

Classification Appeal Decision

issued by

U.S. Department of Interior

Washington, D.C. 20240

Appellant:

[REDACTED]

Position:

Landscape Architect, GS-807-12

Organization:

Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Midwest Field Area
Great Plains Systems Office
Education and Visitor Services

Decision:

Landscape Architect, GS-807-12

^{6th} Dolores Chacon
Acting Director of Personnel

6-11-97

Date

Copies of Decision Transmitted to:

[REDACTED]

NPS
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, NE 68102

Personnel Director
NPS
Washington, D.C.

INTRODUCTION

By memorandum dated November 14, 1996, ██████████ submitted an appeal of a classification decision made by the servicing personnel office of the Midwest Regional Office, NPS on April 5, 1996. In its review of this position which came about as a result of a request from the Team Manager, Education and Visitor Services who proposed to upgrade this position to Assistant Program Leader, GS-13 as an accretion of duties, the NPS determined that the current classification of Landscape Architect, GS-807-12 is accurate.

██████████ disagrees with the NPS determination. Specifically, he questions the series and title determinations believing that landscape architecture is not the main focus of his position rather coordinating/brokering services are predominate. Further, he disagrees with the NPS determinations regarding the difficulty of assignments he handles and the level of responsibility of his position. Our decision is presented below. This is the final administrative decision within the Department of Interior.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The decision was based upon material submitted from the following sources:

- The appellant's official position description and evaluation statement;
- Appellant's Notice of Personnel Action (SF-50);
- Appellant's Performance Standards;
- Organizational Chart;
- Immediate supervisor's official position description and evaluation statement;
- Additional documentation relative to the appellant's position; and
- Telephone interviews with the appellant on May 28, 1997, and with his supervisor ██████████, Supervisory Civil Engineer.

REFERENCES

- Landscape Architect, GS-807, TS-44, dated February 1963

GENERAL ISSUES

The appellant asserted that his position description only partially reflects the duties he performs. During the desk audit, however, it was found that the PD adequately describes the appellant's work. This was also confirmed by the supervisor.

The appellant believes his position is comparable in difficulty to a general engineer/ landscape architect GS-13 position in the Rocky Mountain System Support Office serving as program leader for the Facility Management, Design and Engineering Group and that GS-13 is the proper grade for his position. The appellant submitted a copy of that PD to confirm his statement.

We reviewed the GS-13 PD and noticed significant and inherent differences between assignments performed by [REDACTED] and those performed by the GS-13 position. The referenced position appears to warrant the GS-13 classification because that position operates with more freedom from supervisory controls in performing more difficult assignments and has greater responsibilities than the appellant's position. The referenced position serves as full program leader (participating in employee performance evaluations, making recommendations for awards and disciplinary actions, etc.) to a team of professional and technical employees including civil engineers, landscape architects, architects, general and mechanical engineers, engineering technicians, and specialists providing assistance to the Rocky Mountain and Colorado Plateau Clusters parks.

Nevertheless, the classification appeals process dictates that comparison of current duties and responsibilities to appropriate classification standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions. Thus, the GS-13 PD has no bearing on this decision.

POSITION INFORMATION

The appellant is assigned to the Midwest Field Area, Great Plains Systems Office, Education and Visitor Services, NPS. This office provide services to the Great Plains and Great Lakes Cluster parks encompassing thirteen states and approximately 60 parks. The primary purpose of this position to provide assistance and support to Great Plains and Great Lakes Cluster parks either directly or by coordinating services in landscape and grounds, road and trail systems, parking areas, structures, site development; sustainable practices, environmental, civil, and mechanical engineering, and employee housing. The appellant facilitates and coordinates the services of the team to accomplish project assistance support for parks; coordinates review of design project documents; works with Contract Specialists to coordinate the contracting of design and construction work and to prepare Architech/Engineering service contracts; serves as field area representative on Service-wide initiatives; establishes partnerships with external groups and coordinates the seasonal student program. In addition, the appellant has responsibility for field area-wide activities such as the National Sign Program, the Federal Lands Highway Program, and the National Housing Program.

SERIES AND TITLE DETERMINATION

The appellant questioned whether or not his position was properly assigned to the Landscape Architect Series, GS-807. He believes that the majority of his assignments involve coordinating design projects that go beyond the discipline of landscape architecture. The primary purpose of this position is to provide assistance and support either directly or by coordinating services to Great Plains and Great Lake cluster parks in the areas of landscape and ground, trail systems, road systems, parking areas, site development, sustainable practices, structures, and employee housing. While this position requires wide knowledge and experience, it primarily requires determining the most functional, economical, and esthetic results in physical land planning. The work requires consideration of existing topography and natural features, buildings and area arrangements, movement, grading of land forms, surface and subsurface drainage, construction materials, etc. as well as esthetic principles in order to effectively perform and/or coordinate the work.

The Landscape Architect Series includes positions that perform or supervise professional work in the planning and design of land areas and concurrent landscape construction and maintenance for integrated developments to meet specific human needs. It involves the analysis of land characteristics, operational requirements, land-use intensities, and commensurate land values and includes the efficient correlation of ground and water forms, plant forms, structures, roads, and walks to serve esthetic, functional, economic, and other interrelated purposes. These positions require professional landscape architectural planning and design ability and require knowledge of the allied physical planning fields of architecture and civil engineering, the biological sciences of agronomy, horticulture and botany as they affect land development. We concur with the NPS's determination that the position is appropriately titled and coded as Landscape Architect, GS-807.

GRADE LEVEL DETERMINATION

The Landscape Architect Series, GS-807 is written in narrative format in terms of two evaluation factors taken together: Difficulty of Assignments and Responsibility of the Position.

