

# RESTORING THE FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT WORKFORCE

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## OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS  
AND PUBLIC LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

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## **OVERSIGHT HEARING ON “RESTORING THE FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT WORKFORCE.”**

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**Thursday, March 19, 2009**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, D.C.**

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The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Grijalva, Bishop, Holt, Heinrich, Inslee, Sarbanes, Shea-Porter, Tsongas, and Lummis.

### **STATEMENT OF THE HON. RAÚL M. GRIJALVA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA**

Mr. GRIJALVA. Welcome to the hearing by the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. This is an oversight hearing on Restoring the Federal Land Management Workforce. Thank you very much for being here.

Today our Subcommittee will be conducting an oversight hearing to explore the issues impacting the morale and the effectiveness of our public lands workforce. We will hear testimony from groups that represent the employees in the field, those who protect our forests, manage the range, and serve the millions of park visitors that we have each year. Their offices may be in the top of Mount McKinley or a raft in the Grand Canyon, cruising timber in the Pacific Northwest, or riding the Wyoming range. These are the jobs that most Americans have only dreamt of—yet, by all accounts, their morale is among the worst of all Federal employees. According to survey data, Federal prison guards and IRS agents enjoy their job more than park rangers. We want to know why.

For years, we have increased our expectations of these employees while chronically underfunding their programs. “Do more with less” has been the common mantra. Today, we are asking these beleaguered employees, in addition, to begin to address the impacts of climate change, fight the increasing and more severe wildfires, balance energy development with resource protection, get every child to play outside, keep the trails in good shape, the range lands healthy, and the restrooms clean.

Our Federal land management workforce faces a looming wave of retirements and the loss of institutional capacity and memory.

At the same time, these same agencies routinely rate very poorly on surveys of employee satisfaction, surveys that young job seekers use to guide their career choices. Today, we look forward to hearing from the Partnership for Public Service, producers of the report "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" who will shed light on these low ratings, and offer suggestions for improvement.

Nobody knows the issues faced by these employees better than the employees themselves. So today we will also hear testimony from three witnesses representing rank and file employees of the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service. These witnesses dedicated a great deal of their personal time and energy to addressing these issues on behalf of their peers, and we appreciate the effort it took for them to be here today for this hearing.

Last February, the Department of the Interior Inspector General completed a review of the problems in the United States Park Police, including those that directly impact employee morale. Today, we will hear testimony which will bring us up to speed on the progress to date in achieving what former NPS Director Bomar called "Management Excellence with Park Police."

These dedicated stewards of our Federal land management agencies have protected and conserved our lands and the resources for over a century. The work they do is a model for nations around the world. This Committee must support them and give them the tools they need to face the challenges that lie ahead. I look forward to hearing the testimony of all our witnesses today, and now I will turn to our Ranking Member, Mr. Bishop, for any opening statement he may have. Sir.

Mr. BISHOP. I will yield until we actually hear the testimony.

Mr. GRIJALVA. At this point let me welcome our first panel, and let me begin with Mr. Hank Kashdan, Associate Chief, Forest Service, Department of Agriculture.

Sir, your verbal testimony, five minutes; your written testimony in its entirety, and other extraneous information you want to add will all be made a part of the record. Sir.

**STATEMENT OF HANK KASHDAN, ASSOCIATE CHIEF,  
FOREST SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Mr. KASHDAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Bishop, Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to talk about restoring the Federal public lands workforce. Also appreciate being here with my Department of the Interior colleagues, and I also want to acknowledge being here with Ron Thatcher, the President of the National Federation of Federal Employees, which is our principal union in the Forest Service, and one key to as part of a partnership to address workforce issues that you have cited this morning.

Let me say, Mr. Chairman, that I am close to 36 years with the Forest Service. I am joined by 32,000 plus other career employees who have decades of service and are often second and third generation employees. I feel it is very fair to say that these employees are passionate about the mission of the agency, proud to work for the Forest Service and really optimistic about the future.

Part of that pride and optimism about the future is addressing the opportunities brought to the Forest Service by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act where we are going to be putting additional focus on several of the priorities that were mentioned in your opening remarks, and we have already put \$100 million of that act out into the field and are already creating jobs and our employees are working with those new contractors to deliver on those priorities.

Now, clearly there have been major issues facing the Forest Service in the past couple of decades. Just profound changes we have gone through that has had an effect on the workforce. In the early 1990s, we were routinely criticized for poor financial controls, the inability to account for performance, very expensive overhead. We simply had to make major changes. We have done that.

In a passionate workforce when you make major change and that change goes well, it is stressful, it creates some degree of frustration even if it is executed very well. When it is executed poorly, it is extremely demoralizing to the workforce and, frankly, we have had the best and the worst of major changes in the past 15 years.

Let me focus on one aspect of that change, a major centralization of administrative programs in order to reduce overhead. We have centralized our financial management. We have centralized our human resources. We have dramatically changed how employees receive computer support, and this has involved a downsizing of roughly 1,500 employees that had historically been spread through the field, many of them had to move. Many of the employees had to move. Many of them actually elected to leave the Forest Service as opposed to moving, and that was a very, very disruptive period in time to the agency, and we continue to have some effects from that major centralization today.

We implemented some major IT systems, notably "EmpowHR" and "GovTrip" that have been extremely difficult for the agency to deal with. The EmpowHR system was implemented well before its time, and it had major significant, almost catastrophic impacts on many of our employees that are now adjustment from today.

Centralization of our human resources program has been very difficult and has contributed to some of our employee morale issues. We had some unrealistic downsizing goals, and we had some very poor system implementation associated with that.

In addition, there were other changes that have affected the employees in the Forest Service, the recent experience with competitive sourcing—that is no longer occurring now—had the effect of causing employees who have worked for decades and were very proud of the work they were doing, as a manner of speaking, looking over their shoulder to see if their job might be competed in the future, and that created tremendous negative will toward Forest Service leadership and a fear for their jobs.

Also, in the area of fire suppression, in five of the last seven years we have had to transfer money from other funds in order to pay for the cost of fire suppression when that cost exceeded the money that we had appropriated, and this funding came from recreation, foreign management, you name it, wildlife, et cetera, and that resulted in projects being canceled, projects being delayed, projects being redone, it created angry partners, broken promises.

It was, frankly, no way to run a railroad, and that has had a tremendously negative effect on this organization.

So there are many other changes that I could cite, but that is kind of a capsule of some of the major changes that have affected the organization.

But I also believe as we look to the future we have every reason to be optimistic. We have received seven successful clean audit opinions. The President's budget addresses the fire transfer situation, and if enacted as proposed, the changes of fire transfers are very minimal in the future. Our financial management centralization is now clearly a success. It has moved into what I would call the savings category, and demonstrates that change takes two or three years to implement.

Human resources redesign is now functioning fairly well and will address, I am confident, some of our staffing backlogs. We are about to introduce some new organizational alternatives to deliver computer support to our employees who have been frustrated with the local service they have been receiving. We are making major progress in establishing a new safety culture in our organization, and most recently we are going through the Fiscal Year 2009 Omnibus Act we will be transferring six Bureau of Reclamation job corps centers to the Forest Service, which means the Forest Service will be operating all 28 civilian conservation job corps centers in the country, which is going to be an essential aspect of future career paths for potential agency employees and new careers for young adults.

So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I would have to say that clearly we have gone through a series of profound change. I think the future is looking very bright for the Forest Service, and we would look forward to discussing more with you any questions you might have. So that concludes my verbal remarks. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kashdan follows:]

**Statement of Hank Kashdan, Associate Chief, Forest Service,  
United States Department of Agriculture**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on restoring the federal public lands workforce.

**INTRODUCTION**

I am Hank Kashdan, Associate Chief of the Forest Service and during this transition to the Obama Administration, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at USDA. I have a long career with the Forest Service serving as Budget Director, and until December as Deputy Chief for Business Operations before assuming my current position. It was during my tenure as Budget Director that the Forest Service decided to centralize the business operations for budget and finance (B&F), human resource management (HRM) and information technology (IT). Later, I became the Forest Service Deputy Chief for Business Operations. I had to implement and make operational the centralized operations for B&F, HRM and IT.

The Forest Service and its employees are dedicated to the Forest Service mission "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." The current workforce of the Forest Service is approximately 33,000 employees. Each year our staff grows to almost 50,000 employees with the hiring of about 15,000 temporary and seasonal employees to assist in managing the various conservation and multiple use management programs for forestry, wildlife, recreation, range, fire suppression, forestry research and other resource areas is greatly dependent upon our centralized information, business, finance, and personnel organizations. To achieve our mission, busi-

ness operations and the processes and designs for workflow are critical to agency success and employee morale.

Forest Service employees have faced important changes in the past 10 years associated with service centralization, implementation of new technology, major changes in the dynamics of wildfire suppression, and a heightened focus on climate change.

Forest Service employees are “fired up and ready to go” in implementing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. We are excited about our contribution in creating and sustaining jobs through a focus on infrastructure, reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire, and developing alternative energy based on woody biomass that will support the President’s goal of energy independence.

Forest Service employees are passionate about the agency’s mission and the opportunity to contribute to the economic recovery in the short and long term. When changes occur, there can be major adjustments needed in behavior and operational procedures. Within a passionate workforce such as ours, changes can be, and usually are, debated vigorously. We fully encourage this debate since it points out what is working well and where we can do better. We have learned from these discussions that sometimes change can have a negative affect, even when change is implemented well. However, the situation would be far worse when change is poorly implemented. The Forest Service has experienced the best and worst of change.

#### **CENTRALIZED BUSINESS PROCESSES**

From its inception, more than 100 years ago, the Forest Service had been a decentralized agency. During the majority of this time, however, policy and guidance relating to human resources, financial management, budget, and information were largely concentrated at headquarter levels of the agency. In the last 25 to 30 years, most field units came to have had a full complement of business, personnel and more recently information technology services and programs, largely because of advances in computing capacity. The Forest Service organization includes more than 600 ranger districts, 155 national forests, and 20 grasslands. It has nine regions, 92 research work units and five research stations, the Forest Products Laboratory, the International Institute for Tropical Forestry, and the Northeastern Area office for State and Private Forestry. Each level has responsibility for a variety of functions.

Beginning in 2004, the Forest Service began an effort to centralize certain business-related operations. Centralized business operations can achieve an economy of scale and eliminate duplicative efforts across many field units, and we have seen significant benefits from these efforts. In recent years, the shift to centralized business operations has occurred, thus breaking with our long-standing organizational history. This has a strong effect on morale. This shift is particularly notable for employees and managers accustomed to receiving advice and service from an employee with whom, in most cases, they had a personal relationship. Now, under the centralized model of business operations that service person is not on the field or headquarters unit any more. At the same time, some work associated with business operations remains at field units where individual employees must assume the responsibility for administrative functions. This work, coupled with the shift, has contributed to a circumstance in which some employees feel like they have more workload and can add pressure and stress on them. In some cases, the consequence is reduced employee morale.

#### **CENTRALIZED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

From the 1960’s through 2003, the labor force providing information technology (IT) infrastructure services and information management (IM) policy and standards was highly decentralized throughout the Forest Service. About 1,250 employees devoted at least part of their time to these roles. Industry experts advised agency leadership to replace localized customer support with a model that included “self help” approaches and centrally managed operations. In 2003, a Competitive Sourcing (A-76) study identified a centralized, most efficient organization (MEO) for the Chief Information Officer’s (CIO) organization. The study identified improved efficiencies through a 45 percent reduction of the agency’s IT support staff.

Two years later, in 2005, the responsibility for the agency’s applications, databases, and geospatial information assets was added to the MEO. The implementation of this change had a significant effect on Forest Service employees who now had to exercise “self help” principles in meeting basic technology needs. This process has had some success and some failure. Because of the 2008 Omnibus Appropriations Act,—which states “sec 415(a)(2) None of the funds made available by this or any other Act may be used in Fiscal Year 2008 for competitive sourcing studies and any related activities involving Forest Service personnel.” The Forest Service terminated its competitive sourcing activities and initiated an assessment of alternatives

for improving technology services through reorganization. This reorganization seeks to improve the coordination and integration of information management for the Forest Service, and improve the delivery of IT services.

#### **CENTRALIZED BUDGET AND FINANCE OPERATIONS**

As you can imagine, with the Forest Service performing its accounting and budgeting work at ranger districts, forests, regions, research work units, research stations and the Washington headquarters (WO) locations, there were consistency and accountability issues in the manner and methods in which the agency conducted its financial operations.

In the late 1990s, the Forest Service was poorly performing in proper execution of financial accounting and controls. The agency repeatedly received disclaimers in audits of its financial statements. The issues were so significant that an overall lack of confidence in Forest Service's ability to manage its finances culminated in placing the Forest Service on the GAO Watch list. This led to lost credibility in all aspects of agency performance.

In part to correct the accountability problems, the Budget and Finance (B&F) program, which tracks expenditures, payments, grants and agreements, collections and revenues, travel and budget accomplishments was centralized in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2005. The Albuquerque Service Center (ASC) B&F centralized operating model reduced the total number of personnel involved in these functions from 1,920 to 444 employees specializing in budget and finance operations.

The resulting combination of reducing the size of the field workforce, establishing new procedures, implementing new systems, and even dealing with the impact of Hurricane Katrina which occurred just as the new B&F center was established, had a serious impact on agency employees throughout the organization.

At the outset, the operation encountered major issues with payments to contractors and support to agency employee travel. Fortunately, a planned phase-in of operations, as well as a rigorous monitoring and evaluation program, allowed for corrections and changes to address unintended consequences. While we continue our efforts at improvement, particularly in the area of payments, it is clear this centralization is a major success and is both improving the agencies financial management and leading to significant savings. We fully expect that our continuous improvement efforts will lead to even better service from the B&F organization.

#### **FIRE PROGRAM TRANSFERS**

The Forest Service and its employees understand that we have a nation-wide responsibility for the suppression and management of wildland fire. Wildland fire is an integral part of our mission. In some recent years, the costs associated with wild-fire suppression have exceeded the inflation-adjusted ten-year average of suppression costs appropriated by the Congress. When the ten-year average is not sufficient to cover all fire suppression needs, the Forest Service is authorized to transfer unobligated funds from other non-fire accounts to pay suppression costs. While this transfer authority is essential to ensure there will never be a lapse in emergency firefighting activities due to a lack of funding, these transfers delay implementation of other critical natural resource protection programs.

The FY 2010 Budget reflects the President's commitment to wildfire management and community protection by establishing a new \$282 million contingent reserve fund dedicated to addressing catastrophic wildfires in addition to fully funding the ten-year average of suppression costs adjusted for inflation at \$1.13 billion. By establishing a dedicated fund for catastrophic wildfires, fully funding the inflation-adjusted a ten-year average of suppression costs, and providing program reforms, the Budget minimizes the need for agencies to transfer funds from non-fire programs to pay for firefighting when their appropriated suppression funds are exhausted. Establishment of this contingency fund will be a tremendous boost to employee morale.

#### **CENTRALIZED HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS**

Prior to centralizing, the agency's indirect costs to support human capital management programs were much higher for the Forest Service than for other comparable organizations in the public and private sectors. In October 2004, the Forest Service began centralizing human resources management functions in Albuquerque, New Mexico. To be blunt, this implementation did not go well.

The Human Resource (HR) organization provides customer service to approximately 50,000 Forest Service permanent, seasonal and temporary employees. The success of the service center will be achieved through consistent agency-wide applications of personnel policies, procedures, and processes; a significant reduction of the backlog of work that transferred to ASC-personnel; and a structured support system for 64 Human Resource Liaisons that are located at field offices throughout the agency. For human resource management, there is an approved organization of

612 employees. This is a reduction of approximately 400 positions, compared with the decentralized human resource organization that existed prior to centralization.

The human resource management operation employs Industry and Government Best Practices designs from the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Defense Finance and Accounting Service, Defense Logistics Agency, Motorola, Weyerhaeuser, and the United Parcel Service. In keeping with these models, we want to improve customer service; increase operational efficiencies; reduce or avoid costs and improve management.

Implementation challenges included dealing with the departure from the “high touch” nature of having an HR person “down the hall” in most offices, the tremendous learning curves associated with new processes, and overly ambitious personnel reduction goals. To compensate, the Forest Service has had to expend monetary and personnel resources to create and develop “work-around” solutions to perform daily business operations in a centralized environment. Intended as temporary, because of delays in deploying viable enterprise solutions, we continue to use these “work-arounds” longer than planned, resulting in inefficiencies and higher than planned costs. We look forward to working with USDA to implement significantly better operations.

#### **HUMAN RESOURCES REDESIGN**

We recognize that there are continuing concerns with the current systems for the delivery of human resources management services and products. To address these concerns and to improve the human resources organization, Forest Service leadership approved a new path forward in July 2008. An “optimization team” is reviewing current processes, procedures, and tools to clarify, streamline, communicate and educate system users and program customers. The focus is on improvement of product and service delivery. A “redesign team” is taking a longer-term view at revising Human Resource’s vision and programs based on agency needs, program efficiencies, and customer input. Notwithstanding the Herculean efforts to improve product delivery and service for human resource operations, services and program delivery are still lagging. It is clear that employee morale has been affected by the implementation of centralized HR services. Through a comprehensive redesign, we expect services to improve; but it will take time.

#### **FIRE MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST QUALIFICATIONS**

Following the deadly South Canyon Fire in 1994, an interagency team was formed to investigate the factors contributing to the fatalities. The subsequent 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Policy and Program Review, signed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, directed Federal wildland fire agencies to establish fire management qualifications standards to improve safety and increase professionalism in fire management programs. After extensive effort, the Interagency Fire Program Qualifications Standards (IFPM) and Guide were completed. The occupational series chosen was 401, General Biologist. The implementation of this standard has had an effect on the morale on a small portion of our wildland firefighting personnel.

The Forest Service conducted qualifications review of employees in the GS-401 series affected by the positive education requirements as defined by the Office of Personnel Management, which prohibit the use of National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses not supported by official transcripts from accredited institutions of higher learning. In 2008, human resource management reviews of affected employees’ educational classes were completed. Affected employees were notified of the findings of the review and their status was clarified. However, in October of 2008, the USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG) advised the Forest Service of a “Management Alert” regarding its use of the GS-401 series for Fire Management Specialists. The Management Alert cited major concerns for using the 401 series by the Forest Service to meet its fire management staffing needs. As a result, the Chief directed all units to “stand down” further implementation of the GS-401 series at grades GS-9 through GS-12 in fire management occupations.

Some employees did complete the NWCG training course work and later some courses were determined ineligible by OPM because of changing standards and requirements for positive education requirements. There are over 10,000 wildland firefighters in the Forest Service and most employees are unaffected by this issue. However, at this time 300 employees out of 341<sup>1</sup> have been successful in reaching the positive education standard.

<sup>1</sup>January 30, 2009 letter to Jill M. Crumpaker Acting Director, USDA Office of Human Capital Management

### **EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAM**

The Chief is committed to ensuring that employees' health and safety is integrated into all aspects of the Forest Service mission. The Forest Service is ensuring an enhanced quality of life for employees and cooperating partners by providing safety and occupational health services and leadership for the prevention of work related injuries and illnesses to personnel and damage to public and private property.

