

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:** Range Technician, GS-455-7

**Organization:** [appellant's organization]  
Bureau of Land Management  
Department of the Interior  
[city, state]

**OPM decision:** Range Technician, GS-455-7

**OPM decision number:** C-0455-07-01

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

4/6/99  
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]

Personnel Officer  
Colorado State Office  
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2850 Youngfield Street  
Lakewood, Colorado 80215

[appellant's representative and address]

Director  
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P.O. Box 25047  
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## Introduction

On August 24, 1998, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received an appeal from [the appellant]. The appealed position is assigned to the [appellant's organization], Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior, [city, state]. The agency has classified the position as Range Technician, GS-455-7. The appellant believes his position should be classified as Range Technician, GS-455-9, and has filed an appeal with this office under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

The appellant certified to the accuracy of the duties described in his current position description (PD), number [PD number], dated July 28, 1989, and to the amendment dated November 6, 1996. The appellant's supervisor certified that PD number [PD number] and the amendment accurately reflect the duties performed by the appellant. We find this PD and its amendment are adequate for position classification purposes.

The appellant believes that the agency's evaluation of his position does not adequately reflect the scope and complexity of his current responsibilities and his independence and judgment used in performing his duties. To support his claim to higher credit, the appellant states:

I have taken on several additional duties since assuming this job in 1992, duties with much more complexity and responsibility than the original duties. The amendment to the original PD describes my additional duties, and is accurate. I am still compensated at the original GS-7 level which is grossly unfair. In [a specific state], there are 8 range technicians, of which 5 are GS-9's. Their PD's are nearly identical to my job duties.

I believe it would be fair to classify the [appellant's organization's] range technician position as GS-9 FPL [Full Performance Level] by the following reasoning: there have been accretions of duties since the job was originally filled in April 1992. Among these are: assuming duties as weed coordinator on [the area covered by the appellant's organization], writing of environmental documents for range actions, and management responsibilities for different allotments.

Comparison of the new [appellant's organization's] PD with other GS-9 Range Technicians in [a specific state] shows the nature of the duties to be virtually identical.

In reaching our classification decision, we considered information submitted by the appellant and his agency and information obtained by telephone from the appellant and his supervisor. As required by law, we classified the position based upon its duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements as compared to the criteria specified in the appropriate OPM classification standards and guidelines (sections 5106, 5107, and 5112 of title 5, United States Code). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's current duties to another position as a basis for deciding his appeal.

## Position information

The appellant is one of about 13 employees on the [staff of the appellant's organization], which is headed by a GS-12 Project Leader and also includes two GS-11 Archaeologists, one GS-11 Outdoor Recreation Planner, one GS-11 Environmental Protection Specialist, one GS-11 Ecologist, two GS-11 Realty Specialists, one GS-11 Rangeland Management Specialist, one GS-11 Wildlife Biologist, one GS-11 Natural Resource Specialist, and one GS-7 Recreation Assistant. The appellant works in conjunction with the GS-11 Rangeland Management Specialist, but he obtains work assignments from the GS-13 Associate Area Manager of the [appellant's organization].

The appellant has responsibility for technical support and assistance in the area of range conservation, range management, range improvement, and wild horse management in the [appellant's organization]. A summary of the appellant's major duties follows.

