



*National Weather Service
Employees Organization*

A Message from NWSEO President

On February 6, 2019, NWS management notified NWSEO and the bargaining unit of management's intent to unilaterally implement their "GS5-to-12 progression" plan for 1340 series meteorologists in the near future, with the first steps coming as early as next month. NWSEO has long supported many of the goals of a 5-to-12 progression, however, the plan devised by management contains multiple problems and ambiguities and raises some serious concerns. NWSEO would like to see these addressed and corrected in order to mitigate negative effects on both the personal lives and workplace environment of the bargaining unit employees.

Management states, in their notice of intent to implement the 5-to-12 progression, that "NWSEO failed to timely submit proposals on the GS5-12 career progression program", so they "will not entertain any further proposals on the program or enter into negotiations over the program." In fact, NWSEO submitted clarifying questions regarding management's proposal months ago. Management's responses to these questions made it clear that management was only willing to negotiate over the 5-12 progression if NWSEO allowed management to simply ignore applicable provisions of the existing Collective Bargaining Agreement and Memorandums of Understanding. NWSEO has repeatedly requested that management meet with the union to attempt to work out these issues in a collaborative manner, but management has refused to do so.

Given management's decision to move forward unilaterally in violation of the CBA and multiple MOUs, we have been left no choice but to file a union grievance against the NWS to attempt to stop such an implementation. We sincerely hope that management will engage us in conversations to improve or clarify the following aspects of their plan as soon as possible. NWSEO remains optimistic for a quick resolution and is willing to meet face to face with management to work out these issues below:

- There are serious concerns about employee mobility under the 5-to-12 plan put forth by management. Management's own communications regarding this plan make it clear that in most cases, GS-12 meteorologist vacancies will be filled by hiring new employees off the street, rather than promoting or reassigning existing

NWS meteorologists from other offices. In his all-hands email of February 7, Dr. Uccellini stated that the agency expects that the 5-12 progression will “lower the yearly relocation costs NWS pays for internal promotions”, which brings into serious doubt his later assurances that “for those who want to move, there will be opportunities to bid on open positions as they become available”. Management has clearly stated that one of the goals of this entire enterprise is to save PCS costs; this is what they have in mind. That means if you are hired into the NWS and are not satisfied with your duty location, or you need to move for personal reasons, it will become much more difficult for you to do so. Examples of ways to mitigate this would be an enhanced internal reassignment program, or an assurance that all GS-12 vacancies will be bid internally before being bid to non-status employees.

- Currently the CBA (Article 14, Section 7) assures regular promotions up to GS-11 for employees “below the journeyman level in a career ladder position” (i.e., Interns), as long as they meet a series of listed requirements, one of which is that the employee “has been given grade building opportunities, and has successfully demonstrated the ability to complete them”. This provision has been used many times by the union to win retroactive promotions and back pay for employees who, by no fault of their own and usually due to various administrative errors by WFMO or others, did not receive an expected and deserved promotion in a timely manner. However, management’s 5-to-12 plan would explicitly negate such regular and assured career ladder promotions, and would instead make them discretionary by management; including promotions to the GS-07, GS-09, and GS-11 levels. If your MIC has a problem with you, they could simply not promote you each step along the way. If the agency says they don’t have enough budget for promotions, they could simply nix them. Why should every other position in the NWS including 1340 positions at HQ be protected by this provision of the CBA except operational meteorologists at WFOs and NCEP? In addition, management’s plan does not address what would happen to an employee who is unable to pass their assessment for grade advancement. Would management then simply remove them from their position if they failed the assessment for whatever reason? Would they be forced to remain at their lower grade, re-taking the assessment every year until management decides they feel like promoting them? Management must adhere to the current contract in maintaining regular and reasonably assured promotions for eligible employees, which will eliminate opportunities for personal bias or budgetary games and protect the current career path of Met Interns and General Forecasters.

- Management's 5-to-12 plan also appears intended to effectively eliminate the HMT and OPL positions within the NWS, as it makes no provision at all for the existing HMTs, hiring of HMTs in the future, or how future OPL vacancies would be filled. This would cripple our observational program management. A possible mitigation strategy would be a requirement for maintaining a minimum number of HMT's within the agency, providing enhanced crossover training for HMT's to voluntarily transition to the 1340 series at agency expense, and a firm commitment to training and hiring OPL replacements.

- If GS-05 through GS-12 employees are combined into a single rotation, all working the same shift schedules and performing the same duties, what is to prevent management or an outside auditor from later drawing the conclusion that GS-12 grades are not needed to perform those duties? If a GS-07 employee can work the same shifts and do the same job, why do we need GS-12's in that position? And if we don't need GS-12's, then why do Lead Forecasters need a GS-13 grade? NWSEO notes that Dr. Uccellini's email of February 7 does not mention lead forecasters, although it does state that "NWS will begin the first phase of transitioning **all** GS-1340s, including Interns and General Forecasters, to a 'Forecaster' designation this summer" (emphasis added). Does this mean that current lead/senior forecasters will be re-designated as simply "Forecasters" along with all other 1340s in the 5-12 progression? NWSEO needs assurances that the position descriptions for these employees, and the implementation plan for any 5-to-12 progression, will protect the current pay grades of our employees.

- If each office now has seven to eleven "meteorologists" in the GS-05 to GS-12 range, all in one large rotation, then a base schedule rotation would need to include that many slots. However, what then happens when newer, lower-graded employees within that rotation are not qualified to work all operational duties and shifts? Are they forced to remain on administrative shifts until they are deemed ready by management, while other employees have to cover all their vacated shifts? This raises serious concerns for work planning schedule practices. Management should work with NWSEO to provide guidance and contingency plans and best practices to provide relief so GS-12 and lower employees are not forced to constantly disrupt their lives covering extra shifts unnecessarily.

While NWSEO sees benefits to bargaining unit meteorologists in some aspects of the 5-to-12 plan put forth by management, we also see serious concerns and potential negative effects. As your representatives, we must take action to attempt to mitigate these potential problems for your benefit, and to prevent the NWS from disregarding the CBA whenever it does not suit their wishes. That is why this grievance has been filed.

Thank you,

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