Agency leaders and health and safety professionals are transforming the Forest Service health and safety culture, using as their models high reliability organizations (HRO). HRO's are organizations that are engaged in high-risk activities but have a lower than normal accident rate. Some characteristics of HRO's that the Forest Service is adopting include: taking small errors seriously in order to identify and mitigate system hazards; encouraging employees to report errors to improve organizational learning and promoting the free flow of differing viewpoints by encouraging diversity of thought in the workplace. In other words, employees are encouraged to contribute and participate without fear of retaliation.

Employees appreciate a rigorous health and safety program because they know that managers and co-workers value their personal health and safety.

### **OPM HUMAN CAPITAL SURVEY AND BIENNIAL BEST PLACES TO WORK REPORT**

The 2007 Best Places to Work Survey conducted by the Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the study of Public Policy Implementation, which was based on the 2006 OPM Federal Human Capital Survey, ranked the Forest Service 143rd of 222 agency work places for a ranking score of 59.9. Overall, this leaves the Forest Service with a lot of room for improvement. While we ranked 209 of 222 for work life/balance (ranking 54.6) and 181 of 222 (ranking 51.3) for strategic management—low in the rankings—there are some definite bright spots.

Over the past several years, the Forest Service has consistently scored high (the response rate over 80% positive) for several key morale indicators on the Federal Human Capital Survey. The indicators include: people in your organization (who) cooperate to get the job done; I like the work I do; and the work I do is important. For these survey questions, over 80% of the Forest Service employees polled responded either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree".

African Americans rank the Forest Service as the ninth best federal agency for overall employee satisfaction and engagement, out of 222. The Forest Service also ranked high for the availability of training and development (ranking 46) and 48th in support for diversity. Males, females, over 40 and under 40 demographic strata all ranked the Forest Service between 97 (males) and 138 (under 40) indicating similar attitudes and work experiences.

### **EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION**

The Forest Service is actively addressing leadership and management succession. The Human Resource's plan for succession addresses this need, which has major functions for training policy, strategy, design and delivery. The Human Resource Staff identifies and develops the best solutions for meeting the training needs of all Forest Service employees including succession planning. There are five separate leadership programs addressing aspiring leaders to executives. These seminar programs address career paths for new employees as well as veteran employees; each program examines and develops the leadership competencies required of successful leaders.

Employee development and retention for the Forest Service is achieved sometimes through temporary promotion details, where employees can serve as acting line officers, managers or technical specialists. Coveted by employees and widely accepted by managers, detail assignments are a very successful pattern for Forest Service leadership development. Details, along with developmental training and an agency culture of delegated decision-making, ensure long competitive lists for district ranger, forest supervisor, and research work unit project leader positions. This enhances esprit de corps within the workforce.

The awards and recognition program can assist in improving the morale of the workforce. Recognition for hard work, exceptional service or innovation is part of valuing individuals' contributions to the agency and the U.S. taxpayer. The appropriate and judicious use of the awards and recognition programs available in U.S. government personnel regulations can motivate employees to fulfill their duties and further agency mission. When employees are valued for their contribution, morale in the workforce is usually improving or high. However, the 2007 Best Places to

Work Survey ranked the Forest Service 167th out of 222 agencies studied for awarding and recognizing employees; obviously, there is room for improvement.

As in most organizations, it takes thoughtful supervisors to give awards and recognition for jobs well done. Some of our supervisors are better at employee recognition than are other supervisors. The agency supports several formal awards programs that garner pride in the work employees do, and help them gain recognition for that work. The Secretary's annual awards are tied to the Chief's annual awards, which are tied to annual awards at regions and research stations. Competition for these awards is often keen, and the annual awards ceremonies provide occasions that often inspire awe at innovative work and truly heroic deeds.

### CONCLUSION

The Forest Service has a large work force of approximately 50,000 permanent, temporary, and seasonal employees. Employees are dedicated, tenacious, and hard working. They love the mission of the agency. Many come to the agency as students, seasonal, or part-timers, and are desirous to sign on for permanent work. Many are second and third generation employees, with mothers, fathers, grandparents, sisters, and brothers as role models. Many employees spend an entire career of 30 or more years in the agency, "caring for the land and serving people." Indeed, Forest Service employees are recognized both internationally and nationally as Nobel Laureates, wildland fire fighters, disaster and emergency relief specialists and thoughtful stewards of some of America's great ecosystems found in the National Forests and Grasslands. The Chief and I appreciate their dedication and the excellence to their craft and we are committed to devising business operations systems that are worthy of the stature of the employees.

We recognize, too, that contentions issues and the associated legal complexities that can delay or halt implementation of plans and projects for long periods, sometimes indefinitely may affect employee morale. Over the years, this has been a source of frustration for some employees, who may find their projects held up in the Courts and at times not come to fruition. We recognize and understand how this can reduce morale among motivated forest management professionals. As agency leaders, the Chief and I are empathetic about the disappointment of a hard-worked project being delayed or cancelled. We know, as do our employees, that the National Forests and Grasslands belong to all citizens and we are the steward of that trust.

Leadership is well aware, there continue to be problems with delivery of services provided by HR and CIO operations that have a negative effect on the morale of employees, managers, partners and collaborators when they call upon the centers for service. We recognize the general and specific frustrations experienced by employees and the public and we are committed to improving, and correcting service problems. Our center employees are courteous and dedicated to service and operational improvement. They want to be a credible solution in the work place. The Chief and I are committed to improving the service and function of these operations to provide the level of performance needed to improve morale for our employees and improve credibility for our partners and collaborators.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee this concludes my prepared statement. I am happy to answer any questions that you or Members of the Committee may have.

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Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much.

Mr. Daniel Wenk, Acting Director, National Park Service, Department of the Interior. Welcome, and thank you for being here again, sir.

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, ACTING DIRECTOR,  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE  
INTERIOR; ACCOMPANIED BY MICHAEL NEDD, ACTING  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, U.S.  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

Mr. WENK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Acting BLM Deputy Director Michael Nedd is here to answer questions that are specific to the BLM, and also I have U.S. Park Police Chief Sal Lauro is here and is available to answer questions about the park police that you may have later.

The National Park Service and the BLM both have a strong interest in their employees' career development and satisfaction in their workplace concerns. Both bureaus have implemented wide ranging, positive programs to enhance the quality of the work experience and prepare employees in the organization for the future. Some of the steps the National Park Service has taken recently to improve the skills of our workforce include: initiating a new superintendent's academy; completing and beginning the implementation of the NPS learning and development report; establishing partnership with universities for leadership development; improving the applicant pool through the online hiring system. NPS is one of the last large Federal agencies that did not have online application procedure and we were losing top-quality applicants to other agencies whose automated staffing processes made it easier for candidates to apply for jobs and allowed agencies to respond more quickly. We are developing a culture of safety awareness and adopting professional excellence as one of our centennial goals.

The National Park Service has also acted to better understand and address the concerns of our workforce. In response to the results of the 2007 Best Places to Work Analysis conducted by the Partnership for Public Service, which was based on the 2006 OPM Federal capital survey, the National Park Service leadership brought together a broad-based team of employees to analyze the NPS results and recommend actions for improvement.

The team's recommendations principally addressed training and development, leadership communication to the workforce and efforts to make the survey available to a broader range of NPS employees. We have been taking action in all three areas.

We have also acted to improve the functioning and morale of the U.S. Park Police. The February 2008 IG report on the park police was a catalyst for change. Sal Lauro, a former park police official with 32 years of law enforcement experience, was brought in to oversee the force on an interim basis, and was named chief of police in January. Chief Lauro is working with the NPS to fill vacancies in various command-level positions. Sergeant and lieutenant positions are being filled from the first new promotional list in five years. We are making significant improvements in staffing levels, meeting firearm qualification standards, the upgrading of ballistic vests, and replacing vehicles; all issues of major concern to park police officers in leadership of the National Park Service and U.S. Park Police.

To help address morale, the park police has developed a partnership with OPM, Center for Talent Services, to conduct a survey to identify specific concerns employees had with regard to their work-force environment and the resources they needed to carry out the mission, followed by focus groups designed to elicit specific suggestions for improvement. The information is being reviewed by research psychologists who will recommend specific goals for the organization to focus on and will be further developed through a process that uses employee teams to formulate specific recommendations. OPM will be providing an intense leadership development and training program designed to identify individuals' strengths and weaknesses as well as strategies for improving the effectiveness of police force leaders.

NPS is also taking steps to address the concerns of the law enforcement rangers who work in parks along the border with Mexico, who, of course, have very serious safety issues. We are implementing operational protocols, hiring more rangers, closing high-risk areas to visitors and staff as necessary, and using an encrypted radio system to provide seamless communication between the Park Service and the U.S. Border Patrol personnel. A significant budget increase of \$8.5 million was enacted in Fiscal Year 2009, to accelerate this important endeavor.

The National Park Service leadership believes more efforts need to be made in the areas of increasing the diversity of the workforce, improving training and recruitment, improving capacity in contracting and workforce management, and addressing other employee concerns.

The steps we are taking in each of these areas are described in my full statement. They are areas we hope to have more results to show in the future.

We are just now receiving the results from OPM's 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey, the basis for what will be the 2009 Best Places to Work ranking. Early indications are that many of the issues identified in 2006 survey—training, supervisory skills, communications, leadership, workforce and lack of resources—also will show up in the 2008 survey. Most of the NPS efforts in response to 2007 Best Places to Work rankings are just now beginning to be implemented, so it is unlikely that the 2008 survey and rankings will register much change. However, we believe that we are pursuing appropriate actions to improve the work environment and practices that will address those concerns.

Shifting to the BLM, the Bureau's multiple use responsibilities require wide range of occupations and skills. BLM has long recognized that its success rests entirely on the collective knowledge, experience, and dedication of its employees. The BLM has established a Human Capital Management Program to enhance the quality of the work experience of its employees and prepare for the future. This program has four key goals: recruit skilled and diverse candidates; enhance skills and prepare employees for greater responsibilities; retain satisfied and motivated employees; and engage employees in reaching performance goals and recognize their achievements.

The BLM has established a variety of programs to advance these goals and is continually working to improve the morale and effectiveness of employees.

To interest minority candidates in working for the BLM, the Bureau has partnerships with the Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribal Colleges and Universities. The Bureau has also established an agreement with the League of United Latin American Citizens on a program to increase awareness within the Hispanic community of the BLM and its career opportunities.

BLM is also preparing employees for career advancement in future leadership positions, which is critical because nearly half of the Bureau's managers and supervisors are eligible to retire within the next five years. The training program called "Pathways" introduces new employees to the BLM's history, scope of work, and diverse career opportunities. Emerging leaders target mid-level em-

ployees with interest in management positions and the Leadership Academy prepared selected candidates for positions of greater responsibility.

The BLM has a National Employee Development Program since 1969, which is now housed at the BLM training center in Phoenix, Arizona. The program and center have become world-class institutions which meet multi-agency training needs through the offering of over 300 courses annually in natural and cultural resources management and leadership development.

The Employee Development Program at NTC serves more than 4,400 employees each year through instructor-led training and serves as the center for the BLM community to discuss issues, share experiences and develop better approaches for protecting wildlife habitat, fighting wildfire, provide energy resources, and managing the diverse uses of America's public lands. Other initiatives are making important contributions to the Bureau's workforce development, including greater emphasis on coaching and mentoring employees.

The BLM uses the OPM Federal Human Capital Survey to help provide insight into understanding the Bureau's human capital management efforts, if they are succeeding in learning how to improve the development of the best possible organization. Initial conclusions from the 2008 survey indicate that a key strength of the BLM is that most of the Bureau's employees feel the work they do is important. Additional strengths include a cooperative workforce, employee satisfaction with work/life balance, and an understanding among employees of how their work relates to the agency's goals and priorities.

The 2008 survey showed positive overall trends for the BLM, but also highlights areas of weakness that require greater attention, including recognition of performance workload and employee retention.

These survey results are being utilized to involve and strengthen the BLM's continuing efforts to recruit, enhance, retain, and reward its workforce.

That concludes my prepared remarks. Acting Deputy Director Nedd and I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wenk follows:]

**Statement of Daniel N. Wenk, Acting Director,  
National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today at this oversight hearing on restoring the Federal public lands workforce. My remarks will focus on the progress we are making in addressing workforce issues within the National Park Service (NPS), including those affecting the U.S. Park Police, as well as areas that require more attention. They will also include a brief discussion of workforce issues that are being addressed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The NPS and BLM have a strong interest in their employees' career development and satisfaction, and their workplace concerns. Both bureaus have implemented wide-ranging, positive programs to enhance the quality of the work experience and prepare employees—and the organizations—for the future. In national surveys of Federal employees conducted by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), a large majority of employees in the NPS and BLM say that they like the work they do, feel that it is important, and that it provides a sense of personal accomplishment. While these findings are gratifying, other findings show room for improvement. And,

as in any organization, continued improvements can and will be made. The NPS and BLM both are working to create a more productive, satisfying and rewarding workplace.

#### **National Park Service**

These are promising times for the NPS workforce. Our bureau enjoys strong support from our new President and Secretary, and from Congress. We have embarked on preparing for the NPS Centennial in 2016 with substantial increases in operating funds in the last two fiscal years, which will be followed, if Congress approves the President's request, with another substantial increase in FY 2010. Those increases have provided for hiring 3,000 seasonal employees and making many improvements at our parks. We have moved forward on many new partnership projects and programs as part of our Centennial Initiative. The NPS was fortunate to receive \$750 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which will be put to good use addressing the maintenance backlog and constructing new facilities, with an emphasis on energy-efficiency projects, youth work projects, and rehabilitation of treasured landscapes and structures.

Other trends are also contributing to employee morale. Our 275 million visitors continue to have positive experiences, as demonstrated by visitor surveys which consistently show a satisfaction rate in the mid-90 percent range. We now reach 60 million people through our website, which improves in quality each year. Preview showings of a Ken Burns film series on the history of the national parks that will air in September, 2009, have generated enormous excitement within NPS. The ranks of volunteers at national parks continue to grow, with our 2008 count at 172,000. The National Park Service leadership recognizes that none of the success we have as an agency, none of the support we enjoy from political leaders and the public, would be possible without the hard work, commitment, and enthusiasm of our 20,000 employees. Our efforts are focused on ensuring that we have a skilled, efficient, and satisfied workforce as we move into our second century of service to the American people. Recent budget increases in FY 2008 and FY 2009 have heightened these efforts.

#### **Recent Workforce Management Accomplishments**

The NPS has taken several steps recently to improve the skills of our workforce, including:

- *Initiating a New Superintendent's Academy.* In 2008, NPS launched a new formal training program for first-time superintendents. The program addresses key competencies required of superintendents through an 18-month program tailored to each participant's developmental needs.
- *Completing and implementing the NPS Learning and Development Report.* In 2007, the NPS carried out a year-long, comprehensive review of training and development across the Service. Its recommendations will significantly change the infrastructure, operations, and curriculum of the learning and development program.
- *Establishing partnerships with universities for leadership development.* Growing out of the Learning and Development Report, NPS has undertaken a new initiative to work with partnering universities to enhance our leadership development opportunities. At a summit of university and non-profit partners in the fall of 2008, this "Leadership Roundtable Group" laid the groundwork for what is envisioned as an institutionalized effort to identify and address NPS leadership training needs.
- *Improving the applicant pool through an on-line hiring system.* The NPS has been implementing the USAStaffing system, developed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). As one of the last large agencies that did not have an on-line application procedure, NPS was losing top-quality applicants to other agencies whose automated staffing processes made it easier for candidates to apply and allowed agencies to respond to applicants more quickly. USAStaffing performs an initial screening and evaluation of job applicants, speeding up the otherwise labor-intensive process of candidate referral to managers seeking to fill vacancies.
- *Developing a culture of safety awareness.* Recognizing that traditional approaches to workplace safety management were insufficient to address the wide range of hazardous jobs and tasks throughout the NPS workforce, in May, 2007, the NPS established a Safety Leadership Council to reexamine and reenergize the safety efforts ongoing within the NPS. A key result has been the adoption of a U.S. Coast Guard safety program for our own use. "Operational Leadership," as we have dubbed it, is a bottom-up approach to safety awareness that

emphasizes the responsibility of all employees for their own safety and that of their co-workers.

- *Adopting Professional Excellence as a Centennial goal.* Reflecting our deep belief in the importance of supporting our workforce, the NPS established “Professional Excellence” as one of 5 overarching themes of our Centennial Initiative in our Report to the President in May, 2008. Goals within this theme include advancing the NPS to become one of the top 10 places to work in America, promoting a safety and health culture for all employees and visitors, and establishing a structured professional development curriculum to provide park managers with the skills to apply best business practices and superior leadership. The NPS has also taken steps to better understand and respond to the concerns of the workforce. In response to the unsatisfactory results of the “2007 Best Places to Work” analysis conducted by the Partnership for Public Service, which was based on the 2006 OPM Federal Human Capital Survey, the NPS leadership commissioned a team of diverse employees from all regions and from a range of skill areas to analyze the NPS results and recommend actions for improvement. This team’s recommendations principally addressed training and development, leadership communications to the workforce, and efforts to make the survey available to a broader range of NPS employees. Recommendations involving training and development were incorporated into the comprehensive review of NPS training and development that was underway at that time.

In addition, the NPS entered into an agreement with the National Parks Conservation Association’s Center for Park Management to support NPS’ efforts to achieve the Centennial “Professional Excellence” goal of becoming one of the top 10 places to work. A series of focus groups were also conducted in the fall of 2008 that included not only full-time permanent employees but also seasonal and term employees, who are not provided access by OPM to the survey. Through these focus groups, the Center for Park Management collected more in-depth information about employee concerns in areas that the OPM survey covered. Focus-group data will help us to better understand the 2008 survey results.

#### **Progress on Law Enforcement Workforce Issues**

In February 2008, the Department’s Office of Inspector General released its “Assessment of the United States Park Police,” containing twenty recommendations for improvements. Following receipt of this report, the Department and the NPS installed a Command Management Team to oversee the operation of the Park Police and to address the weaknesses which had been identified in the report. Salvatore Lauro, a former Park Police official with 32 years of law enforcement experience, was named Chief of Police in January following ten months of overseeing Park Police operations on an interim basis. Chief Lauro is working with the NPS to fill vacancies in various command level positions. Sergeant and lieutenant positions are being filled from the first new promotional list in five years.

A major portion of the Inspector General’s report focused on the level of security at national icons, but the report also covered significant officer safety issues, including:

- *Staffing.* The Park Police have been reassessing staffing levels and priorities to identify the most efficient and practicable means of addressing mission needs and alleviating officer safety concerns. We anticipate reaching a workforce of 630 sworn police officers by the end of the FY 2009.
- *Firearms qualifications.* We now have a computer application suitable for tracking firearms-qualification statistics and have developed a standardized data collection format. The Park Police force was in compliance with firearms-qualifications standards in its last two quarterly reports to the Secretary.
- *Ballistic vests.* In the spring of 2008, the Park Police conducted a comprehensive inventory that documented the status of body armor issued to every officer. As a result, working with the vest manufacturer, the Park Police worked to ensure that any officer wearing a vest that was not National Institutes of Justice-compliant was properly fitted with an appropriate replacement vest. All officers now have compliant vests, with the exception of the 35 new recruits who will receive their body armor prior to graduating from training. Additionally, each supervisor is required to check the condition of subordinate personnel vests on an annual basis.
- *Vehicles.* In coordination with the NPS Comptroller, the Park Police has completed a Fleet Management Strategic Plan and submitted orders for FY 2009 and FY 2010 consistent with this plan. The 110 vehicles received this year have replaced high-mileage vehicles. A comprehensive evaluation of the vehicle needs is underway.