- The appellant conducts range project inspections. He completes cooperative agreements and assists in preparation of grazing permits and leases. He has responsibility for grazing authorizations for several "M" category (greater acreage-grazing rotation required) and all "C" category (less maintenance) allotments. This responsibility includes preparation of annual rotation plan letters to permittees and range readiness inspections. The appellant ensures that terms and conditions of grazing permits and leases under his area of responsibility are complied with, and he implements action on grazing trespass cases as directed by the specialist, including investigation, identification, forms completion, and settlement. The appellant serves as primary field contact for all [of the appellant's organization's] sheep allotments in the [geographic area].
- The appellant initiates range use supervision and allotment inspections on assigned allotments. He works closely with permittees to achieve resource objectives and implements flexible provisions concerning livestock amount, time, and use, as appropriate, following consultation with the specialists and the Associate Area Manager. If resource conditions dictate, the appellant recommends to the rangeland management specialist, changes in season use, class/number of livestock, and allotment boundaries.
- The appellant makes recommendations for intensity of range supervision and coordinates with specialists to assure appropriate environmental clearances are completed prior to submission to the National Environmental Protection Assessment coordinator and the Area Manager for signature. The appellant also prepares routine environmental documents for minor range management actions.
- The appellant identifies, evaluates, and selects various range projects based on [the appellant's organization] needs and objectives. He completes necessary program inputs and monitors progress of Allotment Work Plan range projects. He identifies maintenance needs and ensures adopter compliance, serves as contract/project inspector, maintains project files, and acts as project coordinator with zone engineering.

- The appellant serves as primary weed program coordinator for the [appellant's organization] weed management program. Activities range from identification and mapping of noxious weed infestations to treatment and oversight of the treatment of weeds by chemical, mechanical, and/or biological means. He initiates and completes Environmental Assessments and Pesticide Uses Proposals to allow treatment of noxious weeds in the [area under the authority of the appellant's organization].
- The appellant performs noncomplex input/output operations on the various range automated computer systems, including Grazing Billing Systems and Range Improvement Projects. He assists other staff members in establishing and conducting various range studies, including utilization, trends, and photo points.
- If necessary, the appellant coordinates livestock impoundment and/or disposal and assists the wild horse specialist on the resource area staff.

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

The appellant does not question the series or title of his position. We concur with the agency's determination that the duties performed by the appellant are covered by the GS-455 Range Technician Series. This series includes all positions that primarily require a practical knowledge of the methods and techniques of range conservation and related resource management fields. Range technicians provide practical technical support in range research efforts; in the marketing of the range resource; and in the scientific management, protection, and development of grasslands and other range resources.

The proper title for the appealed position, according to the position classification standard for the GS-455 series, is Range Technician.

Since the GS-455 standard contains no grade level criteria, the work of the appealed position is evaluated by comparison to the Grade Evaluation Guide for Aid and Technical Work in the Biological Sciences for the GS-400 Series.

### **Grade determination**

The Guide is written in Factor Evaluation System (FES) format and uses nine grade influencing factors for determining grade level. Within each factor, there are factor level descriptions that represent the minimum or threshold for that factor. If the position exceeds one factor level but fails to meet the full intent of the next higher factor level, the lower point value must be credited. The total of the point values assigned to the nine factors is converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

*Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information that the range technician must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, and policies) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply those knowledges.

As described in the Guide, an employee at Level 1-5 uses knowledge of the technical methods and procedures related to the professional field(s) supported; of management practices; and of the agency's policy and programs to lay out, schedule, organize, and execute the details of a wide variety of types of limited operational projects incorporating diverse technical knowledge, e.g., limited projects requiring the application of appreciably dissimilar specialized methods, procedures, and/or techniques. Employees at this level also apply a practical knowledge of the basic theories and practices of the scientific discipline(s) supported (though emphasis is on the numerous precedents repetitively employed in the organization) and must be adept at combining this knowledge with resourcefulness, initiative, and independent judgment in locating precedents and resolving the details inherent to the application.

Comparable to Level 1-5, the appellant's position requires knowledge of the principles of range management and animal husbandry used in the implementation and development of the [appellant's organization] range program; of the organizational structure and functions of the [appellant's organization] as it relates to BLM District, State, and Washington offices; of State and local livestock rules and regulations; and of the Resource Management Plan and its relationship to the range program and basic knowledge of ecological effects of grazing and local vegetation and key forage species. These knowledges are used to monitor grazing on the allotments for which the appellant has responsibility; to prepare annual rotation plan letters to permittees and conduct range readiness inspections; and to schedule and execute a variety of responsible projects related to range conservation programs. Similar to an illustration in the Guide where the technician explains standard contract provisions and the technical methods to be employed and either obtains compliance or refers noncompliance or unprecedented problems to higher levels, the appellant ensures that lessees comply with the terms and conditions of grazing permits and leases or refers unprecedented problems to a specialist or the Associate Area Manager. In another illustration, the technician at Level 1-5 develops preliminary plans for implementing improvements to grazing allotments, oversees implementation, and works with permittees. Such activities and the knowledges required to carry them out parallel those for the appellant's position. The knowledge required for the appellant's role as weed coordinator for the [appellant's organization] exceeds the illustration at Level 1-4 where the technician is a *participant* in the control of noxious plants. In summary, the knowledge required by the appellant's position fully meets Level 1-5.