Difficulty of Assignments covers those factors that are inherent in an assignment and makes it more or less difficult to work on. The difficulty of assignments, therefore, is influenced by the following factors considered as they each affect the other:

- the amount of land being dealt with, whether it is a large tract composed of a number of areas, an area composed of a number of sites, or an individual site; •
- the natural, climatic, and topographic features of the terrain, whether they are unique or varied as to post unusual or unprecedented design problems;
- the variety of functional purposes or uses of the land to be accommodated by landscape design;

- the degree of originality required for design projects; and
- the knowledge and ability required to coordinate activities and negotiate, and the extent to which the landscape architect is an authority in his field.

At the GS-12 Level, landscape architects assignments are extensive in scope and importance, contain many difficult features, and are largely involved in planning and coordination. A typical assignment includes responsibility for coordination of master planning and preparation of master plan drawings and narratives for large tracts of land, requiring cooperation of people from one or more fields in addition to landscape architecture. Some positions at this level review landscape architectural plans of architects, builders, contractors, local authorities, and others for such projects as large subdivisions, housing developments, and hospitals. Assignments often lead to guidance and negotiation in order to achieve the best planning solution possible for design problems. Assignments require extensive liaison with those who are doing the design and the appropriate officials or authorities. Assignments require extensive knowledge and skill to handle unusual problems and the ability to coordinate the activities of a number of groups effectively.

At the GS-13 Level, landscape architects assignments involve unusual difficulty and responsibility and provide considerable opportunity for individual decision-making. GS-13 level landscape architects are specialists in their area of work and have extensive knowledge of special requirements of such projects as parks, parkways, roads, highways, recreational facilities, airfields, hospitals, subdivisions, rental housing, and military installations. They represent the agency at meetings with high-ranking professional personnel from other agencies and organizations requiring negotiation on the part of the landscape architect to reconcile diverse points of views, making special landscape architectural studies in connection with proposals for projects not within the ordinary master planning concepts; and performing consultant service on matters for a variety of organizational segments within the agency. Some positions at this level act as professional advisors to field office staff serving a large geographical area containing diversified developments in this country and/or abroad. Assignments at this level require the professional experience in landscape architecture; extensive knowledge of agency policies, aims, objectives, and of existing legislation and program requirements of the agency; and an ability to meet and deal effectively with management, engineers, architects, builders, contractors, and others, since a substantial portion of time at this level is spent in consultation and negotiation.

The appellant performs assignments that meet GS-12 level work. [REDACTED] works as a senior landscape architect responsible for coordinating and facilitating construction, repair and maintenance work projects for parks, and coordinating services to provide technical assistance to parks. He administers the National Sign, the Federal Lands Highway, and the National Housing Programs as well as sustainability programs. He also establishes partnership programs with local schools.

Although the appellant has significant coordinative responsibilities and some negotiating skills, [REDACTED] does not perform work as described at the GS-13 level. The appellant's work does not directly and significantly involve negotiating diverse views, differences and issues that impact a

wide range of agency activities, nor are the services coordinated conducted throughout the agency, or cover the operations of the agency's headquarters or most of its field establishments and affect the agency's national goals and objectives as envisioned at the GS-13 level. The work performed by the appellant primarily supports the accomplishment of the field office mission.

We concur with the servicing personnel office that this position meets the GS-12 level for this factor.

Responsibility of the Position measures the degree of supervision received and authority to act:

- this refers to the manner in which work is assigned and reviewed; whether supervision is close and continuous, the nature of review, and the nature of recommendations, decisions, and conclusions made; and

the type of personal contact work performed:

- this refers to the purpose of the contacts, whether they are for the purpose of receiving or exchanging information and instructions, making commitments, coordinating activities, or negotiating.

At the GS-12 Level, the supervisor assigns work in terms of broad, general objectives. Landscape architects at this level are relatively free from technical control. Technical decisions and recommendations are seldom changed by higher authority. Completed work is reviewed for adequacy in terms of the broad objectives of the assignment and for compliance with agency policies and regulations.

Personal contacts constitute a substantial portion of the work at the GS-12 level. The landscape architect must coordinate work and maintain liaison with organizations performing related work. They have contacts with planners, architects, engineers, builders, contractors, State and municipal authorities, related agencies, and the general public.

At the GS-13 Level, supervision received is in the form of administrative direction. Assignments are given in terms of general objectives, and recommendations made at this level are accepted as technically sound.

Personal contacts are an important factor at this level. Architects at this level act as consultants and negotiators. They may be required to speak to groups on technical matters relating to their work.

The appellant's position meet the GS-12 level. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of priorities, objectives, and project parameters. The appellant works independently in planning and carrying out the work. He coordinates with others and resolves most problems that occur. The supervisor is available for consultation on controversial or unusual problems. Completed work is reviewed for effectiveness in meeting requirements and to ensure conformance with established policies and regulations. The employee has contacts with employees within the NPS, employees in

other government agencies including the Department of Justice, Veterans Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, the Forest Service, contractors, special interest groups, and manufacturers to coordinate and expedite projects, establish partnerships, and exchange information. [REDACTED] works under greater supervision than the administrative direction described at the GS-13 level. In addition, the small size and specific functions of the office limit the need for such extensive coordination, negotiation and integration of varied programs and projects as envisioned for GS-13 level work and results in the position carrying out duties and responsibilities similar to those at the GS-12 level. We concur with the NPS that this position meet the GS-12 level for this factor.

SUMMARY

We have evaluated both factors, **Difficulty of Assignments** and **Responsibility of the Position** at the GS-12 level.

DECISION

The appealed position is appropriately classified as Landscape Architect, GS-807-12.