In addition, as a result of low workforce morale and other concerns, the Park Police developed a partnership with the OPM Center for Talent Services to conduct an Organizational Assessment Survey designed to assess workplace culture and climate. This survey was administered by personnel research psychologists with the objective of further identifying specific concerns employees had with regard to their workforce environment and the resources they needed to carry out the mission. As a follow-up to the survey administration, representatives from the various geographic locations covered by the Park Police were invited to participate in focus groups for both non-supervisory and supervisory officers as well as civilian employees. These focus groups were designed to elicit specific suggestions for improvement. Information from both the survey and the focus groups is being reviewed and evaluated by the research psychologists who will recommend specific goals on which the organization as a whole should focus in order to address employee concerns. These recommendations will be further developed through an employee-driven action planning process that empowers teams to formulate specific actions and recommendations for improving morale and organizational effectiveness.

In addition to providing a structure for engaging employees in the decision-making process, OPM will be providing an intensive leadership development and training program designed to identify individual strengths and weaknesses as well as strategies for improving the effectiveness of the Force's managers and leaders.

The NPS law enforcement workforce also includes park law enforcement rangers. Rangers who work in the 19 national park units along the border with Mexico, in particular, face serious safety issues due to the growth in illegal cross-border activities. The NPS has taken steps to improve employee safety there by implementing operational protocols for "working on the border" which include check in/out procedures, working in pairs, and receiving specialized training. Additional rangers have been hired, and high-risk areas are being closed to visitors and staff as necessary. A digital, encrypted radio system has also been installed to provide seamless communication between the NPS and U.S. Border Patrol personnel. A significant budget increase of \$8.5 million was enacted for FY 2009 to accelerate this important endeavor.

NPS staff in border parks, north and south, have increased collaborative efforts with sister agencies. At Big Bend National Park, the NPS hosts U.S. Border Patrol agents who live in and are stationed within the boundaries of the park. The parks have increased coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the other land management agencies and tribes. In conducting periodic operations aimed at interdicting the high level of smuggling by boat, and along the northern border, NPS rangers in some parks have been cross-designated as U.S. Customs Inspectors. Additionally, the Caribbean parks are currently working closely with ICE to obtain dispatch services for law enforcement operations. These developments are helping improve the safety and well-being of NPS rangers.

#### **Areas of Concern in NPS Workforce Management**

The NPS leadership believes more effort needs to be made in the areas of increasing the diversity of the workforce, continued improvement in training and recruitment, improving capacity in contracting and workforce management, and addressing other employee concerns.

To have a workforce that better represents the growing diversity of the U.S. population, we have developed and are working to meet diversity recruitment goals. We engage several national-level organizations that represent ethnic minorities. Our Recruitment Futures Implementation Team (RFIT) has completed its third year of supporting job fairs, training NPS employees who serve as recruiters at specific schools or events, and working with a consortium of minority-serving schools to sponsor targeted recruitment events.

An ethnic minority youth intake initiative was developed by Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area that brings students from minority-serving high schools to work as park interns, and we are exploring the possibilities for expanding this initiative to other parks for recruiting outreach to minorities at early ages. In addition, the Office of Workforce Management and the Youth Programs Division have initiated a collaboration involving programs supported by the division (Youth Conservation Corps, Public Lands Corps, Youth Partnerships Program, Student Conservation Association) to channel their participants to programs aimed at higher-level students as they outgrow their initial program. We are also developing stronger connections between human resource recruitment planning and the potential candidates these programs provide. Promoting youth conservation work at our national parks is a high priority for Secretary Salazar, and we anticipate more efforts in this area as we move forward.

NPS piloted a centralized summer seasonal hiring effort in 2008 to facilitate the hiring of the 3,000 seasonal employees made possible by Centennial Initiative funding. This centralized effort has the added benefit of enabling us to provide more focused attention on outreach to diverse candidates.

NPS is continuing to work toward improving employee training and development programs and recruitment efforts. We plan to fully develop a proposal for turning Mather Training Center into a NPS distance-learning center and determine what will be required to make better use of our TELNET capacity. We also plan to develop a new employee orientation package for all new employees, partners, concessionaires, and volunteers. Aligned with a Departmental initiative on learning and development, we are working with other bureaus to develop comprehensive training for new supervisors to help us respond to a 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey result (which was reconfirmed in the 2008 results) showing that new supervisors lack awareness about their supervisory responsibilities.

Recognizing the lack of capacity in several of our administrative functions, notably contracting, human resources, and learning and development, we are developing service-wide strategies to support these functions. Budget increases were provided in each of these functional areas for FY 2009 to invest in the training needs of the employees in these disciplines, so that we can provide employees with the competencies needed to proactively manage new initiatives and programs rather than reactively process individual transactions as they have done in the past.

We are just now receiving the results from OPM's 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey, the basis for what will be the 2009 "Best Places to Work" rankings. Early indications are that many of the issues identified in the 2006 survey (training, supervisory skills, communication, leadership, workload and lack of resources) continue as issues. Most of the NPS' efforts undertaken in response to the 2007 "Best Places to Work" rankings are just now beginning to be implemented, so it is unlikely that the 2008 survey and the 2009 rankings will register very much change. However, we believe that we are pursuing appropriate actions to improve the work environment and the workplace practices that will address these concerns.

#### **Bureau of Land Management**

The BLM's multiple-use mission and responsibilities are uniquely varied and complex, and its mission requires a wide range of occupations and skill sets, ranging from wildlife biologists, to cadastral surveyors, to petroleum engineers, to financial managers. The BLM has long recognized that its success rests entirely on the collective knowledge, experience, and dedication of this diverse workforce. This understanding is fundamental in the BLM, and it motivates and shapes the BLM's wide-ranging efforts to recruit, develop, and retain highly skilled and satisfied employees.

#### **BLM's Human Capital Management Program**

The BLM has established a Human Capital Management Program (HCMP) to enhance the quality of the work experience of its employees and prepare for the future. The HCMP has four key goals and components:

- Recruit skilled and diverse candidates;
- Enhance skills and prepare employees for greater responsibilities;
- Retain satisfied and motivated employees; and
- Engage employees in reaching performance goals and recognize achievements.

The BLM has established a variety of programs to advance these goals and is continually working to improve the morale and effectiveness of employees.

#### **BLM's Workforce Planning**

The BLM is committed to recruiting a diverse workforce that reflects the multicultural heritage of the American people. This can be a special challenge for natural resource management agencies, which have offices in some locations where populations may be less ethnically diverse. The BLM has established programs that engage and encourage minority candidates to consider a career in public service with the BLM. For example, through partnerships with the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the Bureau recruits students at Alabama A&M University, Alcorn State University, and other HBCUs. A similar partnership was recently established with Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and the BLM now conducts recruiting at primarily Native American schools such as Salish Kootenai College in Montana and Oglala Lakota College in South Dakota. The BLM has also established an agreement with the League of United Latin American Citizens to build a program to increase awareness within the Hispanic community of the BLM and its career opportunities.

In addition to building a diverse workforce, the BLM is working to prepare employees for career advancement and to assume future leadership positions. These efforts are critical, because over 25 percent of the BLM's employees are eligible to re-

ture in the next 3 years. Nearly half of the BLM's leaders are eligible to retire within the next 5 years. The BLM has established a series of training and succession programs to prepare for this transition. The first, "Pathways", introduces new employees to the BLM's history, scope of work, and diverse career opportunities. The second, "Emerging Leaders", targets mid-level employees with an interest in leadership positions. The final program is the BLM's Leadership Academy, which prepares selected candidates for positions of mid-level and above leadership. The BLM leadership invests time and energy into these programs, including providing opportunities to meet and talk with senior BLM officials.

#### **BLM's Focus on Enhancing Skills**

The BLM has a long-standing commitment to and emphasis on developing a highly professional and diverse workforce using a wide variety of educational opportunities. To help achieve this, in 1969 the BLM established a National Employee Development program which is now housed at the BLM National Training Center (NTC) in Phoenix, Arizona. The program and the center have become world-class institutions which meet multi-agency training needs through the offering of over 200 courses annually in natural and cultural resource management and leadership development. The BLM's Employee Development program has become a pioneer in distance learning, providing a web-based Knowledge Resource Center (KRC) for just-in-time information and web-based courses and training broadcasts to over 130 BLM satellite network sites nationally. The Employee Development program and NTC serves more than 4,400 employees each year through instructor-lead training. Nearly every BLM employee accesses some type of on-line course or utilizes the KRC numerous times throughout his or her careers.

The NTC is more than a training facility. It has become a town center and crossroads for the BLM community, where employees discuss issues, share experiences, and develop better approaches for protecting wildlife habitat, fighting wildfire, providing energy resources, and managing the diverse uses of America's public lands. While the training programs at the NTC remain central to enhancing employees' skills, other initiatives are making important contributions to the BLM's workforce development, including a greater emphasis on coaching and mentoring employees, the use of action learning teams and the development of well-designed employee performance plans.

#### **The Federal Human Capital Survey**

The BLM is both interested and deeply committed to knowing if our human capital management efforts are succeeding. We are continually working to improve and develop the best possible organization. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has conducted the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) to help provide this insight. The survey began in 2002 and has been conducted biannually.

The latest FHCS was conducted in 2008 and its results were released recently. It surveyed more than 210,000 Federal employees on a wide range of issues, and the methodology provides comparison data across the last three surveys: 2004, 2006, and 2008. About 54 percent of BLM employees participated in the survey (compared to 51 percent government-wide). The BLM is now examining the results to learn its relative strengths and weaknesses and to identify areas for improvement. We have some initial conclusions.

A key strength of the BLM is that most of our employees feel the work they do is important. This sense of commitment and united purpose is perhaps our greatest asset. Additional strengths include: a cooperative workforce; employee satisfaction with work-life balance and an understanding among employees of how their work relates to the agency's goals and priorities. Further, the 2008 survey showed positive overall trends for the BLM. In comparison with the 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey, the BLM improved on 54 of 73 questions by 2 percent points or more, including questions on leadership, diversity, and resources.

The survey also highlights areas of weakness that require greater attention. These areas include: recognition of performance, workload, and employee retention. In response to previous surveys, the BLM has initiated several efforts to address these challenges. For example, the BLM's succession development program encourages retention by providing a guided pathway for career advancement. To address workload concerns, the BLM has linked strategic goals with annual budget plans, workload targets, and performance plans. This process provides clear national priorities that correspond with field capabilities and individual accomplishments. The recent survey results are being utilized to further evolve and strengthen the BLM's continuing efforts to recruit, enhance, retain, and reward its workforce.

The BLM's mission is complex and challenging, and its workforce is highly skilled and dedicated to managing the public lands for the American people. The BLM has

a strong history of commitment to employee development and growth, and we remain committed to creating a more productive, satisfying, and rewarding workplace.

**Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the other members of the Subcommittee have.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much, and I was remiss in not welcoming Deputy Director Nedd here again to the hearing room. Thank you very much for being here.

Let me begin with more—I do not know if there is a real good answer to this question, but all jobs have value but having said that, how is it possible that a Federal prison guard rates their job as more satisfactory than the park rangers rate their job? I just find that difficult to understand.

Mr. WENK. I think the job satisfaction, Mr. Chairman, relates to we have a passionate and committed workforce. They deserve and expect to have the resources at their disposal to do their job in the best possible way. I think some of the frustration rests on the fact that they may not have all the resources that they need to do their job, and I cannot speak for the prison guard, but I know that our employees want to do their job at the highest level possible, and I think sometimes they feel frustrated that they do not have the support to do that that they would like to have.

Mr. KASHDAN. Mr. Chairman, when the results of that survey came out, I would have to confess that the chief and I looked at this and were, frankly, shocked. It was very, very concerning to both of us, and did not sink with what we tend to encounter when we see employees in the field and how proud they are of the work.

I would have to say that there were some clear factors associated with that. The passion that Mr. Wenk talked about, when you are passionate you also tend to not like anything to rock the boat, and we had really rocked our employees' boat tremendously with some of the administrative changes we had worked out, some significantly poor execution of some of our new personnel systems.

I want to think that a great deal of that has been addressed, and if we took that survey again today, we would see marked improvement. Again, cannot speak to the prison guards, but we are very concerned about that, and we have tried to address it through quickly improving some of our administrative problems, and working with the union to address their partnerships.

Mr. GRIJALVA. I do not want to diminish the prison guard, but as we work a lot of it I would hope that our park rangers are as satisfied as the prison guards in terms of, at the minimum, in terms of their job.

Anyway, I am going to ask, if I may, Mr. Kashdan, a specific question. The efforts to reclassify the fire managers into a whole new job series, I think has affected morale throughout the fire fighter ranks. Let us say I am a wild land fire fighter, I have no college education, I have 15 years of experience at that job, good evaluations. What advice would you give that employee about moving up in the career ladder in the agency, and can such an employee that has experience and tenure as part of their evaluation have the opportunity to move up in general?

Mr. KASHDAN. Yes, sir. You are referring to the reclassification of positions into what we call the GS-401 series, a professional series versus a technical series. Our fire operations positions have historically been in the technical series, and did not require a college degree. I am saying that simply did not require a positive education requirement as OPM would define it.

We embarked, and admittedly DOI and Forest Service have to come together on this issue, but we had embarked on reclassifying positions into the GS-401 series on the premise that courses certified by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group would suffice to meet our requirements, which we felt was appropriate and would allow our technical employees to move into that series.

A redefinition has basically said you have to have positive education requirements now to fill a 401 series, and that caused a great deal of concern to the chief and I, and in response to an Office of Inspector General management alert we in the Forest Service basically issued a stand-down order on implementing that because we value the fire operations technical career.

So what I would tell those employees is stay with us, we are working on that. We are very concerned about the implications of the direction we took in the 401 series, and we have a lot of work to do there.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. I am going to probably have other questions but my time is up. Let me turn to Mr. Bishop if he has questions.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Mr. WENK, let me ask you a few questions, and if others have answers to them, that would be fine as well.

You recently signed an order banning sportsmen from using lead tackle or ammunition in national parks. Can you explain why this decision was made without providing any evidence that the lead gear poses a risk to wildlife at the species level?

Mr. WENK. Congressman Bishop, the memo that I sent to the field did not do that, sir. What it did was it said the National Park Service in its own internal operations would stop—would switch from lead-based ammunition in our own internal culling operations, resource management activities, management activities; that we would look to engaging with the sportsmen groups and organizations between now and 2010, and engage in a dialogue to look at banning those lead ammunitions from those park areas where hunting is allowed. But there is no ban at this time on the public from using those.

Mr. BISHOP. So the ban only applies to government officials?

Mr. WENK. The ban is on our own internal operations.

Mr. BISHOP. Does that include law enforcement?

Mr. WENK. Law enforcement? Until there is ammunition that is developed that has the characteristics of the lead ammunition, that ban will not be on their active-duty carry ammunition, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. OK. As I understand, part of the memo said you want to take a leadership role in removing lead from the environment. Is that an accurate statement of the National Park Service goal?

Mr. WENK. Yes, it is, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. OK. Your testimony describes a situation on our public lands along the southern border. How has the inability to secure the border and the resulting impediments to scientific research damaged the protective habitat death and injury to park employees in the park impairment damage morale?

Mr. WENK. I think it has had a significant effect, Congressman Bishop. I believe that we have recognized that we have areas of some of the parks along the border that are not currently safe for visitors and/or our own employees, and we are closing those areas until we can secure them. We are taking active resource management restorative actions within the park area. We have identified it as an effort, and we have increased our budget for those border parks by \$8.5 million in 2009 in order to hire additional employees and to deal with some of these issues.

One other important factor, sir, is that we also have instituted an operational leadership which is, I will call, a base-driven assessment of the risk that people have associated with their jobs that we are very actively listening to, to try to provide an environment that will not only protect our parks but also allow for our employees to work in a very safe and effective manner.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you. In your written testimony, you also mentioned you have an arrangement with the National Park and Conservation Association, which is, of course, a lobbying group, for their support of professional excellence in NPS employees. Does that arrangement involve a grant or a contact with NPS?

Mr. WENK. It does not. What that arrangement is, sir, is that they have an organization within the National Parks and Conservation Office called the Center for Park Management. We are working for the Center for Park Management, reaching out to universities that we can work with from around the country who have programs and resource management leadership that we can work collaboratively with to develop leadership programs within the National Park Service. They are serving as an organizing force in helping us work with those universities.

Mr. BISHOP. Did you have any kind of competitive bidding process or look at other groups before you entered into that arrangement?

Mr. WENK. We did not have a competitive bidding process. There was no bid. There was no funds, government funds that are used with the NPCA.

Mr. BISHOP. Last year I asked the Interior Department for copies of communications between the National Alaska Conservation System and certain lobbying and political advocacy organization. It triggered an investigation by the Inspector General who in a couple of weeks, I think, will be presenting his report. I am making the assumption that there will probably be some level of improper activities identified.

I have made a similar request from the Park Service. When do I expect to get a reply?

Mr. WENK. Mr. Bishop, I do not know the answer to that. I will find out and get you a response immediately after the hearing.

Mr. BISHOP. Has the Department of the Interior taken any steps since the scandal came to light dealing with NLCS to ensure that

Department of the Interior employees cease any kind of improper collusion with political advocacy groups or lobbying groups?

Mr. WENK. I believe the Department of the Interior has in a very forthright manner tried to address the ethical behavior of all of our employees throughout the service. I cannot cite any specific examples for the instance that you have stated.

Mr. BISHOP. Can I make an assumption that probably once the report is finalized and actually presented by the Inspector General, that then would be an appropriate time to take—

Mr. WENK. Yes, you can.

Mr. BISHOP.—reconsideration of those actions.

Mr. WENK. Yes, you can, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. I have other questions but for now let me let my colleagues go.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Bishop. You reminded me, Mr. Wenk, let me extend the appreciation of at least myself for those public lands that are on the border for not only the resource attention by I think the focus that has been placed on those challenges that the employees there face. It is very much appreciated by the employees, and I think by a better sense of security for visitors and it is appreciated a lot.

Mr. WENK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Heinrich, any questions, sir?

Mr. HEINRICH. I will apologize ahead of time for my voice today. Mr. Kashdan, the Albuquerque Service Center which you mentioned in your testimony is in my district, and it has obviously had its challenges, and there are a wide range of activities that have been moved there from around the country, and around the country meaning down the hall for most Forest Service employees.

I am wondering, one, where is that process going on? Do you feel like you are ahead of the curve in terms of some of the challenges that that is faced? And what measures are you taking to make sure that that system where those activities are centralized is working to the benefit of Forest Service employees, and more importantly, the resources as well all across the country?

Mr. KASHDAN. Thank you for the question. In Albuquerque, we have three major operations that we have located here. Our financial management operation, which was the first to move there, is part of the Albuquerque Service Center. Our human resources program moved there about two years later, and then our information technology has been slowly moving people to Albuquerque, and I would expect to be moving about another 150 to 190 information management employees there. So it is in various stages.