At Level 1-6, the employee uses knowledge of the technical methods and procedures, management practices, agency policies and programs, and an extensive familiarity with the methods and practices of the science(s) or discipline(s) to design, coordinate, and execute complete conventional projects when the projects are well preceded but require the exercise of judgment based on critical analysis and evaluation or project objectives, past practices, and alternatives among available work processes;

to participate in most phases of the full research process and assume full technical and operational responsibility for a majority of the phases; or to administratively maintain a significant function or area of responsibility on an ongoing basis. Technicians at this level have administrative and/or technical assignments, projects, and responsibilities which are hard to distinguish from those assigned to employees within the organization who perform standardized *professional* level research studies or projects. To illustrate, a technician at this level performs project planning activity, adapts a design, and coordinates and executes pest management field projects which include developing a study plan; collecting data; organizing, justifying, and refining the data collected; studying and evaluating the data; and writing up recommendations for approval prior to implementing, independently, the eradication procedures selected. A technician at this level may manage precedented types of study projects concerned with habitat analysis for wildlife, fish, or plant populations where the technician would adapt a plan for executing the study; resolve administrative concerns; collect, organize, and summarize data on habitat conditions and diversity and study the results to determine distribution of endangered, threatened, sensitive, and other plant and animal species on assigned project areas of units; and generate conclusions or proposals. Technicians at this level may represent the agency at meetings organized to keep the local public, contractors, or interest groups informed about the organization's objectives and activities. The appellant's position does not require the technical knowledge to design, coordinate, and execute complete conventional projects comparable to the criteria at Level 1-6. Even though the appellant is the primary coordinator for the weed program for his organization, the knowledge required to perform duties associated with this responsibility fall short of the intent of Level 1-6.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-5 (750 points).

### *Factor 2, Supervisory controls*

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the responsibility of the employee, and the degree to which work is reviewed by the supervisor.

The appellant is supervised by the Associate Area Manager who has authority and responsibility for management of the [appellant's organization]. The appellant's supervisor or a higher level employee assigns specific tasks and provides clear, detailed, and specific oral or written instructions on the methods to be used in completing those tasks. The appellant's supervisor or a higher level employee provides direction on the priorities, objectives, and/or deadlines for types of work to be performed. The appellant determines the approach to problems encountered and resolves them based on established procedures and precedents. He refers significant technical or procedural problems to his supervisor or a higher level employee. The appellant's supervisor reviews completed work for quality of judgment used, accuracy of the data appropriateness, technical soundness, and conformity to policy and requirements.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor outlines objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance on dealing with unusually involved or one-of-a-kind situations. Work is typically assigned in an area for which the employee has ongoing responsibility. Similar to Level 2-3, the appellant coordinates work

efforts with outside parties and carries out the successive steps to complete project requirements and objectives. He exercises initiative in developing his own techniques and methods within established guidelines to resolve problems and deviations. He refers problems that do not have clear precedents to higher graded employees or the Associate Area Manager for resolution. Completed work is reviewed for appropriateness, technical soundness, and conformity to policy and requirements. Supervisory controls for the appellant's position meet and do not exceed Level 2-3.

This factor is evaluated at Level 2-3 (275 points).

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them.

To support his claim to higher credit, the appellant states:

Much of the work is now independently performed, from design to execution, with a high degree of personal judgment and coordination with customers.

