

July 26, 2022

Hello Eraina Ortega,

I work as an environmental scientist in the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's 401 Water Quality Certification unit (401 unit). We are a unique unit in our Region in that we have only Environmental Scientists as regular staff in our unit. Our unit is an example of the inequity in how the State values scientists, and how this inequity is unacceptable.

The 401 unit deals with projects that directly impact water bodies through dredging, filling, or excavation. We implement federal water quality protections in collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and ensure compliance with State environmental regulations. Recent work includes collaborating with municipalities on flood control and fire risk reduction projects that are critical for public safety.

The 401 Certification process established in 1990 provides the regulatory framework for a technical review of projects during the design process, before waters are impacted. To demonstrate why this is important, one can look at the results of unchecked development in the past. The state of California has lost 90% of its historic wetlands since the mid-1800's¹. The state of California's policy is to prevent further net loss of area and function of aquatic resources. These resources are critical to the State for reasons that range from recreation to fish spawning habitat to infiltration that replenishes our groundwater reservoirs.

The work done by scientists in my 401 unit and throughout the State is currently compensated by the State at close to 40% less² than engineers doing similar value work. This pay disparity would seem to suggest that the State does not value our work protecting these resources. It also results in my whole unit receiving less pay overall than other units in our office, despite our work as a first line of defense against direct impacts to waters of the State. Scientists are not only asking that our wages increase at a rate that keeps up with the rate of inflation and other rising costs of living. We are asking that the State provides a viable career for scientific professionals who want to help find evidence-based solutions for the struggles that our State continues to face.

Regards,

Kathleen Hicks
Environmental Scientist

¹ [My Water Quality: Wetlands \(ca.gov\); Microsoft Word - Wetlands memo 10 18 10_2_.doc \(ca.gov\)](#),

² [Pay Equity for Scientists! - About Salary Equity \(google.com\)](#)