I mentioned earlier in my opening remarks that the financial management operation, the first to go there, I would say is now very, very successful, running at about 450 employees. That is down about 500 employees less than we used to have, and I would call that clearly a success. We are realizing about 28 to 30 million dollar annual savings as a result of the financial management operation.

When I say savings, that is different than operating costs, and in human resources we targeted reducing about 20, actually saving about 28 million, and I would say that we are not experiencing savings yet because of some of the problems you had discussed.

Our human resource operation, we are now going through what we are calling a strategic redesign to address some severe staffing backlogs, classification backlogs that I think are probably the primary sore point, if you will, for the rest of the organization. Those people used to be down the hall in our remote locations. So HR, we have a ways to go, and I would say, although we are not experiencing some of what I would call catastrophic problems of employees not getting paid, getting terminated without explanation, from a system problem we have a long way to go in HR, and I expect another couple of years before we can actually say we are in a savings mode there.

In our information technology, like I said, we will be moving another 150 plus employees to Albuquerque. We have some key improvements we have to make in local service which I think is reinstating people down the hall in some of our local units, but I am very pleased with the decision we made about Albuquerque, and look forward to making it continue on the path to success.

Mr. HEINRICH. With that, Mr. Chair, I would just echo your comments about the importance of focusing on some of these public lands on the border. I have certainly had constituents who have been directly impacted by the challenges that the national wildlife refuges, the parks along the border have imposed on people visiting those facilities, and I think the extra attention there is well deserved and important if we are going to protect the resources that those were created to protect.

With that, I would yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Ms. Tsongas, questions, comments?

Ms. TSONGAS. Yes, thank you, Mr. Wenk, for your testimony. I happen to represent the Fifth District of Massachusetts that has—there are 14 national parks up in Massachusetts, and two of them are located in my district. The Minuteman National Park and the Lowell National Historical Park, they make up a part of our very unique history and culture and bring thousands of people a year to visit. In fact, in Lowell, Massachusetts, the initiation of the national park has been key to its revitalization as an old industrial city.

If it were not for the knowledge and enthusiasm and experience of the people who work at these parks, I doubt the parks would experience so much popularity. My district has been lucky to have its parks run by extremely dedicated staff, two extraordinary superintendents and staff who have stayed with the parks for a long time. But many of them will be retiring, and I am concerned that the future of these parks and parks across the country, if they are unable to retain and attract good employees, they may be very much compromised.

We have just heard about the challenges in the morale of the workforce, and we all know that the morale improves, not only how people do their jobs, but our ability, the park's ability to attract good people. So specifically I would like to know what you are doing to engage employees to improve morale and how, as you are looking forward to potential retirements, you are beginning to cast a net to bring in good people to replace the extraordinary ones who might be leaving.

Mr. WENK. If I can deal with your last question first. One of the opportunities that we were presented with the funding we received in advance of and in preparation for the centennial of the National Park Service in 2016, we were able to engage 3,000 additional seasonal employees within the National Park Service. Those seasonal employees last year and again this year and in future years will help us in terms of outreach to new, to diverse employees, non-traditional employees to come in and work with the National Park Service.

We also completed, based on the 2007 Best Places to Work, we took that very seriously, and we engaged with our learning and development organization to really look at what do we need to do within the National Park Service to be more effective, to provide a better work environment for employees to be able to, not only once we attract them, to retain them.

Certainly we have initiated a fundamentals program that really steps in the employees in the policies and the mission of the National Park Service, that we will train over 700 new employees to the Park Service this year in that program.

We have initiated a new superintendent's academy so that people who get to the level where they are ready to take on that increased responsibility, we have a superintendent's academy that will help prepare those for that increased responsibility. I talked a little while ago we are partnering with universities to talk about leadership development. We have hired a new chief of training within the National Park Service who comes to us with great skills we believe is looking and doing the right things so that we are taking the steps necessary to, once we have attracted those employees, retain them and make them the best employees we can within the National Park Service.

Ms. TSONGAS. Thank you. That sounds promising. I can say from my experience with our national parks that the caliber of the superintendent is really key to how the overall park is managed and run, and the kind of presence it has in a community. So I think all your efforts on behalf of fostering superintendents can only serve us well.

I have another question. I am concerned, and I have heard from those in my district with the centralization efforts of the agency, that many national parks have lost their ability to contract and execute projects; that they really have to look to a centralized location to move forward. With this diminished capacity, how are our national parks going to be able to spend the money under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act effectively and expeditiously because we all know that the goal of that act is to move quickly and to get funds out into our economy and projects going quickly?

Mr. WENK. We are also very aware of the need to be able to have effective contracting for these projects within the Park Service. There is good news. In fact, at our central location, our Denver Service Center, which has a primary responsibility for the line item construction or the large construction programs, of which approximately three-quarters of the money that has been given to us under the recovery act, they have already increased their contracting staff.

In addition to that, we did not centralize all contracting functions within the National Park Service. We have, we hope, hit a very good compromise between a number of contracting offices within each region that allows for the most effective contracting for projects and programs that can be done. We will, by centralizing or bringing people together and there may be three or four different contracting offices for every region, so I believe there is 21 or 22 across the National Park Service. They will be very efficient in their work. They will be very effective, being able to concentrate on the work that they know best and do best, and we believe that it is a—if you will—a sweet spot that does not bring total centralization but provides effective working relationships between contracting offices in park areas where they can develop relationships and they can be effective in their work. We believe we can obligate and get that money done in a very effective manner on the stimulus package.

Ms. TSONGAS. Thank you.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Ms. Shea-Porter, any questions, comments?

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Thank you, I do. Thank you for being here today and having this hearing. I had just a couple of questions.

The first one was I was concerned about the report about outsourcing, and we have been dealing with this pretty much across the Federal government and different committees, and I wanted to know the impact. What percent are actually being outsourced, percentage of jobs, and is the concern among the Federal employees elevated or actually because they hear about it, or are there actual numbers saying this is having a serious impact? How many jobs are being lost? Anyone or each one of you have a different perspective.

Mr. KASHDAN. I can speak to that from the context of what we have experienced in competitive source. For the most part with some minor exceptions as part of the competitive sourcing process, most of the—in fact, the vast majority of the competitions actually stayed in-house. That did not mean that it was not somewhat disruptive and one of our notable ones that we did contract out as part of the competitive sourcing dealing with the fleet repair in California. We ultimately ended up terminating the contract.

Other outsourcing that we consider on occasion but for the most part we are not actively engaged in any outsourcing activities now where jobs that have historically been performed by Federal employees. So it is so minor that I do not have the number, but I could certainly get that for you, but it is a very small number.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. OK, thank you. And the other question I have was I know that over the past few years there have been some incidents in national parks that—petty crime or more serious crimes, and I wanted to know the impact on the morale of our workers there, and what else needs to be done.

Mr. WENK. I think any time that we have a crime, whether it is against an individual or against the environment, I think that our workforce is quick and very professionally responds to those occurrences. I believe, unfortunately, those are occurrences that date a long time in our history, you know, of those kind of issues. So I guess I do not believe that it has a—if we are talking petty crime

and those kind of things—I do not think that has a real impact on our workforce. I think where the impact is, is the serious nature of some of the law enforcement situations, for example, along the border where we do not want and we will not put officers and employees at risk, and I think of steps we have taken through Operational Leadership, additional resources, we are addressing that very directly to make sure that we have an appropriate response and an appropriate level of protection and visitor services.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. OK. And you feel like you have the appropriate funding level to do that, to make sure you are staffed enough?

Mr. WENK. Well, we dedicated an additional \$8.5 million in Fiscal Year 2009 to that effort along the southwest border. I think, whether it is the Federal government or private organization, many people always believe that they would put more resources to wise use.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. So I guess the question is do your employees feel there is enough resources there, those who actually work in the areas?

Mr. WENK. I think that our putting an additional \$8.5 million into the southwest is a reflection of our employees' concerns, just as putting additional money into the U.S. Park Police to increase the staffing, the equipment, the training, is a reflection of the needs of the U.S. Park Police.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. OK, thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Mr. Holt.

Mr. HOLT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for putting together this hearing.

If I may ask about the BLM, and I suppose Mr. Nedd would be the best person to answer it. There have been reports that field employees have been pulled off of resource conservation programs in favor of efforts such as expediting permitting for energy development. Is that true? Has that been happening? Is this something that is frequent where people are not doing what they expect to do? And I suppose I could broaden that to the other management services as well. Do people feel that they have been yanked around, going from one job to another beyond their expectations?

Mr. NEDD. Congressman, I do not believe so. That is a feeling. As part of the 2005 Energy Policy Act, Congress established seven pilot offices for the processing of oil and gas permits, and as part of that, biologists and other types of wildlife and resource position was hired as an interdisciplinary team to work on oil and gas permitting in those seven offices.

But I do not believe it is widespread or the allegation that employees have been pulled off to do is really something that is true, and that we have been experiencing.

Mr. HOLT. Whether it was mandated by Congress or not is not my point. It is for whatever reason have people been pulled off the job? But you say it is a small number.

Mr. NEDD. Congressman, additional resources was hired, so it was a small number, including biologists and other type of resource was hired to process those permitting in the seven offices. If they were pulled off, it may have been for a short period to work on an interdisciplinary team.

Mr. HOLT. Let me ask the other two witnesses if in the various services which I know there are some shortages of employees in some areas, whether people have been moved around in a way that is contrary to their expectations for which they were hired, and whether that affects morale.

Mr. WENK. Certainly if they are, it would affect morale, but, Congressman Holt, I cannot—I cannot think of circumstances or instances within the National Park Service right now where we have had movement of—there may have been movement within a specific park area as the superintendent sees a need for adjustments in terms of needs of that park area, but in terms of movement from place to place, different kinds of jobs, I think that is a very minimal occurrence within the Park Service.

Mr. KASHDAN. And Mr. Holt, I would say that our field workforce has the expectation that they will be highly flexible in responding to priorities, and so I think that the shifting is probably common, but that is not a demoralizer, particularly the example I would use is the Recovery Reinvestment Act where they are not responding to projects associated with jobs and mission, and it creates a separate set of project opportunities, and I think our employees are just absolutely excited about that.

So I have not heard a negative aspect to shifting of their duties.

Mr. HOLT. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No questions at this moment.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Any follow-up questions, Mr. Bishop? I have some too when you are done.

Mr. BISHOP. Do you want to go first?

Mr. GRIJALVA. Yes. Let me ask kind of a general question to each of you, Mr. Kashdan first. Part of the underlying issue that we are talking with the workforce is morale, and a sense of job satisfaction, a sense of contribution that an employee needs in order to be able to do their job well, and also provide that service at the top-notch level, and let me ask a general question, and if you can answer it, that is fine.

What impact has political pressure had on employees? In the case of forest, almost everything—decisions that are being made right now on siting, on development issues, on other things are under categorical exclusion, and at least from the employees I have talked to, going around the NEPA processes has had an effect on morale because professionally the inability to really deal with that resource question, the protection of that resource. Would you consider that political imperative of a categorical exclusion to have had an effect on morale?

Mr. KASHDAN. Mr. Chairman, let me answer that from the context of process that employees work through to achieve project execution, and the difficulties in completing all of the extensive process to have a project through to the point that you can actually execute it, and the degree to which maybe we spend 80 percent of our time getting to the last 20 percent of bullet-proofing, if you will, in terms of making a project appeal proof.

So I would have to say from a process standpoint there is a frustration, but there is also an understanding of how critical it is for all aspects of the public, all parts of the public to be heard and that transparency is going to an extensive part of this new administra-

tion's emphasis on project execution, particularly relative to the recovery act where we are talking about blogs and right to the project level that is going to invite a lot of public input.

So, I think that where we are going with this in the future is still to be defined as the administration adapts its position on working with NEPA and categorical exclusion.

Mr. WENK. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GRIJALVA. No, I was going to quickly—let me reference the rewriting of the management rules for Park Service, primarily done by political appointees at their urging, and that is the sense that I get, the effect on morale, same question.

Mr. WENK. Mr. Chairman, I think that the initial belief by the rank and file of the National Park Service was that the rewriting of the management policies was a top-down direction. I believe that in the middle of that process it became very much an employee-driven, National Park Service-driven rewrite of the management policies. I think the National Park Service, I think at the end of the day there was no—none or very little concern that the management policies changed any major direction, did anything in a significantly different way than has been the policies of the National Park Service for a long time.

I think there is a reality within our workforce that, just as you have resource management concerns, you have, you know, all kinds of concerns, there are also concerns with local communities, stakeholders. We engage the public on a regular basis to understand what the stakeholders' interests are and we consider all those things in our decisionmaking process.

But the policies themselves believe they are—

Mr. GRIJALVA. Quickly for both, let me follow up, you know, on the political pressure question. Another kind of pressure is we expedite resource use on public lands and we have been doing that for possibly the last decade, expediting that process.

In terms of morale, it appears from other reports that this Committee has received that the diminishing role of fact and science as part of the decisionmaking process has had an impact among the professional ranks as to their role in decisionmaking, because fact and science, on the resource side of it, is not given the prominence that it should have in terms of decisionmaking and planning. That affects morale because suddenly valuable studies and science are either changed or manipulated or ignored, and I would assume that has an effect on morale and the professional staff.

Mr. HOLT. If the gentleman would yield—

Mr. GRIJALVA. I yield.

Mr. HOLT.—and if I could just append a specific example to that question. It is something that I have been involved in quite a bit—the winter vehicles in Yellowstone Park, which I believe were based—the initial regulations were based—on pretty good science, and yet their policies yo-yoed back and forth, partly because of the courts, no doubt. I would think that is a specific example of what the Chairman is asking about.

Mr. WENK. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Or in general. I mean, the issue is the effect on morale.

Mr. WENK. I think that the moral of the National Park Service is improved and will continue to improve based on the emphasis that both the President and the Secretary of the Interior placed on science-based decisionmaking. We certainly expect that science-based decisionmaking will be how we go forward with our decisions within the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. My time is up. Let me turn to Mr. Bishop if he has any follow-up questions. Sir.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you. I have maybe three or four for each of them, if it is possible.

Mr. Wenk, I am grateful that you said, I think the number was \$8 million that you are going to add into the interior portions of land on the border for that is going to improvements and enforcement and improvements of that. But I do have one of the questions on just simply the commitment of Interior to increasing that, especially increasing law enforcement budgets, especially in light of the fact that DOI is going to spend more on the so-called mitigating effects of the border fence than it will on law enforcement. I just wonder why.

Mr. WENK. Well, certainly we recognize that we do have to mitigate the effects of the fence, and so we are going to deal with that. I think, Mr. Bishop, we continually look at the staffing needs and the requirements along the southwest border. We will look again in the 2010 budget and beyond to make sure we are adequately staffed to provide the resource and visitor protection that we need to do there, and it is an ongoing process. The 8.5 does not mean that we believe that we have solved the issue. It means we will continue to look but that is our commitment in 2009.

Mr. BISHOP. Let me try and help you get off the hot seat there because I do appreciate your improvement in that area. I want more improvement for obvious reasons.

Obviously back in 2007, the Ironwood National Monument where three people were executed, the response at that time was simply to pull all the employees off the land for two weeks. Later they had to go back and pick up two tons of trash, and basically there was no change, no additional law enforcement, no practical changes.

I am making the assumption when you say the additional money and re-looking at those, these types of things will be changed so a more proactive approach will be developed by the Department of the Interior for these types of situations on the border area.

Mr. WENK. Yes.

Mr. BISHOP. That was the easiest answer. Good for you.

Let me ask you one other question for you and then I will leave you alone. The reason I asked the questions about the lead in the first place was simply the news release that was sent out by the Park Service, which is not clear at all that it was merely intended for internal government employees, and in fact the words that were used here is very broad, that your goal is to eliminate it all by 2010, and the eventual total removal of the Park Service. So I appreciate your clarification here. Let me just say I think the release was somewhat misleading, and I do appreciate the clarification. I think that is a better response and perhaps some semantics changes could have been used there.

Mr. WENK. We agree with you, Mr. Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Mr. Kashdan, and I have a couple of questions I would like to ask, do you hear complaints from Forest Service personnel that too much of their time is spent preparing for and working to prevent litigation?

Mr. KASHDAN. Similar to my answer before; that is, as part of process our employees are spending quite a bit of time working on process aspects, and when I said spend—concern about spending 80 percent of their time to get 20 percent bullet-proofing, I think it speaks to the aspect of avoiding litigation. So it takes quite a bit of time.

Mr. BISHOP. So I am assuming that 80 to 20 split can also be counted with the phrase “paralysis to analysis”, that spends a whole lot of time rather than getting to the front of it, and I appreciate you saying that that is indeed a problem that you have to face in different times.

Can I ask one other similar to what I asked Mr. Wenk? There are problems of crime on Forest Service lands in national forest areas too, Coronado, for example, where there have been numerous news stories basically about crime has returned there, as well as basically a loss of control to those areas to some criminal elements. Some of them are international criminal elements.

What is being done to change those policies in the Forest Service and why simply is the Forest Service not asking for substantial funding increases for law enforcement on Forest Service lands?

Mr. KASHDAN. Thank you, Mr. Bishop. Yes, you mention the Coronado, which is one of our core partnership law enforcement issues that we have with the Department of the Interior and in fact with the border patrol. In terms of funding, let me just clarify that I believe it was Fiscal Year 2007 and 2008 our law enforcement program in the Forest Service received substantial increases. I am talking 25 million, roughly, to address the issues of drugs on the national forest and border issues.

So, I would say that we had a very substantial increase that are really bringing our staffing up in Fiscal Year 2009 to address, and the vast priority associated with those increases are to directly address drugs and particularly organized crime, drug cartels that involve quite a bit of trafficking across the border, leading to marijuana gardens principally on national forest lands. So it is part of us working together quite extensively.

So, we have had a very significant increase, and that is why the 2009 and 2010 budgets do not reflect another increase.

Mr. BISHOP. Maybe you could make a deal with the National Parks and Conservation Association to have them work on the border too.

Mr. Chairman, I have four questions. Would you like me to defer and come back or do you want me to just get it over with now? It is up to you.

Mr. GRIJALVA. I think it would be less painful if you got it over with now.

[Laughter.]

Mr. BISHOP. From your point of view, it certainly would be.

Mr. Nedd, I am sorry I do not have a specific question for you. I apologize for that. You will find how exciting these hearings are

as time goes on in your new position. I guess the only thing I could say is I appreciate the answer you gave to Mr. Holt, that you are not yanking people to expedite permit processes, but to be honest, he has come up with a damn good idea. Maybe you should consider doing it, and I will leave you with that.

I would also say I do appreciate the emphasis that both the Chairman and Mr. Holt said about using science. We would appreciate if that was—I mean, if EPA is not going to do it, at least you guys ought to. And I also appreciate a lot of the testimony that you have presented as to how the workforce in both the Forest Service as well as the Interior Department are responding. A lot of the concerns that were originally mentioned deal with job security, outsourcing, the need for more money. I hate to say that. You walk into any faculty room on a high school in this nation and you are going to hear the same concerns. So I think your ultimate response was actually very refreshing as to how you are going and how things have changed, and how you are moving forward in that particular area.