At Level 3-2, the procedures for doing the work have been established and a number of specific guidelines are applicable. These guidelines may range from complex, standardized, codified regulations to maps, blueprints, standing operating procedures, oral instructions, equipment or instrument manuals, or technical texts. The employee must use judgment in selecting the appropriate guideline because of the number, similarity, linkage, and overlapping nature of the guides. The appellant uses guidance provided by BLM manuals, regulations, laws, and instruction memoranda. He accomplishes this as described at Level 3-2, i.e., by using standard approaches and judgment in interpreting guidelines and instructions for general or specific situations. Unlike Level 3-3, the problems the appellant must resolve do not require him to exercise judgment independently in applying the guidelines or extending their applicability to situations not specifically covered; using guidelines as the basis for making procedural deviations from established administrative and/or technical methods; or otherwise adapting guidelines when judgment is exercised based on an understanding of the intent of the guidelines and reacting accordingly. When the appellant encounters situations for which guidelines or precedents are unclear or not completely appropriate, he resolves them in accordance with general directions, previous training, accepted techniques, and organizational practices, or refers them to a higher graded employee or the Associate Area Manager. Guidelines used by the appellant and the judgment needed to apply them are characteristic of Level 3-2.

This factor is evaluated at Level 3-2 (125 points).

### *Factor 4, Complexity*

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.



To support his claim to higher credit, the appellant states:

Comparison of the original [of the appellant's organization's] range tech. PD with the new PD reflecting current duties shows a big discrepancy. The nature of the work reflected in the new PD shows more complexity.

At Level 4-3, the work requires the performance of various technical duties which involve differing and unrelated processes and methods. At this level, the decision regarding what needs to be done depends upon the analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment, and the chosen course of action may have to be selected from many alternatives. There exists a number of possible courses of action for planning as well as executing the work, and the technician is given leeway or is otherwise expected to exercise discretion in choosing from among them. Judgment is required in applying a wide range of conventional, established approaches, methods, techniques, and solutions to new situations.

The complexity of the appellant's position fully meets and does not exceed Level 4-3. The appellant assists in rangeland management and provides recommendations or determines what data to use, record, or report. The "M" and "C" allotments for which he has responsibility involve the more routine activities associated with allotments and do not involve the more complex work associated with "I" allotments where continuing improvements must be made to the land. To carry out his work, the appellant may need to obtain additional information by reviewing operating procedures, guidelines, and standard references. The appellant identifies and recommends resolution of discrepancies in data based on a study of how the data interrelate. He determines the nature of the problem, question, or issue, and makes decisions by studying the alternatives, identifying the issues, obtaining or researching information, and taking appropriate action.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-3 (150 points).

*Factor 5, Scope and effect*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work (i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment) and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization. To receive credit for a factor level, both the scope and effect of the work must meet the level.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-3 where the work involves applying conventional technical and administrative solutions and practices to a variety of problems. Comparable to Level 5-3, the appellant is responsible for the ongoing operation of several "M" category and all "C" category allotments. At this level, the work product directly affects the design and operation of systems, programs, or equipment systems. The appellant's accuracy, reliability, and expertise directly influence the overall effectiveness of the range program. The appellant's work meets Level 5-3 for scope and effect.

Level 5-3 is assigned (150 points).

*Factor 6, Personal contacts, and Factor 7, Purpose of contacts*

Factor 6 addresses the regular and recurring contacts with individuals outside the supervisory chain, and Factor 7 addresses the purpose of those contacts.

The appellant has contacts with individuals both within and outside the agency, including specialists, permittees, cooperators, private landowners, contractor personnel, law enforcement agencies, various local and Federal Government personnel, and the general public. These contacts occur in a moderately structured setting. Such contacts are comparable to Level 2 in that contacts at this level are with individuals or groups outside the agency on matters for which there is a routine working relationship.

The appellant's contacts do not meet Level 3 where contacts are made on a nonroutine basis and may include a variety of noted subject matter experts from other Federal agencies, universities, private foundations, and professional societies; influential local community leaders such as members of tribal governing bodies or comparable State or local government officials; newspaper, radio, and television reporters; legal representatives of private landowners; and representatives of organized landowner or special interest groups.

