



Forest
Service

Washington
Office

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

File Code: 1600
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Subject: Best Places to Work Survey

To: All EMPLOYEES

The Washington Post's Federal Diary contained an article entitled "Struggling to Boost Forest Service Morale," which focuses on results from a recently published survey "Best Places to Work." The survey was conducted by the Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation. It ranks federal agencies based on responses from 212,000 federal employee responses to questions about the work place, including training, employee empowerment, leadership, and matching skills to the agency mission. The Forest Service was ranked 206 out of 216 agencies surveyed. The Post article included comments from Congressional leaders, employee unions' officials and Associate Chief Hank Kashdan's testimony in an April Congressional hearing.

This ranking, and the negative commentary coming from a variety of sources, concerns me deeply. This deserves leadership's attention and your attention at every level of the agency. Hank and I are examining the survey results closely and will seek ways to engage employees further and address the concerns that are presented in these results.

We have had some challenging years in the Forest Service that coincide with the increasing cost of wildfire suppression. Most of our non-fire programs have been forced to give up budget share; we have downsized, eliminated programs, delayed important and even critical projects, and have struggled to meet the increasing demands of the agency's work. Fire transfer of \$240 million late in FY 2008 was particularly painful. And all this has been going on along with a number of efforts to centralize, modernize and comply with external direction involving technology, standardization, and homeland security. It has been rough.

The Forest Service program of work is critical to the success of so many of the President's goals and objectives for this Administration. We do make a difference. You make a difference in sustaining the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. I want the Forest Service to continue its tradition as an employer of choice and look forward to working with you to address our workplace challenges.


ABIGAIL R. KIMBELL
Chief



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