I guess I just have one last question, Mr. Wenk or Mr. Kashdan, actually Mr. Nedd, if you want to do this. We will probably go on the Floor today with some suspensions to try and do some retroactive taxing on people, so you know, when we create a problem and a loophole in the law, we are going to come back and try and fix it by going after them in a punitive way.

So, are there any groups that you would like us to go after? I mean, if you can do it for one, you can do it for others. Just name them and we will do some kind of retroactive punitive taxing measures on them. Seems to be a very effective way of getting something done. Do you have any that just come to the top of your head? Do not say politicians, because when we talk we emit CO<sub>2</sub> and there may be a tax on that later on?

Mr. KASHDAN. I will defer to my colleagues.

Mr. WENK. Can I consult and answer that for the record?

[Laughter.]

Mr. BISHOP. If you would like to do a written statement later, I think that would probably—Mr. Nedd, you wish to go where the angels fear to tread?

Mr. NEDD. I have no recommendation.

Mr. BISHOP. That is good. Thank you very much.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you, Mr. Bishop.

One request for information for the Committee relative to the cost, and let me just be specific about the border of public lands. The question that has come up time and time again, and at least talking with your land managers in those parks that were referenced by Mr. Bishop, is the cost recovery issue; that a cost basically incurred by Interior, Agriculture, as a consequence of supplanting and subsidizing some of the enforcement activities of homeland security, and if you would—at least I heard that from the law enforcement side, the land managers side. If you could provide the Committee that information. I think there is a cost recovery issue that I have brought up consistently, that homeland security in its access and work on the public lands, as they do that there is mitigation issues that need to be taken care of, there are reassignment of personnel to deal with security issues as opposed

to management, resource issues, and I think there is a cost attendant, and we would appreciate that information.

Mr. WENK. We can provide that.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Thank you very much, and I would invite the next panel, please.

Thank you very much. We are going to be called soon, I assume in the next 10 or 15 minutes, for a vote. We will try to get through as much of this panel as we can, and then recess, and come back and begin where we left off. Hopefully, we can get through the testimony, and when we come back to only have the question and answer process left. So thank you very much for being here, taking the time. Some of you came from long ways away to get here, and it is very much appreciated. It is an important issue to this Committee and an issue that your input we are going to follow up on.

So let me begin with Mr. Kevin Simpson, Executive Vice President, Partnership for Public Service. Thank you very much for being here, sir, for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF KEVIN SIMPSON, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Mr. SIMPSON. Thank you, Chairman Grijalva and Congressman Bishop. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I represent the Partnership for Public Service, which is a non-partisan, nonprofit organization which is dedicated to revitalizing the Federal Civil Service by inspiring a new generation to serve, and transforming the way the Federal government works.

We at the partnership believe very strongly that employee engagement is an absolutely indispensable predicate for organizational excellence, and as such, it should be the shared responsibility and concern of agency leaders, both career and political, as well as of Congress, and that is why we are so pleased to be here today to discuss issues of employee engagement at the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.

Since 2003, the Partnership has published on a bi-annual basis our Best Places to Work in the Federal Government Rankings, which are built upon data from OPM's Federal Human Capital Survey to provide a comprehensive set of rankings of employee engagement among Federal agencies and their subcomponents. We measure not only overall engagement but also 10 different workplace environment characteristics such as employee skills and mission match, the quality of leadership, work/life balance, and other characteristics. When used appropriately and consistently over time, the best place rankings can aid Congress in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities by highlighting the Federal government's high performing agencies and raising a red flag before agencies fail at important public responsibilities, when agencies suffer from low employee engagement and the associated risks of poor performance.

In our 2007 best places rankings, we ranked 30 large agencies. The Department of Agriculture, which the Forest Service is a part, ranked 17 out of 30 large agencies. The Department of the Interior, which includes NPS and BLM, ranked 22 out of 30. We also broke those agencies down further into 220 ranked subcomponents. All

three agency subcomponents at issue here ranked in the bottom half when compared to the total 222 agency subcomponents. Forest Service ranked 143, NPS ranked 160, BLM ranked 157 out of 222 subcomponents.

For 2009, we are preparing our rankings now, but we expect to see modest improvements for NPS and for the Bureau of Land Management. However, we predict the Forest Service's overall ranking will drop. At the Forest Service we see a downward trend in the 2008 survey responses to key questions that reflect overall employee satisfaction.

For example, 56 percent of Forest Service employees surveyed say they would recommend their organization as a good place to work, and that is a decline from 61 percent two years ago. Sixty-two percent say they are satisfied with their job. That is a decline from 70 percent in 2006. Forty-four percent say they are satisfied with their organization. That is down from 51 percent two years ago.

Clearly there is much work to be done to improve employee morale and engagement in all three agencies, and the Forest Service, in particular, may have greater hurdles to overcome.

There are bright spots. Employees at all three agencies are attracted by the mission of their organization and believe their jobs are a good match for their skills. More than 80 percent of employees at the Forest Service, the NPS and the BLM say that they like the kind of work that they do. There is a decline at the Forest Service slightly from 88 percent in 2006 to 83.5 percent in 2008 on this measure. That is notable, but the numbers are still high on an absolute level.

The Park Service's responses have remained relatively stable over time, and BLM has actually increased slightly from 82.9 percent in 2006 to 84.5 percent.

All three subcomponents compare favorably with the private sector benchmark of 83 percent. We do know that satisfaction with regard to training has increased at both NPS and BLM, and that suggests that an increased investment in this area by the Department of the Interior is noted and appreciated by its employees. On the other hand, satisfaction with training has decreased at the Forest Service.

In terms of areas for improvement, the number one driver of employee satisfaction in all three agencies, according to the 2007 best places rankings, is leadership, and we see that governmentwide. In 2008, the survey results for the three agencies we are talking about today are far below the governmentwide average for virtually every question about effective leadership. Responses are particularly low for the questions on whether leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce. Only 27 percent of respondents at the Forest Service say their leaders generate high levels of motivation. National Park Service and BLM do not fair much better with just slightly higher scores of 29.6 percent and 30 percent, respectively.

Similarly, the 2008 survey responses show us that a majority of employees do not have a high level of respect for senior leaders in their organization. They do not believe their leaders maintain standards of honesty and integrity, do not feel empowered with re-

spect to work processes, and do not feel satisfied with the information received from management about what is going on in the organization.

Taken together, the results from the 2007 best places rankings and the trend data from FHCS convey the sense of a public lands workforce that under stress. The Forest Service, NPS and BLM are fortunate to have workforces that are highly committed to their respective missions and who generally believe that their immediate supervisors are doing a good job. But these are also workforces who say they lack the resources to do the job required of them, that their agencies do not excel in recruiting new talent with the needed skills, and that their leaders failed to inspire and motivate high performance, and that the skill level of the agencies is stagnant.

We can say with confidence that an underresource and under-trained workforce will not be able to perform at its best on behalf of the American people.

We have a set of recommendations. Well, I am doing OK on time. The Partnership offers several recommendations for attracting talent, improving morale and enhancing overall employee satisfaction and engagement at the Forest Service and the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

Leadership, obviously, should be a key priority for all three agencies. They should make improving satisfaction and engagement a priority. Leaders should also focus on improving horizontal and vertical communication and fostering opportunities for employee input.

Supervisors should be selected based on leadership/management skills, and not just technical expertise. Congress should support agencies in creating a dual track for technical experts, allowing them to be compensated, recognized for their skills and abilities without the necessity of becoming supervisors.

Congress should ensure that the agencies have the resources and the personnel necessary to fulfill their mission, and that includes setting aside funding for training and leadership development.

We also suggest that Congress require the Office of Personnel Management to conduct a Federal Human Capital Survey, the Federal Human Capital Survey on an annual basis, and release the data as soon as its accuracy can be assured. This will enable agencies to make real-time course corrections where needed; provide an annual benchmark capability by providing consistent data across agency lines; and provide Congress a more timely and informative oversight tool.

And finally, we have also suggested a Federal Applicant's Bill of Rights to make the application more user friendly and the hiring process more timely and transparent.

I will submit the rest of my remarks for your consideration.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Simpson follows:]

**Statement of Kevin Simpson, Executive Vice President and  
General Counsel, Partnership for Public Service**

Chairman Grijalva, Representative Bishop, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Kevin Simpson, Executive Vice President and General Counsel of the Partnership for Public Service, a non-partisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to revitalizing the federal civil service by inspiring a new generation to serve and transforming the way the federal govern-

ment works. We are honored to be here today to discuss morale at the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and National Park Service (NPS). In our testimony, we will comment on the efforts of these agencies to improve recruitment, retention and overall employee satisfaction, and will suggest areas which we believe would benefit most from this subcommittee's attention.

The Partnership has two principal areas of focus. First, we work to inspire new talent to join federal service. Second, we work with government leaders to help transform government so that the best and brightest will enter, stay and succeed in meeting the challenges of our nation. That includes all aspects of how the federal government manages people, from attracting them to government, leading and engaging them, supporting their development and managing performance; in short, all the essential ingredients for creating, developing and maintaining a world-class workforce.

### **A New Opportunity**

On the eve of the Presidential election in November 2008, the Partnership conducted a poll with Gallup on public perceptions of the federal government.<sup>1</sup> The research confirmed that most Americans continue to think poorly of their government in general. When asked to assess the performance of various levels of government, less than one-third of Americans gave a positive rating to the departments and agencies of the federal government (27 percent) and just over one-third were positive about the performance of civil servants in the federal government (37 percent).

While the general public lacked confidence in government, there were a few positive signs—and one of them was the national parks. Survey respondents were asked to rate the job that the federal government was doing on different issues. With respect to “running the country's national parks,” 51 percent said they thought the federal government was doing a “good/excellent” job, while 36 percent said “fair/poor” job and 13 percent said they didn't know. The Forest Service, NPS and BLM need to capitalize on this public support for the work of government in managing our parks and public lands, and Congress must ensure that these agencies have the human resources they need to maintain and protect the natural resources that so many Americans treasure.

With the election and subsequent inauguration of President Obama, there has been a renewed interest in government service. Agencies need to capitalize on these changing attitudes and work hard to recruit, engage and retain top talent in service to the American people.

In his inauguration speech, President Obama said it well: “The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works.” As the new administration begins to settle in, we urge the President and Congress to focus not just on policy objectives but also on ensuring that our government has the talented and engaged federal workforce that it needs to effectively implement those policies.

The Partnership issued a report last year entitled “Roadmap to Reform: A Management Framework for the Next Administration.”<sup>2</sup> In our report, we suggest that the core components of an effective workforce include having the right talent; an engaged workforce; strong leadership; and, public support. This is true for government as a whole, and it is true for the departments and agencies of government—including the Forest Service, National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management. The Partnership is pleased to provide you with some insight into the human capital challenges facing these agencies and suggest some areas in which your oversight and legislative attention would have the most impact.

### **Measures Drive Change**

The old adage that “what gets measured, gets changed” still holds true. And when it comes to the federal workforce, not enough is getting fully measured. Data available on the state of the federal workforce is not systematically organized, evaluated or disseminated in a way that is meaningful to all of the key audiences.

The value of indicator systems as an effective tool for driving reform has been widely documented. The Partnership has taken a step toward creating national indicators through our Best Places to Work in the Federal Government rankings, prepared in collaboration with American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation. The Best Places rankings build upon data from the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) to pro-

<sup>1</sup> In the Public We Trust: Renewing the Connection between the Federal Government and the Public. Partnership for Public Service and Gallup, November 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Roadmap to Reform: A Management Framework for the Next Administration. Partnership for Public Service, October 2008.

vide a comprehensive assessment of employee satisfaction across the federal government's agencies and their subcomponents.

Employee satisfaction and commitment are two of the necessary ingredients in developing high-performing organizations and attracting needed talent to meet our nation's challenges. The Best Places to Work rankings are a key step in recognizing the importance of employee satisfaction and ensuring that it is a top priority of government managers and leaders.

Since the first rankings were released in 2003, they have helped create much-needed institutional incentives to focus on priority workforce issues and provide managers and leaders with a roadmap for boosting employee engagement.

The rankings also provide Members of Congress and the general public with unprecedented insight into federal agencies and what the people who work in those agencies say about leadership, mission and effectiveness. Ideally, the Best Places rankings can aid Congress in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities by highlighting the federal government's high-performing agencies and raising a red flag when agencies suffer from conditions that lead to low employee engagement and, consequently, poor performance.

#### **A Look at Employee Engagement**

The Partnership recently received the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey data from OPM for agency subcomponents so we are in the process of preparing our 2009 Best Places rankings. Although the rankings will not be calculated and released until later this spring, we can discuss the 2007 rankings and are able to preview some important findings for the subcommittee drawn from the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey. Additionally, we can provide some trend data for the subcomponents based on Survey data from 2002-2008.

In 2007, the Partnership ranked 30 large agencies, 31 small agencies and 222 agency subcomponents. Our index scores are computed based on data that comes from federal employees themselves through their responses to OPM's Federal Human Capital Survey. As part of the rankings, we organize the data into ten key workplace categories which are all key drivers of employee satisfaction: employee skills/mission match, leadership, work/life balance, teamwork, pay and benefits, training and development, support for diversity, strategic management, performance-based rewards and advancement, and family-friendly culture and benefits.

In the 2007 Best Places ranking, the Department of Agriculture, of which the Forest Service is a part, ranked 17 out of 30 large agencies. The Department of the Interior, which includes NPS and BLM, ranked 22 out of 30. All three agency subcomponents received rankings comparable to other subcomponents in their respective departments; however, they all ranked in the bottom half when compared to the total 222 agency subcomponents. The Forest Service ranked 143 out of 222 subcomponents, NPS ranked 160 out of 222 subcomponents, and BLM ranked 157 out of 222 subcomponents. After a preliminary review of the 2008 FHCS data, we expect to see modest improvements in the 2009 Best Places rankings for NPS and BLM; however we predict that the Forest Service's ranking will drop. At the Forest Service, we see a downward trend in the 2008 FHCS responses to key questions that reflect overall employee satisfaction:

- Fifty-six percent of employees surveyed say they would recommend their organization as a good place to work, which is a decline from 61 percent two years ago;
- Sixty-two percent say they are satisfied with their job, also a decline from 70 percent in 2006;
- Only 44 percent say they are satisfied with their organization, down from 51 percent.

Results such as these suggest that something is not going right at the Forest Service. Clearly, there is much work to be done to improve employee morale and engagement in all three agencies and the Forest Service in particular may have greater hurdles to overcome.

It is encouraging to note that the agencies we are discussing today have one prominent thing in common—employees are attracted by the mission of their organization and believe their jobs are a good match for their skills. More than 80 percent of employees at the Forest Service, NPS and BLM say that they like the kind of work they do. There is a decline at the Forest Service from 88 percent in 2006 to 83.5 percent in 2008, which is notable, but the numbers are still high. NPS responses have remained relatively stable over time and the BLM has increased slightly, from 82.9 percent in 2006 to 84.5 in 2008. All three subcomponents compare favorably with the private sector benchmark of 83 percent. Agency leaders, both at headquarters and in the field, should continue to focus on the mission and

help employees understand the connection between the work they are doing and broader organizational goals.

In terms of areas for improvement, the number one driver of employee satisfaction in all three agencies according to the 2007 Best Places rankings is leadership, and we expect this will continue to be the case in the 2009 rankings. The Forest Service, NPS and BLM will need to make a concerted effort to address leadership. Improving employee perceptions of their leaders will have the most impact on employee engagement.

The Federal Human Capital Survey includes several questions regarding employee perceptions of leadership in the workplace. In 2008, the survey results for the three agencies we are discussing today are notably low—far below the government-wide average—for virtually every question about effective leadership. Responses are particularly low for the questions on whether leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce and whether complaints, disputes or grievances are resolved fairly in their work unit. Only 27 percent of respondents at the Forest Service say their leaders generate high levels of motivation. The National Park Service and BLM do not fare much better with just slightly higher scores of 29.6 percent and 30 percent respectively. With regard to the way complaints, disputes and grievances are resolved in the workplace, 32.7 percent of employees at the Forest Service, 34.9 percent at NPS and 34.6 percent at BLM feel they are handled well. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior also receive low marks from employees on both of these questions, which suggest that leadership needs to be addressed at the Department level, as well.

Similarly, scores reveal that a majority of employees do not have a high level of respect for senior leaders in their organization, do not believe their leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity, do not feel empowered with respect to work processes and do not feel satisfied with the information received from management about what is going on in the organization. At the Forest Service, for example, only 37 percent of respondents believe they have sufficient information as compared to 66 percent in the private sector benchmark, which is a substantial difference. On a more positive note, 66 percent of respondents at the Forest Service believe that their immediate supervisor/team leader is doing a good job, which is the government-wide average. Despite the good news about supervisors, all three agencies still fall below the private sector comparison of 74 percent. These data points combine to tell an unfortunate tale about the state of leadership in our public lands agencies.

In addition to leadership, there are other key areas where the Forest Service, NPS and BLM need to focus their attention. According to the 2008 FHCS data, it appears that the agencies are still struggling to cultivate a work environment with a positive work/life balance. On the one hand, survey respondents strongly believe that their supervisors support their need to balance work and other life issues. This is one of the areas where the Forest Service gets the highest marks. Eight-two percent of respondents believe their supervisor supports a healthy work/life balance. On the other hand, it is clear that Forest Service respondents do not believe that they have sufficient resources (e.g., people, materials, budget) to accomplish their jobs. Only 32.5 percent of respondents say they have sufficient resources, a drop from 39 percent in 2004. The government-wide average is 51.2 percent. The Bureau of Land Management (41.6 percent) and National Park Service (35.3 percent) do not fare much better but their scores have improved slightly since 2006. Clearly this question of resources is one area that warrants further attention from the agencies and from Congress.

According to the Best Places rankings, strategic management is another key driver of employee engagement. When asked the question “my work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills” on the 2008 FHCS, the scores are low for BLM and NPS and are particularly low for the Forest Service. Only 35.3 percent of survey respondents from the Forest Service believe their work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills. The scores for BLM and NPS are both 41 percent, which is still lower than the government-wide average of 45 percent.

In general, employees at the Forest Service, NPS and BLM believe that the workplace has the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals. The scores are relatively high and range from 71 percent (BLM) to 66 percent (Forest Service); however, the same employees do not give high marks for the question on whether the skill level in their work unit has improved in the past year. We do know that satisfaction with regard to training has increased at both NPS and BLM. This suggests that an increased investment in this area by the Department of the Interior is noted and appreciated by employees. On the other hand, satisfaction with training has decreased at the Forest Service. In 2006, 63 percent said they were satisfied with training, well above the government-wide average of

54 percent. Now, two years later, only 55 percent say they are satisfied with training.

Taken together, the results from the 2007 Best Places rankings and the trend data from the FHCS convey the sense of a public lands workforce that is under stress. The Forest Service, NPS and BLM are fortunate to have workforces that are highly committed to their respective missions and who generally believe their immediate supervisors are doing a good job. But these are also workforces who say they lack the resources to do the job required of them, that their agencies do not excel in recruiting new talent with needed skills, that their leaders fail to inspire and motivate high performance, and that the skill level of the agencies is stagnant. We can say with confidence that an under-resourced, under-trained workforce will not be able to perform at its best on behalf of the American people.