The appellant's agency credited his position with Level b where the purpose of the contacts is to plan and coordinate work efforts; explain the need to adhere to laws, rules, or contract or lease provisions; discuss inspected work and contract requirements when monitoring activity of contractors; discuss technical requirements of equipment with manufacturers and resolve problems concerning the work or the peculiar needs of the organization; interpret data obtained and explain its purpose; or to reach agreement on operating problems such as recurring submission of inaccurate, untimely, incomplete, or irrelevant data. Similar to Level b, the purpose of the appellant's contacts is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts of the range program and provide general information to the public. Many of the appellant's contacts parallel those described at Level b where contacts are made to resolve operating problems by influencing or motivating individuals or groups who are working toward mutual goals and who have basically cooperative attitudes.

The appellant's contacts do not require the skill necessary at Level c where the contact is to influence, motivate, interrogate, or control persons or groups. For example, the purpose of contacts at this level is to persuade others to participate in projects or organizational objectives when there is no requirement for doing so; to gain compliance with established policies and regulations by persuasion or negotiation; to influence others who are knowledgeable about the work to adopt, within the organization, methods about which there are conflicting opinions among those in the line of work; or to persuade technical and administrative personnel from outside the government to submit the information desired for a study when there is no official or legal basis for requiring submission of the information and there are conflicts with the parties involved.

We evaluate these combined factors at Level 2b and credit (75 points).

### *Factor 8, Physical demands*

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and physical exertion involved in the work.

At Level 8-2, the work requires some physical exertion, such as regular and recurring running, walking, or bending; walking or climbing over rocky areas, through plowed fields or other uneven surfaces, through dense vegetation and in mountainous terrain; etc.

The appealed position requires intensive field work in remote areas by foot and four-wheel drive vehicles. The terrain varies from flat mesas to steep mountains. Some heavy lifting (under 50 pounds) may be required. Long periods of physically demanding work may be required when and if the appellant is engaged in fire fighting. He must be able to drive a four-wheel drive vehicle over rough and mountainous terrain in extremes of temperature and climatic conditions. Physical demands for the appellant's meet Level 8-2.

The physical demands of the appellant's position do not meet those described at Level 8-3 where the work requires regular and protracted periods of considerable and strenuous physical exertion such as carrying or lifting heavy objects (over 50 pounds); hacking passages through dense vegetation; or climbing ladders or scaffolds carrying heavy equipment used to install, maintain, or repair research installations.

This factor is evaluated at Level 8-2 (20 points).

### *Factor 9, Work environment*

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety and occupational health regulations required.

At Level 9-2, the work involves regular and recurring moderate risks or discomforts which require special safety precautions, e.g., working around machine parts, motorized carts, or machines or working with irritant chemicals. At this level, technicians are required to use protective clothing or gear, such as masks, gowns, coats, goggles, gloves, or shields to moderate risks or to follow procedures for minimizing risk.

The appellant works in an office setting for one to two hours per day. The rest of his work is performed in an outside environment during all months of the year, on hazardous terrain and in all kinds of weather. He uses protective clothing, e.g., masks and gloves when working with chemicals for treatment of weeds. The appellant's work environment meets Level 9-2.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 9-3 where the work environment involves high risks with regular and recurring exposure to potentially dangerous situations or unusual environmental stress where high risk factors exist which cannot be reasonably controlled.

This factor is evaluated at Level 9-2 (20 points).

### *Summary*

In summary, we have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Points</b>
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-5	750
2. Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150
6. and 7. Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts	2b	75
8. Physical Demands	8-2	20
9. Work Environment	9-2	20
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>		<b>1565</b>

The appellant's position warrants 1565 total points. In accordance with the grade conversion table provided in the Guide, the position is properly graded at GS-7.

### **Decision**

The appellant's position is properly classified as Range Technician, GS-455-7.