 grade level require the employee to extensively modify or adapt standard procedures, methods, and techniques to address problems for which guidelines and precedents are not substantially applicable. Typically, assignments include considerable breadth and diversity requiring the employee to use initiative and resourcefulness. Completed work is reviewed mainly for general acceptability and feasibility in relation to the overall program. Recommendations are normally accepted without close review unless they involve policy or resource issues. The JFS at the GS-12 grade level depicts work assignments which 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.

Illustrative of GS-12 grade level scientific assignments pertinent to this appeal is:

- 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 non-controversial in nature.

The appellant's assignments are reflective of planning, executing, and reporting on original studies or ongoing studies requiring a fresh approach to resolve new problems typical of the GS-12 level. For example, the appellant represents [Location] and serves as expert on special research study projects. He/she served on a research study project for [Serviced Division] on a mercury study to analyze mercury in water, fish, mussels, bats, turtles, dragon flies, sediments and soils. He/she reviewed and transmitted findings on a quarterly basis and prepared an amendment and negotiated additional budget and contract dollars for continuation of study. As would be typical of the GS-12 grade level, the appellant's Regional Coordinator functions entail coordinating complex programs and activities which involve sensitive issues that have significant impact on parks. The appellant reviews the parks' current resources conditions and resources plans and transmits comments to the park units, identifying their goals as service-wide goals versus park-specific goals. He/she ensures parks understand the reporting requirements for land health goals, water quality (River and Stream), water quality (Lakes and Reservoirs), and water quantity. The appellant identifies water and air resources program needs and develops strategies and tactics and addresses those needs. He/she studies water and air resource issues and problems, identifies action alternatives and legal and administrative implications. As at the GS-12 level, this work requires extensive modifications 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.

The level of supervision and review received by the appellant is similar to the GS-12 grade level. He/she receives general administrative supervision on objectives and policy issues for each 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/her assignments with considerable latitude. He/she selects the appropriate methods for resolution of complex issues or problems. His/her work does not receive technical review and is generally accepted without change.

The appellant believes his/her position warrants evaluation at a higher grade because he/she coordinates Climate Change presentations by developing and distributing invitations to parks and other National Park Service (NPS) Divisions, locates date, time, and place for the presentations, and distributes PowerPoint presentations to attendees. He/she also states he/she coordinates Regional Climate Change Action Summaries, polls the parks and consolidates each parks responses to questions, and presents documents which identify park-based climate change actions findings; acts as Program Leader and reviews, ranks, and transmits comments for NPS Funding Source – Air Tour Management Acoustic Monitoring, coordinates conference calls to discuss projects submissions, and attended a meeting with [Serviced Agency] Administrators and other GS-14 staff members. However, these are duties and responsibilities fully encompassed within the GS-12 grade level as previously discussed.

At the GS-13 grade level, employees function as senior experts, on work for which technical problems, definitions, methods, and/or data are highly incomplete, controversial, or uncertain. While the appellant is viewed as a regional technical expert with the responsibility for resolving problems concerned with novel, undeveloped, and controversial aspects of physical science and related disciplines of sensitive and complex nature, the potentially controversial problems, concerns, issues, or other matters having far-reaching implications are handled by the supervisor. At the GS-13 grade level, employees are representatives for the agency before public bodies on controversial projects and are recognized as authoritative sources for consultation by other scientists and program specialists with a key role in resolving issues that significantly affect scientific programs. The appellant believes he/she performs work comparable to the following GS-13 grade level illustration in the JFS:

- Serves as the water-quality expert for an organization that is comparable to a single or multi-state water-resources program area or a small region in terms of size and complexity; plans and develops new water quality programs and projects by studying and analyzing the information needs of State and local government organizations and Federal agencies and the requirements and objectives of new legislation and regulations; reviews project proposals involving extremely complex water quality problems and issues to determine the feasibility of the projects, based on agency or bureau programs or priorities, the adequacy of work plans, proposed technical approaches and methodology, and human and budgetary resources; and develops broad guidelines for applying state-of-the-art science hydrologic data, analysis, and quality assurance techniques to various water-quality projects.

The appellant's work fails to fully meet the scope and complexity of work depicted in this illustration. While the appellant deals with the hydrological problems of an area which includes the agency's [Location], this is not equivalent to serving as the water quality expert for an entire state or multi-state water-resources program area affecting the general public described at the GS-13 grade level. Furthermore, the appellant is not responsible for the depth and breadth of

technical issues; nor is he/she responsible for developing the policies and approaches for the overall management of entire regional watershed areas. The appellant's expertise is respected by his/her colleagues and superiors. However, the record does not show that he/she is sought out for consultation by other scientists in the field to the extent envisioned at this grade level in the JFS. While the appellant frequently represents his/her agency before public bodies, the purpose of the representation is to address complex problems that are noncontroversial in nature. He/she does not represent the agency before public bodies on controversial projects, which requires staff work with responsibility for reviewing and developing legislative or regulatory proposals found at the GS-13 grade level. Experience expected at the GS-13 grade level suggests the employee is in an advisory or consultative role for headquarters or field offices and often performs tasks such as ensuring the technical adequacy of plans before submission to Congress and developing new or revised guidelines for department-wide use. The appellant's position is not tasked to perform these functions. Therefore, we find that the GS-12 grade level of the standard and its 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.