Congress and the Administration need to work together to ensure that adequate resources are available. This includes making sure that agencies are using all of the tools at their disposal to recruit, retain and develop talent; ensuring the resources are available to use these tools effectively; addressing leadership issues and cultivating new leaders; and, investing in training and support for supervisors/managers to ensure that they are able to effectively manage a diverse workforce which includes many seasonal and part-time employees.

Since a significant percentage of the workforce at BLM, NPS and the Forest Service are not full-time permanent employees, Congress should encourage agencies to do regular “pulse check” surveys that include part-time, temporary and volunteer workers. These groups are not included in the FHCS but are an important population, and their performance directly affects the ability of these agencies to fulfill their missions.

In addition, better and more frequent data are essential for Congress to conduct necessary oversight of the Forest Service, NPS and BLM and how they are managing their workforces. We recommend that OPM conduct the Federal Human Capital Survey on an annual basis, and release the data as soon as its accuracy can be assured. This will enable the agencies to make real-time course corrections where needed; provide an annual benchmark capability by providing consistent data across agency lines; and provide Congress a more timely and informative oversight tool.

#### *NPS Case Study*

Last summer, at the request of the National Parks Conservation Association, the Partnership conducted an analysis of employee satisfaction and engagement at the National Park Service. The Partnership conducted a trend analysis for NPS using FHCS data from 2002-2006. The trend analysis informed a subsequent set of focus groups of NPS employees conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. in fall 2008. The Partnership has recently issued a set of recommendations for how NPS might improve leadership. Many of these recommendations can be applied to Forest Service and BLM, as well.

First, the Partnership recommended that NPS work to engage leadership. Senior leaders need to understand the importance of having an engaged workforce and clearly make improving employee engagement a priority. We recommended that NPS leadership meet as a team to determine priorities around improving engagement. New political appointees, particularly the next Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks and his or her key staff, should be included as soon as—and to the maximum extent—possible.

Effective communication begins at the top of the organization. Employees need to hear from NPS leaders that employee engagement is a priority.

- First, we recommended that leaders send emails, convene town hall meetings and spread the word through other communication channels that improving employee engagement is a key goal for NPS leaders.
- Second, we suggested that leaders share the summary findings of the FHCS and then focus on group results with employees—the good, the bad and the ugly.
- Third, we urged NPS to communicate leadership’s top areas or issues for improvement and periodically follow up with employees through progress reports.
- Finally, we recommended that NPS leaders ask for input on specific issues and then use that employee feedback (e.g., ask employees: how can we better use our limited resources to achieve our mission?).

Leaders also need to foster effective communication from the bottom up. Employees need to know that they are heard and that their opinions and perspectives matter. Leaders should provide additional avenues for upward communication; for example, a virtual employee suggestion box, short pulse surveys, or town hall meetings. Employees should be encouraged to provide input on projects and should be

consulted on how to improve processes. It is important that employees are heard and that senior leaders follow up on suggestions.

Developing strong supervisors and managers must be a priority for NPS leadership. NPS leaders should consider conducting 360-degree reviews of supervisors or create a mentoring program to help them develop. Leaders should also select supervisors based on an individual's management and leadership skills, rather than simply technical expertise. It makes sense to create a dual track for those technical experts, which will allow them to be compensated and recognized for their skills and abilities without requiring them to become supervisors.

Finally, it is important that NPS leaders, as well as supervisors/managers conduct regular, meaningful performance discussions and provide guidance for how employees can improve and build upon strengths. Leaders are also encouraged to recognize and reward employees' good work through a simple "thank you," additional time off, spot awards or other methods.

### **Attracting New Talent**

The good news is that the federal government is an attractive employer, whether it is for young people graduating from college or older Americans considering encore careers. Our January 2009 report, "Great Expectations: What Students Want in an Employer and How Federal Agencies Can Deliver It," surveyed almost 32,000 American undergraduates about what they are looking for in an employer.<sup>3</sup> We found that government/public service is the most popular industry choice out of 46 career options among the undergraduates surveyed. A healthy work/life balance was the number one career goal, with 66 percent of students citing this as a priority; 46 percent of students say they want to be dedicated to a cause or feel they are serving a greater good.

Older workers also find the federal government to be an attractive employer. The Partnership published a report in January, 2008, entitled "A Golden Opportunity: Recruiting Baby Boomers Into Government."<sup>4</sup> As part of the report, we surveyed older workers and found that 58 percent believed "there are good jobs for people like me in the federal government." When asked what job qualities they found most appealing, respondents cited work that is interesting and challenging and offers health care benefits, both of which the government offers.

Tapping into this interest in federal service is essential to ensuring that the Forest Service, NPS and BLM have the human resources needed to meet their responsibilities; indeed, the federal government as a whole needs to attract new talent at all levels. The Partnership projects that more than 500,000 full-time permanent federal employees will leave government over the next five years, the majority through retirement. This exodus of talent will create huge voids that will need to be filled.

The three agencies we are discussing today have significant hiring needs. In 2008 alone, the agencies made the following new hires:

- Forest Service: 1,148 full-time, permanent and 12,548 full-time, temporary;
- Park Service: 590 full-time, permanent and 8,905 full-time, temporary;
- Bureau of Land Management: 550 full-time, permanent and 2,509 full-time, temporary.

According to the USAJOBS Web site, on March 12, 2009, there were over 1,400 job openings being advertised at the National Park Service, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management combined. The largest number, 594 vacancies, were at the Bureau of Land Management. The Forest Service had 436 vacancies and NPS had 385. These positions run the gamut from Fire Management Officer to Park Ranger to Biological Science Technician, and are located all across the country. A significant number of these vacancies are temporary, seasonal positions.

It's likely this level of hiring will continue and perhaps increase into at least the near future given that the Recovery Act includes \$146 million for the NPS, \$125 million for BLM, and \$650 million for the Forest Service. Further, the President's proposed FY 2010 budget calls for a \$100 million increase in park operations (plus inflation) and a \$50 million increase (plus inflation) for national forest operations, among other initiatives likely to impact on hiring needs in both agencies. Clearly this is a time to focus on efforts to improve the federal government's ability to effectively attract and hire some of the nation's best talent for the jobs to be filled.

A short visit to the USAJOBS Web site shows quite clearly that federal hiring procedures are inconsistent and not designed with a positive applicant experience

<sup>3</sup>Great Expectations: What Students Want in an Employer and How Federal Agencies Can Deliver It. Partnership for Public Service and Universum, January 2009.

<sup>4</sup>A Golden Opportunity: Recruiting Baby Boomers Into Government. Partnership for Public Service, January 2008.

in mind. In one vacancy announcement for a “Park Ranger (I)” at the National Park Service, the information under the “how to apply” tab was nine pages long. Some applications may be submitted online; others ask applicants to send applications via U.S. Mail. Some job announcements provide the name of a point of contact; others cite the general phone number for the human resources office. One of the most common requirements across government is that applicants answer several essay questions to address “KSAs”—knowledge, skills and abilities—a time consuming task that discourages many of even the most qualified people from applying. Those motivated enough to complete the application process find that it is just the beginning; some wait months before receiving a response. It is no wonder that many potential candidates for federal positions conclude that it is simply not worth the effort to apply.

While we cannot comment on the specific hiring practices of the Forest Service, BLM and NPS, we can say that government as a whole needs to improve its ability to hire the right talent, with the right skills, in a timely manner. The Subcommittee would be well-served to review the hiring processes at the three agencies we are discussing today to determine whether our public lands agencies are indeed hiring as effectively as they could be. The Partnership would like to offer some general recommendations with regard to recruiting and hiring new talent.

1. First, we suggest that Congress pass legislation creating a “Federal Applicant’s Bill of Rights.”<sup>5</sup> An applicant bill of rights should provide that the hiring process must be understandable, transparent and timely. Job announcements should be written in plain English. In most cases, applicants should be able to apply online with a standard resume, and should be able to reach a real person at the agency to which they are applying if they have questions. Agencies should be held accountable for making timely hiring decisions, and notifying applicants when a hire has been made.

We also suggest that Congress require better data collection from federal agencies regarding their hiring effectiveness.<sup>6</sup> This subcommittee needs more and better information from the agencies you oversee regarding their ability to hire and retain needed talent. Measures of hiring effectiveness should include an understanding of where the agencies are getting their talent, whether that talent is diverse, whether managers are satisfied with the match between the skills of newly hired individuals and the needs of their agencies, and whether qualified applicants accept positions elsewhere due to the length or complexity of federal hiring. It is also important to collect data on the temporary, seasonal and part-time employees who comprise a significant part of our nation’s public lands workforce.

2. Agencies should prioritize student internships as key talent sources for entry-level jobs and then recruit accordingly and resource these programs adequately. They should also make greater use of the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) because these internships are designed to enable agencies to convert the most promising students into permanent employees. Managers should have greater flexibility to hire students from all internship programs who have demonstrated their capabilities. Congress should require agencies to evaluate their intern programs and ensure agencies are making the best use of their authority to build their critical workforce pipelines.

Other agencies can learn from the Bureau of Land Management, which will be highlighted in a future Partnership report on federal student internship programs. The agency hired a student coordinator to oversee the National Student Employment Programs, Presidential Management Fellows Program and Federal Career Intern program. The coordinator develops standardized procedures, sets expectations across the agency and maintains a resume databank that hiring managers can tap. She also conducts monthly conference calls with student employment program coordinators in all 16 states in which BLM operates, which allows for the sharing of best practices for recruiting students and ultimately converting them to full-time permanent employees. BLM also developed an entire on-line training program with modules applicable for student program coordinators, hiring managers and supervisors as well as students.

These efforts have been paying off. There are roughly 200 SCEP interns with the BLM each year. About one-third receive special incentives from the Washington, D.C. office in the form of tuition support (\$2,000/year for

<sup>5</sup> See Applicant’s Bill of Rights draft legislative language in Appendix I.

<sup>6</sup> The Partnership suggests “Measures for Federal Hiring Effectiveness” in Section 3 of the draft “Federal Applicant’s Bill of Rights” in Appendix I.

in-state and \$3,000/year for out-of-state) plus travel to and from job duty stations. These incentives are geared towards enhancing the retention of underrepresented populations such as women and racial minorities in the BLM's locations in the western states and lead to conversion rates of about 80 percent among those receiving the incentives.

3. Congress should encourage agencies to continue to take advantage of existing recruitment incentives, such as student loan repayment, and should provide resources necessary for them to do so. Congress should also require agencies to report on the use and effectiveness of different recruitment incentives in an effort to determine the most effective way to recruit and retain talent.

According to OPM's 2007 Federal Student Loan Repayment Program Report to Congress, the Department of the Interior provided nearly \$400,000 in loan repayment to 41 individuals in positions including Park Ranger, Land Surveyor and Facilities and Operations Management Specialists, among others. The Department of the Interior cited the value of using this student loan repayment program as a way to help individual bureaus attract key talent in fields such as engineering, environmental science, telecommunication and financial analysis. The Department of Agriculture also provided just over \$400,000 in loan repayment to 53 employees spread across all components of the agency. Again, the agency reported that the student loan repayment program was a valuable recruitment and retention tool.<sup>7</sup>

4. Finally, the Partnership suggests that Congress pass Representative David Price's Roosevelt Scholars Act, a measure that could help the agencies—and the rest of the federal government—meet some of their critical hiring needs. Named after President Theodore Roosevelt, who championed the creation and expansion of national parks and monuments, the legislation creates a graduate-level scholarship program in mission-critical fields in exchange for a federal service commitment. The program could help agencies recruit new engineers, biologists, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialists, and other high-need professionals. The military's ROTC program has been a tremendous source of leadership talent for our nation's armed forces; we believe the Roosevelt Scholars Act could become an analogous source of needed expertise for our civilian agencies. The Roosevelt Scholars Act was introduced in the 110th Congress and is expected to be introduced again shortly.

In summary, the Obama administration has ushered in an era of enthusiasm for government service not seen since the Kennedy years; now our government must seize the opportunity to build new pipelines of talent into government and improve management of our current federal workforce. It is critical that agencies streamline their hiring processes, build robust internship programs that can serve as a pipeline of talent, and utilize existing hiring authorities and recruitment incentives to recruit the best and brightest talent. Congress should require that agencies collect metrics to enable agencies to understand what hiring authorities and incentives are most effective in recruiting and retaining needed expertise.

#### **Summary of Recommendations**

The Partnership offers the following recommendations for attracting talent, improving morale and enhancing overall employee satisfaction and engagement at the Forest Service, National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management:

Leadership at the Forest Service, NPS, and BLM should make improving employee satisfaction and engagement a priority. Leaders should also focus on improving horizontal and vertical communication and fostering opportunities for employee input.

Supervisors should be selected based on leadership/management skills, not just technical expertise. Congress should support agencies in creating a dual track for technical experts, allowing them to be compensated and recognized for their skills and abilities without the necessity of becoming supervisors.

Congress should ensure that agencies have the resources and personnel necessary to fulfill their missions. This includes setting aside funding for training and leadership development.

Congress should encourage agencies to do regular "pulse check" surveys that include part-time, temporary and volunteer workers. These groups are not included in the FHCS but are an important population, and their attitudes/perceptions about the workplace will contribute greatly to overall morale.

<sup>7</sup>Federal Student Loan Repayment Program Report to Congress, Office of Personnel Management, 2007.

Congress should require the Office of Personnel Management to conduct the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) on an annual basis, and release the data as soon as its accuracy can be assured. This will enable the agencies to make real-time course corrections where needed; provide an annual benchmark capability by providing consistent data across agency lines; and provide Congress a more timely and informative oversight tool. This will also save each department and agency the time and cost associated with complying with the annual employee survey requirement in the year that OPM does not conduct the FHCS.

Congress should require all federal agencies and their subcomponents to adopt a “Federal Applicant’s Bill of Rights” to make the application process more user-friendly and the hiring process more timely and transparent.

Congress should encourage agencies to take advantage of existing hiring authorities and recruitment incentives and should provide resources necessary for them to do so. Congress should also ask agencies to collect metrics to assess how they are using these personnel flexibilities and recruitment incentives, and what is most effective in recruiting, engaging, and ultimately retaining diverse and highly qualified talent. Agencies should also report on how these flexibilities and incentives can be improved.

Congress should require additional measures of hiring effectiveness to determine whether BLM, NPS, the Forest Service and other federal agencies are able to recruit and hire enough of the right people with the right skills.

Agencies should prioritize student internships as key talent sources for entry-level jobs and then recruit accordingly and resource these programs adequately. Congress should require agencies to evaluate their intern programs in this context to ensure agencies are making the best use of their authority to build their critical workforce pipelines.

Congress should pass the Roosevelt Scholars Act to help agencies recruit mission-critical talent.

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## Appendix I (7/8/08 draft)

### Section 1. Short Title.

This Act may be cited as the “Federal Applicant’s Bill of Rights Act of 2008”.

### Section 2. Standards for Federal Hiring.

(a) Clarity of job announcements.—Federal job announcements shall be written in plain English, with a minimum of acronyms or jargon, and shall clearly and prominently display the title, salary, location, work schedule, type and duration of appointment, responsibilities of the position and instructions for applying.

(b) User-friendly application process.—Federal agencies shall keep the amount of initial information required from an applicant to the minimum necessary to determine qualifications and eligibility. On-line receipt of a standard resume and a brief response to questions regarding citizenship and veteran status may serve as application for employment except in special circumstances as determined by the head of an agency. Submission of additional material in support of an application, such as college transcripts, proof of veteran status, and professional certifications, may be required only when necessary to complete the application process and applicants shall be given a reasonable amount of time after the closing date of the job announcement to provide such information.

(c) Timely communication and online tracking.—[Federal agencies/OPM] shall devise and implement a means by which applicants for federal jobs (1) receive prompt acknowledgement of their application, (2) be given or have on-line access to periodic updates on the status of their application, and (3) may speak to an appropriate individual at an agency regarding the hiring process or their application for employment.

(d) Timely decision and candidate notification.—Federal agencies shall make timely hiring decisions. Within ten business days of the time that selected candidates have accepted offers of employment or job announcements have been canceled, non-selected job applicants will be notified.

### Section 3. Measures of Federal Hiring Effectiveness.

(a) Pursuant to subsection (b), federal agencies shall measure and collect data on a continuous basis and report to the Office of Personnel Management on the following indicators of hiring effectiveness:

- (1) Recruiting and Hiring “
  - (A) ability to reach and recruit well-qualified talent from diverse talent pools;
  - (B) use and impact of special hiring authorities and flexibilities to recruit most qualified applicants;
  - (C) use and impact of special hiring authorities and flexibilities to recruit diverse candidates, including veteran, minority and disabled candidates;
  - (D) data on the age, educational level, and source of applicants;
  - (E) length of time elapsed between the time a position is advertised and the time a first offer of employment is made;
  - (F) length of time elapsed between the time a first offer of employment is made and the time a new hire starts in that position;
  - (G) number of internal and external applicants for federal positions;
- (2) Hiring Manager Assessment—
  - (A) manager satisfaction with the quality of new hires;
  - (B) manager satisfaction with the match between the skills of newly hired individuals and the needs of the agency;
  - (C) manager satisfaction with the hiring process and hiring outcomes;
- (3) Applicant Assessment “
  - (A) applicant satisfaction with the hiring process (including clarity of job announcement, user-friendliness of the application process, communication regarding status of application and timeliness of hiring decision);
  - (B) mission-critical gaps closed by new hires and the connection between mission-critical gaps and annual agency performance;
  - (C) number of people who withdraw from consideration or accept other positions due mainly to the length or complexity of the federal hiring process;
- (4) Onboarding—
  - (A) new hire satisfaction with the onboarding experience (including welcoming and orientation processes, becoming familiar with new work unit and job responsibilities, being provided with timely and useful new employee information and assistance, and assignment of meaningful work);
  - (B) new hire attrition;
  - (C) investment in training and development for new employees during their first year of employment;
- (5) Other indicators and measures as required by the Office of Personnel Management.
  - (b) The measures of hiring effectiveness established under subsection (a) may be augmented or adjusted over time as the Office of Personnel Management deems necessary for improving the data available on hiring effectiveness.
  - (c) The Office of Personnel Management shall issue regulations within 180 days of the enactment of this Act directing the methodology, timing and reporting of the data described in subsection (a).
  - (d) The Office of Personnel Management shall make the data reported under subsection (a) available to the public online on a quarterly basis and in a consistent format to allow for a comparison of hiring effectiveness and experience across demographic groups and federal agencies.
  - (e) Before publicly releasing data as described in subsection (d), the Office of Personnel Management shall provide the data in a consistent format to OPM-certified non-profit organizations upon request for purposes of research on hiring practices and hiring effectiveness.

#### **Section 4. Annual Federal Human Capital Survey.**

- (a) In General.—The Office of Personnel Management shall conduct the Federal Human Capital Survey of federal employees on an annual basis.<sup>8</sup>
- (b) Each federal agency shall reimburse the Office of Personnel Management for the cost of conducting the Federal Human Capital Survey in that agency.
- (c) The Office of Personnel Management shall make the data reported under subsection (a) available to the public online in a timely manner [by a date certain] and in a consistent format to allow for a comparison of hiring effectiveness across demographic groups and federal agencies.
- (d) Before publicly releasing data as described in subsection (c), the Office of Personnel Management shall provide the data in a consistent format to OPM-certified

<sup>8</sup>OPM conducts the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) on a biennial basis, though OPM is not required to do so by law. This provision would make the FHCS a statutory requirement.

non-profit organizations upon request for purposes of research on hiring practices and hiring effectiveness.

**Section 5. Authorization of Appropriations.**

(a) In General.—There are authorized to be appropriated, in Fiscal Year 2009 and each subsequent fiscal year, such sums as may be necessary for the Office of Personnel Management to meet the requirements of this Act.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Let me ask Mr. Ron Thatcher, President, Forest Service Council, National Federation of Federal Employees. Welcome, sir, and look forward to your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF RON THATCHER, PRESIDENT, FOREST SERVICE COUNCIL, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES, LIBBY, MONTANA**

Mr. THATCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Bishop, other Members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.

I am Ron Thatcher, a 35-year career Forest Service employee. I am currently the president of the National Federation of Federal Employees' Forest Service Council. It is in this capacity that I am honored to represent approximately 20,000 dedicated public servants committed to the professional and ethical management of the 192 million-acre national forest system.

Mr. Chairman, Forest Service employees are among the most dedicated public servants in the Federal workforce. This is why obstacles to getting our work done decreases our morale as well as our effectiveness. One such obstacle is the erosion of the land management workforce as more funds out of a flat budget go to wildfire suppression each and every year. We support the approach taken by the FLAME Act in which funding for catastrophic wildfires does not come at the expense of land management work that is badly needed on our national forests.

Another problem is a seemingly endless stream of ill-planned and harmful reorganizations and new technologies, methods and policies. For example, administrative support personnel were removed from field offices and command to centralized service centers that report directly to Washington; a self-service model in which highly graded employees now perform more critical and administrative tasks that have been put in place; mandated use of phone support for field-going employees; the rush to put new software in place before its tested. Employees simply cannot get to the jobs they were trained to do because they are bogged down with administrative tasks that they were not trained to do.

The centralization of our human capital management has probably been the biggest problem that we have encountered. The list of problems go on and on. For example, we bring 15,000 employees into the rolls each field season. Now some are sent to work before they are actually hired with a promise from management that we will get their pay to them later. When they go off the rolls at the end of the season, their lump-sum payments are often delayed by months and months. Employees at all levels report the occurrence of a shift of power and authority away from the field to this centralized human capital management organization, an unintended

consequence of removing the supervision of these functions from field managers.

One employee noted, "Human capital management is supposed to be a support function, but it has become the tail that wags the dog." Another said, "It is like they created a kingdom that answers to no one."

Finally, I want to mention the reclassification of our fire managers into the GS-401 series. This imposes new academic requirements which in many cases are totally unrelated to the duties of these fire fighting positions. This may force as many as a third of our field generals in the war on fire out of the jobs they have successfully performed for years, plus it imposes a glass ceiling for some of our most capable leaders coming up through the ranks. The knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead a fire crew from harm's way are not obtained in a classroom. They are obtained by specialized agency-developed training and on-the-ground experience.

So how did we get to this point? In every case we hear the same thing: leadership did not ask the field. In many cases the ultimate decision can be traced all the way up to former President Bush. Competitive sourcing quotas were the driving force behind the centralization and downsizing of human capital management. Other decisions, such as timetables that prevented adequate testing of the new software applications, were mandated by the Department or even higher levels of government. In these cases, even our agency leaders were excluded from the decisionmaking process.

However, not all sources of top-down secretive and unaccountable decisionmaking are outside of the agency. It is agency officials who elected to exclude field employees from the decision to reclassify fire managers. Even the agency's top field managers with decades of experience were not consulted.

We believe it is time for a new way, Mr. Chairman, it is self-evident that front-line employees are the ones who know the best and they have the best ways to get the jobs done. We need to tap into this collective wisdom to make the best decisions. The agency needs to engage employees as advisors even as collaborators. This is particularly true of the Forest Service, an institution in which one size does not fit all because of the diversity of lands from Alaska to Alabama for which the agency is responsible.

This new way of doing business require officials to embrace the principles of transparency and accountability articulated so well by President Obama. The payoff will be shared accountability and shared ownership, a decision informed by better information, and a workforce that will be motivated to make that decision work. To encourage this, Mr. Chairman, we recommend passage of a Federal labor/management partnership act, and the Whistle-blower Protection Enhancement Act of 2009. These two bills would help put an accountability infrastructure in place that would allow employees to collaborate with agency officials on the difficult problems our agencies and others face in government.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, that concludes my oral statement. I thank you and the 20,000 plus employees of the Forest Service thank you for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Thatcher follows:]

**Statement of Ron Thatcher, President, National Federation of Federal Employees' Forest Service Council**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit the following testimony.

My name is Ron Thatcher. I serve as the President of the National Federation of Federal Employees' Forest Service Council (NFFE-FSC). In this capacity, I am honored to represent approximately 20,000 dedicated public servants committed to the professional and ethical management of the 192 million acre National Forest System.

Today's topic is broad: issues related to the morale and effectiveness of Forest Service employees. Our treatment of this topic here today will be far from comprehensive. If this is to be the final word on the topic, then we will accomplish little. However, we hope this testimony will begin a dialog on how to restore both the capacity of the agency and the pride and confidence of its employees.

It is widely understood that low morale adversely affects effectiveness. The converse, that an employee's effectiveness affects his/her morale, is also true. Forest Service employees are among the most dedicated in the federal workforce—we care deeply about the agency's land management mission. Historically, the agency has been a wonderful employer and national forests have been a great place to work. Employees didn't get rich on a Forest Service salary, but took great satisfaction in doing a job they loved and that served the needs of the American people. It is in this same dedication that today's morale problems have their roots. Over and over, I hear from front line employees that one of the biggest reasons for their low morale is frustration at the imposition of barrier after barrier to their ability to accomplish their work.

Sadly, too many employees have lost the hope and belief that things can get better. They have lost faith in the distant and unseen leaders of our agency, our department, our government. Such employees can become cynical and disengaged, further eroding productivity. Some even hang it up by retiring earlier than they had planned, ending their careers because they are no longer able to tolerate the frustration of trying to do their jobs with their hands tied behind their backs. But many more believe as I do that the time is right for a renewal of our once-proud agency. It is with this optimism that I come to tell you about the challenges we continue to face and to offer suggestions about how they can be overcome.

**Erosion of the Land Management Workforce by Diversion of Funds to Fire Suppression**

One big issue is the steady erosion of the land management workforce. This affects not only today's capacity, but also bodes ill for the future. Due to the shrinking budgets on the land management side of the agency, many positions vacated as a result of retirements have gone unfilled. Employees are being stretched beyond their limits as they are asked to perform the work of several positions. In addition, succession planning has largely fallen by the wayside. Succession planning is critical in a land management organization because the knowledge needed to manage the land and resources is a site-specific understanding must be gained from on-the-ground experience, but unfortunately mentors with this irreplaceable knowledge are leaving before they can transfer it. We need to reverse this trend immediately.

This workforce erosion is not the result of an intentional policy change, but is rather a failure to adjust policy to deal with on-the-ground realities. Fire suppression costs exceeded one billion dollars in six of the last nine years and are trending steeply upward. Increasing costs of wildfire suppression erodes funding for other land management work in two ways.

First, funds are committed to manage wildfires based on the 10-year average of suppression costs. This leaves an ever smaller piece of the appropriated pie for land management. As a percentage of the agency budget, Forest Service fire management activities have risen from 13 percent in 1991 to a projected 48 percent for 2009. This diversion of resources from land management activities, including fuels reduction projects and others that could help prevent fires in the future, may be unintentional, but it is very real and very substantial.

Second, in six of the last nine years, the actual cost of wildfire suppression exceeded the budgeted amount. When this happens, the agency transfers funds remaining in other accounts to cover the ongoing emergency costs of suppression. These accounts are sometimes, but not always, repaid for this "fire borrowing." Even when they are repaid, time-sensitive work is disrupted and agreements with collaborators broken, which can result in significant cost increases or even in destroyed relationships.

To give a typical example of the cascading effects, “fire borrowing” in one case required that stand examination, in-stream fish habitat improvement, and wildlife meadow habitat improvement projects be put on hold. This delayed the planning and implementation of a large-scale NEPA document, which in turn delayed several timber sales and projects to enhance the habitat of threatened and endangered species. An entire year of work and progress was lost and the agency’s standing with collaborators was adversely impacted.

Last year, this Committee reported out the FLAME Act, under which emergency national responses to catastrophic wildfires would have been funded like other national emergencies, such as hurricanes. This structural change would stabilize the funding for land management and allow this workforce to be rebuilt. This cannot happen soon enough, as our workforce is old and we need to get new employees on board before current employees take their knowledge of the land and resources into retirement. I see that the FLAME Act was recently introduced in this Congress, for which I am very thankful. Our Council will do all we can to support this approach.

#### **Initiative Shock: Cumulative Effects of Unsuccessful Changes**

Employees are frustrated by a seemingly endless stream of reorganizations and new technologies, methods, and policies that seem ill-planned and end up significantly impeding their ability to get their jobs done. Field-going employees and managers find themselves faced with an ever-increasing number of administrative tasks that were previously performed by support personnel. Any single challenge may be trivial in the grand scheme of things, but the cumulative effect can be overwhelming. It is this cumulative effect that has caused many employees to suffer from “initiative shock.”

One source of increased administrative tasks comes from the “burden shift” associated with recent reorganizations of agency support functions. Historically, these support organizations were maintained by field units. Resources were shared using a “zone” concept when local or regional managers decided this was beneficial. Support personnel reported to local line officers. In response to a presidential mandate, supposedly to increase efficiency, the Forest Service Washington Office assumed administrative and budgetary control of most of these administrative functions by standing up new stovepipe organizations. In these organizations, employees now report through a chain of command isolated from the field, directly connected to Washington. In total, nearly 4,000 employees, or roughly 10 percent of the workforce, were directly affected by these reorganizations. Field employees no longer have local staff to consult, but call an 800 number for support. The following reorganizations were implemented between 2005 and 2007:

- Information Technology (IT) support was downsized as a result of competitive sourcing. Personnel were not physically centralized, but were stationed at various field locations. However, they reported through the chain of command of their virtual IT organization.
- Human Capital Management (HCM) was downsized and centralized by Business Process Reengineering (BPR). Although the competitive sourcing process per se was not used, the project was undertaken for the stated purpose of meeting the quota associated with this presidential initiative. HCM employees were directly reassigned to the Albuquerque Service Center (ASC is sometimes called “Washington Office West”).
- Agency Budget and Fiscal (B&F) operations were also downsized and centralized by BPR. It is our understanding that this centralization was mandated by the Department; credit toward the agency’s competitive sourcing quota was also sought. Employees were directly reassigned to ASC.

As these organizations were stood up, employees with managerial, land management, and other duties found themselves saddled with work previously provided by support personnel. When IT support was downsized, some tasks were intentionally assigned to users, while others were inadvertently left out of the new organization’s responsibilities and had to be picked up by other staff. When Human Capital Management (HCM) was downsized and centralized, part of the plan involved a “self service” model in which “line staff will be required to redeem some managerial functions that they are not currently performing in order to...reduce the costs of the [HCM] function.”

In addition, a number of computer-based business applications have been released in rapid succession without adequate testing. In many cases, these systems have been mandated from above, for example by the Department. In other cases, they are agency-sponsored packages designed to provide stop-gap coverage of critical processes that cannot be performed by non-functional Departmental-sponsored software. There are literally dozens of applications, most of which are problematic and some of which are all but dysfunctional. Difficulties with the poor user interfaces and

questionable functionalities of these applications are exacerbated by the lack of field administrative support personnel who have historically handled these processing tasks.

Self-service and phone helpdesk support are particularly frustrating and ineffective for field-going employees. I strongly encourage the reading of the most thoughtful and comprehensive accounts, including a letter to the Forest Service National Leadership Team signed by 37 District Rangers, which are provided in their entirety in exhibits 1-4 attached to this testimony. The following are some additional employee comments, obtained within the last month:

"Burden shift due not only to the HR centralization but other functions such as B&F and the Computer Technologies has greatly reduced my efficiency to do my job... I now spend much more time learning these other functions and performing these tasks before I can do my own tasks. Tasks such as loading computer software and troubleshooting errors, programming funds, managing credit cards, as well as numerous other time consuming tasks eat away from my productivity with the job I was hired to perform. Not to mention that there really isn't any type of training for many of these tasks—some B&F background would help to figure out how to perform B&F type functions but often there isn't anybody left on the forest to ask for help. I just feel that we have been spread too thin and expected to know too many fields to be effective at our own jobs."

"In July 2007, I opened a case with HCM to see how many days of military leave I had. I have to track that manually since Paycheck program does not track it automatically...I was unable to get any answers from HCM. In December of 2007, I opened up a Merit Board Protection case. I gathered from my conversation with the merit board person that I was not the first one to call them up. They (Merit Board) called HCM on January 21, 2008 and one week later, I had my leave audit. It is too bad I had to complain to get such a simple item done."

"I tried to start the hiring process for a dispatcher in February 2008...The job finally came out and closed in early December. I selected my candidate 5 weeks ago; she has been contacted by ASC; however ASC cannot tell me if she will be able to report to work on March 16th...We have seen letters recognizing that centralization of HR did not work, but to give it more time. How about this, IT IS NOT WORKING>>>>>FIX IT. When are they going to call uncle and go back to the way it was, when people were there to assist you, instead of saying call the 1-800 number and see if they can help you. There is no personal contact with the field, they have no clue the time and energy it takes for supervisors the hire their crews now. It is ridiculous how much time it takes to get things done."

"I had 8 STEPs [student temporary education program employees] that I did resignation 52s for at the end of the season. At least 5 of these 52s which were done in August 2008 were not completed till February 2009. Some of these students had lump sum payments due to them...No one seems to be able to correct our leave errors...Needless to say my interaction with ASC has not been very productive. My work load has doubled since the reorganization and my expectations of success have plummeted. This move to consolidation is an illusion of progress producing only confusion, inefficiency and demoralization."

"Prior to ASC each Forest had a Payroll Clerk who had the ability to correct leave errors. That ability was taken away and [now] we constantly have leave errors with no way of correcting them. Each leave error costs our Forest (a fee is charged by the National Finance Center (NFC)) and those fees are adding up because we can't get the errors fixed in a timely manner. We maintain leave audits on our units but by the time an audit is sent to ASC for a correction, another pay period has elapsed and, even if ASC fixes the problem, it is already incorrect because the employee has accrued more leave; this in turn causes another error."

"Employees all over the country are doing Windows XP retrofits [to upgrade computer operating systems]. At my GS-11/Step 10 salary I have spent 6-plus hours on the install, and I just hit an error so I will have to restart it tomorrow."

"(1) I have an employee that for 6 weeks has been trying to get his Lotus Notes [employee email and time and attendance program] fixed. He is a field going employee. He is currently sitting by a phone (instead of out in the field doing his job) waiting for someone from the help desk to finally call him back. He has been playing phone tag for several days with the help

desk...(2) I have an employee that has been trying to get his computer login fixed with a new password for over 6 weeks. Phone calls are not returned and neither are emails. When the mandatory Aglearn training is then not completed [due to a lack of system access], the forest supervisor threatens employees with letters in their files...(3) I had another employee who had some weird error message that resulted in training that was completed showing as incomplete, he also had the same issue with the help desk and was also threatened with a letter...(4) My battalion chief spent a day and half upgrading his computer to Windows XP and then when the migration did not work correctly had to call the help desk. I have better things for him to do than be a computer expert. He could have spent that time working on agreements with the local volunteer fire departments.”

“I spent 16 hours in February on the phone with the PC helpdesk folks—both times because my profile as a FS employee was mysteriously dumped. I would venture a guess that 10 hours a month is about average for me to have to devote to fixing computer problems...Meanwhile, out on the logging job, I’m not there. My position requires that I be readily available in the area of current operations. If a contractor were forced to stay away from the field, he has to have an alternate representative on the site or be in breach of contract. The same is required of us. I have no alternate. Therefore, when I am absent from my duties in the field, I am placing the government in position for breach [of contract].”

“I used GovTrip for the first time yesterday, submitting a [travel] voucher. My experience took over 2 hours and not only took up my time (as a GS-7), but also intermittently the time of a GS-9 and a GS-11. The program was very user unfriendly. What is really irritating is that we get charged extra for using their helpdesk. The contractor is essentially double-dipping. They are paid once to design and manage a travel system, and then paid again when we need help because it was so poorly designed.”

“GovTrip is crazy. We have a bunch of highly-paid scientists wasting time struggling with this ridiculous software. Talk about a waste of time. I’ve done some application development, and this may very well be the WORST-written application I’ve ever experienced. Confusing, cumbersome, doesn’t use typical Windows conventions (i.e., use of the return key to accept entries in dialog boxes, etc.). Easy to make a mistake that requires re-filling in entire screens. Hard to get pricing on airlines, you can try selecting the same exact flight 5 times and get 4 or 5 different fares.”

“After 3 hours creating the initial authorization thru GovTrip, I spent over 4 hours of my time attempting to finalize a travel voucher today. I am a field going employee, but not today. My pay level is GS-9 plus steps. I am not technologically challenged, the travel system just is not working well—it kicks you out before your voucher is completed.”

I want to emphasize that these comments should not be taken to reflect poorly on employees laboring in the stovepipe administrative support organizations, who are doing the best they can in untenable and extremely stressful situations. The problem lies elsewhere—in the organization, tools, training, etc. available to them. For example, the vast majority of the agency’s human resource employees retired, resigned, or transferred to other jobs when faced with directed reassignment to the ASC—taking their years of training and experience with them. This dramatic loss of human capital meant that crucial mentoring could not take place. It takes people to transmit a corporate culture—and the needed people did not come along for the ride.

I have another perspective to share on this point. It involves an IT employee. IT employees are required to focus on meeting Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and are ordered to turn away projects that may be important to the local units where they are stationed, work they previously would have routinely performed, if it is outside the scope of work of the IT organization. This fragmentation adversely affects the morale of both non-IT employees whose needs are not met and IT employees prevented by the organization from meeting those needs. One IT employee reports an old friend he ran into was surprised he was still working at the local unit because local management had said that he “no longer works for us.” This employee, like too many others, has been reorganized from a “can-do” member of the Forest Service team to an isolated, alienated employee who “can’t.” He told me he had been devastated by his new situation and planned to retire as soon as he could.

As troubling as these inefficiencies are, the centralization and stovepiping, particularly of HCM, have raised more profound issues. Employees at all levels report

the occurrence of a shift of power and authority, perhaps unintended but nevertheless real, away from the field to HCM. Field supervisors retain responsibility for program delivery, but the authority they need has been taken from them. As one employee noted, HCM is supposed to be a support function, but has become “the tail that wags the dog.” The following quotes address this issue:

Employee and union official, “ASC is making their own policy—Our Forest Supervisor was just as unsuccessful as the rest of us when she tries to solve problems. It’s like they created a kingdom that answers to nobody.”

Employee and union official, “Nowadays I get called into the Forest Supervisor’s office more to help him try to figure out angles to get around ASC-HCM than I do for any sort of disciplinary action or anything else.”

Employee and union official, “There is no experience in those centers. All the experience was left in the field doing other jobs or gone when employees retired or resigned. We lost a lot of good and experienced employees from this. The service centers are hiring people right off the streets in Albuquerque to replace long-time experienced employees. They are hiring people who have never worked for the Government or been on a Forest, but who are making decisions that affect us at the Forest and District level not understanding how it will affect us.”

37 District Rangers, “While we have retained the responsibility for land management and public service, we have lost significant authority to meet these responsibilities. We are concerned that recent changes have resulted in line officers at all levels ceding power to those in support functions.” (See Exhibit 1 for entire letter.)

17 Forest Supervisors, “Line officers from multiple regions relate incidences time after time where HCM employees appear to be stepping into what traditionally was a line officer’s role and going beyond their technical delegation—As our organization centralizes various functions at the national, regional, and sub-regional level, it is becoming increasingly difficult for line officers to redeem their many various responsibilities. The agency is increasingly separating accountability to accomplish the mission of the National Forest System from the authority to accomplish that mission. This trend is having a significant impact on line officers’ ability to achieve mission-critical outcomes.”

#### **Reclassification of Fire Managers**

Finally, I need to mention some of the unique issues faced by our firefighters. This portion of our workforce is substantial and plays a key role: the Forest Service is the lead agency in wildfire suppression. Firefighter issues are many and complex, as is the workforce that fights wildfire. This workforce encompasses employees largely or solely dedicated to fire duties, such as the many firefighters in Region 5, and militia members who normally perform non-fire work and fulfill various firefighting and support functions on incidents as collateral duties. One-size-fits-all solutions are unlikely to be effective for this range of situations.

There are a number of issues affecting the effectiveness and morale of our firefighters—many more than I can begin to summarize here. Just to name a few, there’s issues of proper classification, roles and responsibilities of fire managers and non-fire agency administrators, pay and personnel policy reforms to improve retention in Region 5, temporary hiring practices, succession planning, waning cultural support and incentives for participation in the militia, and over-reliance on contract resources. However, I do need to mention one issue that represents a clear and present danger to the safety and effectiveness of our firefighting workforce, and that is the reclassification of fire managers into the GS-0401 series. The knowledge, skills, and abilities to lead a fire crew into harm’s way are not obtained in a classroom—they are obtained by specialized agency-developed training and on-the-ground experience. The reclassification imposes new academic requirements which in many cases are unrelated to the duties of these positions. Based on the most recent numbers we have seen, this may remove as many as 31 percent of the agency’s 473 field generals in our war against wildfire from their jobs next year. Further, the reclassification imposes a glass ceiling for some of our most capable leaders coming up through the ranks (see Exhibit 5), but effects on succession planning have been ignored.

The situation is essentially unchanged since I testified about this issue before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources on June 18, 2008 (the testimony is available at <http://energy.senate.gov/public/—files/ThatcherTestimony.doc>). Last year, as a result of Congressional inquiries, the agency made a number of commitments to mitigate the adverse impacts of this reclassification. Most, if not all, of these commitments have been broken. An Office of Inspector General (OIG) management alert has been issued on this and the agency claims to have “stood down” its transition to the GS-0401 series. However, in reality the transition is proceeding unabated. Critical fire management positions continue to be filled from applicant pools skewed

away from vital field experience toward largely irrelevant academic degrees. Limited funds continue to be diverted from needed training to pay for coursework that is unrelated to fire management. Fire management capacity continues to erode every day the agency continues this misguided policy.

#### **How We Got Here: Top-Down Management without Field Input**

So, how did we get to this point? In each and every failed initiative, we hear the same complaint: leadership didn't ask the field. The initiatives were developed and imposed on employees from on high without field employee input.

The decision to stovepipe and downsize IT support came from the President of the United States. The Bush administration's competitive sourcing initiative was the ultimate top-down, non-collaborative management style. It sought to put all commercial work performed by Federal agencies up for bid. The theory was that agencies would either downsize staff to avoid outsourcing this work or all of it would go to the lowest private sector bidder. The process was regulated by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular No. A-76. OMB assigned agencies quotas of full-time equivalents (FTEs, or jobs) to submit to the A-76 process. The competitive sourcing initiative, especially as implemented by the Forest Service (see <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08195.pdf>) has since been largely discredited; however, it left behind a legacy of eroded infrastructure and low employee morale.

There are many flaws to the competitive sourcing initiative, but perhaps the most important was its fragmented approach. By design, it failed to look at the entire agency holistically. Instead, staffing and outsourcing decisions were made based solely on cost comparisons of work functions considered in isolation. Strategic considerations are beyond the scope of the A-76 Circular—and the fatal flaw of competitive sourcing was that its quotas took this discretion away from agency leaders as well. In addition, because of the secrecy required by this procurement-sensitive process, employees could not be meaningfully and productively engaged but by design were excluded and kept in the dark. The outcomes caused by this initiative—as well as employees' sense of powerlessness and betrayal—have had lasting impacts.

Although not a result of competitive sourcing per se, the BPR of HCM was undertaken as an alternative in lieu of an A-76 public-private competition. The responsibility for top-down decision-making that excluded employees in this case also rests with the previous administration. As in competitive sourcing, the efficiency and cost effectiveness of Forest Service operations as a whole were not considered. Centralization and downsizing were preordained outcomes.

The most troubling deployments of business application software have been mandated by the Department or by even higher levels of the government. Examples include GovTrip and EmpowHR, the backbone application for HCM self-service. The implementation timetables mandated from on high for these and other applications prevented adequate testing. Testing and feedback on the functionality of new systems by pilot groups is among the most basic of ways to engage employees—and there can be no doubt it results in better data and better decisions. In this case, as in those mandated by competitive sourcing, we include our agency leadership among the employees excluded from the decision-making process—Department mandates and timetables apparently left them no authority to perform the testing that would have been prudent.

The decision to reclassify fire managers is the only issue I've discussed that is an agency decision. However, decision-makers have elected to exclude employees, even the agency's top field managers with decades of experience, from the decision-making process. There are many bright, dedicated, and concerned individuals in the Fire and Aviation Management organization; however, an unfortunate culture of secrecy and top-down decision-making seems to have developed in the organization, at least as displayed in this instance.

#### **A Better Approach: Engage the Workforce**

I have no magic bullet, no simple solution to fix these problems. A few union leaders are no more infallible than are a few agency leaders. But I would like to suggest a strategy that would immediately begin to improve morale and put us on a pathway to increase our effectiveness.

We submit that front-line employees are the ones who know the best way to get their jobs done. It is they who have the best understanding of the barriers that block their way on a daily basis. It is they who have the best understanding of how to improve the processes with which they work every day. It is they who know what needs to be done to increase their effectiveness. We believe it is crucial to tap into the collective wisdom of the workforce. This is particularly true of the Forest Service, an institution in which one size cannot be assumed to fit all because of the diversity of lands, from Alaska to Alabama, for which the agency is responsible.

We need a process to meaningfully engage employees so their collective knowledge and wisdom may be brought to bear on agency challenges. Such a process is available. Content analysis was developed by Forest Service employees to compile, organize, and analyze public comments pursuant to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. Chairman Rahall's new agenda for the Natural Resources Committee includes a renewed commitment to require the federal government to "think before it acts...by requiring solicitation of public opinion and consideration of alternatives," using methods such as content analysis. We propose that the Forest Service engage its workforce regarding internal reorganizations, implementation of new technologies, etc. in a similar fashion and for the same reasons: to ensure the agency thinks before it acts. We believe the process can be streamlined and used to great advantage to compile the collective knowledge of employees and managers in the field.

A top priority must be taking action to win back the trust and respect of the workforce. For far too long, employees have been kept in the dark and misled by their leaders. This has had an effect on morale that is even more devastating than the challenges themselves—the thought that our leaders would substitute propaganda for truth is really devastating to a dedicated employee committed to the work of the agency. Even though the ultimate responsibility for this has often been at levels of the government above the agency and therefore beyond the control of agency leadership, it still falls to that leadership to address the effects on morale this unfortunate era has left in its wake. Recently, President Obama said on national television, "I screwed up." Our agency leadership needs to follow his example and bring the same level of accountability back to that part of the American government for which they are responsible, the Forest Service. Straight talk about what has not worked—about our failures—is needed to restore the trust and credibility that are so important to effective leadership. We agree wholeheartedly with the Dialogos report recommendation that "top leaders must then honestly communicate the realities—to all relevant audiences in the organization, and engage in an open strategic conversation with the organization's distributed leadership and employees." For example, leadership needs to start talking straight to our employees by telling them:

- The savings of the IT reorganization were overstated for political reasons, because accounting guidance mandated by the White House Office of Management and Budget was misleading (see <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08195.pdf>). IT employees have shouldered a heavy load and performed admirably, but the business models and standards developed by the secretive and fragmented competitive sourcing process have ill-served the needs of many field-going employees.
- The Forest Service has had to experience the unintended operational impacts and the cultural/emotional pain of a failing implementation of centralized HCM services for over 2 years. We need to revisit the fundamental assumptions associated with self-service. We need to determine what level of HCM resources in the field best serves the agency's needs.

I'm happy to report some recent developments that are quite encouraging. A reorganization team is looking at the IT organization. This team got off to a shaky start. For example, management insisted on secrecy during the development of the initial plan, even requiring our union representative to sign a nondisclosure agreement. This was not the best way to begin with employees who already have "reorganization fatigue" and a lack of trust because of their painful experience with competitive sourcing. Further, employees had serious concerns about the draft plan that was released for employee review and comments. There was great concern that the draft plan did away with virtual positions in favor of a centralized service center. In addition, this plan did not appear responsive to recommendations of the CIO Technology Program Review, which assessed the IT support organization model and called for more "boots on the ground."

However, the reorganization team solicited employee comments on the draft plan and, more significantly, compiled them using a content analysis process. More significantly still, they appear to be seriously considering the comments and are reporting back to employees in a timely fashion with the results of their analysis and some preliminary decisions. This is significant because there is a history of comments being solicited and then disappearing, never to be seen again. The team deserves a lot of credit for taking this step. It is our hope it is one small step on the path to a new way of doing business. I need to mention as well that in spite of this being a particularly battered and bruised staff, as they have only recently emerged from competitive sourcing, roughly 35-40% of them took the time to comment. Under the circumstances, this is an excellent response rate, and it indicates that employees, for their part, are ready to engage in a productive way, if only leadership will open the door and honestly consider their input.

The situation with HCM is less promising. In spite of dire internal assessments, leadership has yet to be completely straight with the workforce. Two teams were recently chartered to work on HCM problems, one to deal with urgent operational priorities (crisis management) and the other to deal with strategic issues, such as the business model itself. These are positive steps in the right direction; however, these are not the first teams to be chartered and dispatched since we transitioned to the new HCM organization. We need a bigger effort. We need a transparent process to engage the workforce. This would not only to put more heads together to work on the problem, it would also go a long way toward restoring trust and morale by sending a message that leadership understands the magnitude of the problem—and that they understand our workforce is a valuable resource to help solve it. It would be just as important for leadership as for rank and file employees, for they, too, are battered by “initiative shock” and need the help.

The situation with the reclassification of fire managers is as bad as can be. Officials responsible for the policy are not communicating with the field, not even to provide adequate guidance for implementing the decisions they have made behind closed doors, and have refused to discuss the matter with the union. Although this story is complex and fraught with twists and turns, the bottom line is the decision to transition these positions to the GS-0401 series was announced on June 15, 2004, yet many employees have still not been informed of how to meet the new standard in order to keep the jobs they have successfully performed for years (see Exhibit 5). The disregard for employees in these positions, not to mention the safety and effectiveness of the wildfire operations they lead, has had large negative effect on morale. Field employees, including managers, feel disconnected and ignored by national leadership.

### **Conclusion**

I have shown here today how sweeping agency changes based on decisions made in secret without employee input by isolated officials who are not held accountable for their decisions have been disastrous. This way of doing business has not served the needs of the agency at all well. A new way is needed. The knowledge employees have about their jobs is knowledge that agency officials need in order to make the best decisions about the organizations, means, and methods of getting those jobs done. Employees need to be engaged, as advisors, even as collaborators, if the best decisions are to be made.

This new way of doing business will require officials who have grown accustomed to the top-down, secretive mode of operations of the old administration to abandon these habits. It will require them to embrace the principles of transparency and accountability articulated by President Obama. The payoff is in shared accountability and shared ownership—a decision informed by better information and a workforce motivated to make the decision work.

We recommend the following legislation to encourage this way of doing business:

- Reintroduce and pass the Federal Labor-Management Partnership Act as introduced in the 110th Congress (HR 3892). As found by Congress, the right of employees to participate in the agency decision-making process through unions “contributes to the effective conduct of public business.” This legislation would establish labor-management partnership committees whose express purpose would be “to better serve the public and carry out the mission of the agency.” The Forest Service has such a committee, and while its influence is limited it is still an institution that provides an important avenue for employee participation. In addition, this legislation would also enable unions to negotiate on organizational matters and on methods and means of performing work—the very matters in which, as I hope I have shown here today, employee participation is critical.
- Pass the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2009 (HR 1507). This legislation would strengthen protections against acts of reprisal which employees all too often face as a result of their disclosures of problems that their superiors would prefer remain hidden from Congress and the American people. This legislation would encourage the kind of transparency and accountability that is required for meaningful employee participation in agency decision-making.

These bills would put an “accountability infrastructure” in place that would allow us to collaborate with agency officials to develop and use methods that are appropriate for the diverse specific problems we will face. For example, though we have spoken highly of content analysis, we have not asked for legislation to mandate the use of this method for all reorganizations. This tool, while powerful, may not be appropriate in all cases. Instead, we seek a statutory framework within which we may, in collaboration with agency officials, develop our own best practices.

In addition to these legislative items, your continued engagement and oversight on these issues is important. As I've discussed, they are of critical importance and are currently at high risk for catastrophic failure. Even with perfect legislation in place, I'm sure we'll need to continue to bring specific concerns to your attention on a case-by-case basis. In any organization as large and complex as a federal agency, there will always be pockets of resistance to change. Old habits die hard. For now, we urge you to remain engaged on the issues we have discussed here today and to pressure the agency to take meaningful action to address them. We would be happy and honored to help you in any way that we can.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, this concludes my prepared statement. Thank you for the opportunity. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time. In addition, please contact us at any time with any additional questions or requests for information. I may be reached at [rthatcher@fs.fed.us](mailto:rthatcher@fs.fed.us) and our Legislative Director, Mark Davis, may be reached at [mwdavis01@fs.fed.us](mailto:mwdavis01@fs.fed.us).

**Exhibit 1, Accompanying Testimony of Ron Thatcher, NFFE-FSC  
Restoring the Federal Public Lands Workforce—March 19, 2009**

*The following is a letter from 37 District Rangers, the agency's front-line supervisors, to the National Leadership Team. We are aware of no response from the Leadership Team.*

May 29, 2008

TO: Members of the Forest Service National Leadership Team

**A FIELD PERSPECTIVE**

We recently completed a Rocky Mountain regional district ranger meeting to discuss common issues facing us at the field level. This letter summarizes some of the concerns we discussed. It is intended to be constructive, and aims to provide solutions to these concerns. We respectfully ask for your consideration and offer our support in solving these issues.

The district rangers overwhelmingly support some recent changes made at the national level. This includes the decision to have the Human Resource Liaisons assigned to local line officers and the decision to not "stovepipe" the AQM organization. We appreciate your efforts and your support of the Dialogos report's recognition of the benefit of "straight talk". We also understand that the National Leadership team (NLT) has been reconfigured. The NLT is now smaller and focused on strategic decisions. Given this recent change, and the NLT's enhanced role in decision making, we decided to send this letter to the entire NLT.

As district rangers we feel that, while we have retained the responsibility for land management and public service, we have lost significant authority to meet these responsibilities. We are concerned that recent changes have resulted in line officers at all levels ceding power to those in support functions. The Dialogos report identified this phenomenon. An aspect of this issue was highlighted in the March 27, 2008, letter from the R6 Forest Supervisors to the Acting Regional Forester, regarding the current role of line officers in employment authority.

As an agency, we have become more process oriented and less mission oriented. Business functions currently hinder operations, with people becoming distracted by the additional workload and the frustration of being unable to make progress. Individually these additional tasks and new processes are manageable; cumulatively they have become a huge burden on an already stressed workforce. Our workforce feels overloaded with new processes and frustrated by a burden shift of administrative duties with less time to focus their efforts on mission-critical work. The connection between land managers and administrative support used to be clear and immediate with success measured by the ability to provide service to mission-critical work. The connection between the two groups has become strained and in some cases is completely severed.

The district ranger job has always involved "kicking rocks out of the way" so that our staff could get work done. Lately, it has been difficult to acquire and to share current and useful information with our employees, let alone help them when they hit a roadblock. Often we do not even know who to talk to in order to resolve issues, nor does it seem we have the authority needed to set priorities or resolve issues. The past year has been especially difficult for districts as it regards human resource support. We have not been able to hire the people we need, sometimes have not gotten employees paid on time, and the summer seasonal hiring process has been stressful at best. This is not intended as criticism for the hard working employees

at HCM trying to make the system work. And we do recognize that new efforts are being made to correct the situation.

We suggest that administrative services and processes be better focused on the needs of the field. Sometimes our expressed concerns regarding process/organization changes either have been ignored or treated as if we were simply resisting change. We want to be clear here. We embrace change as necessary to keep the Forest Service relevant, efficient and effective. We do not ask for a return to historic processes, but instead ask that we better focus, plan, and execute needed changes.

We have observed a trend toward a more “top-down” agency with less involvement from the field, and lacking adequate feedback mechanisms. The effect is that ranger districts sometimes feel alienated, creating a “we/they” dynamic. We recognize the importance of strong central leadership and direction, but we cannot have mission alignment without field involvement. Lack of field representation during the formulation and development of programs that have so profoundly restructured key branches of the agency has resulted in design and execution problems that have negatively impacted mission delivery.

Initiatives are important to an organization in setting priorities and making needed changes. Having too many initiatives, however, can divert attention away from mission-critical work and dilute the agency’s focus. The Dialogos report also highlights this issue as “initiative fatigue”. We suggest that our most important initiative is fixing a broken service delivery system as it hinders our ability to address emphasis items and assigned targets.

We have reviewed summaries of the Dialogos report and believe that our concerns are echoed to some degree in that report. We will continue to have difficulty maintaining mission focus and attention to safety if we can’t resolve issues in those processes that were traditionally taken for granted. The sooner we can stabilize these issues the sooner we may focus on our primary mission and the safety of our workforce.

### **Recommendations**

To quote Colin Powell on leadership, *“The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership”*. We believe that you can solve these problems and that you care.

As you address the many issues facing the agency, we respectfully request consideration of the following:

- Clarify the roles, responsibilities and authorities throughout the agency in light of changes and centralization of various functions.
- Re-establish line authority over support functions. Recognize that you cannot hold line accountable if they do not have the authority.
- Focus your efforts (be visible) on improving administrative service support throughout the agency. We believe this is the most important thing you can do to support the ranger districts.
- Adequately test new software and systems and ensure they are working properly before being extended on an agency-wide basis.
- Ensure ranger districts are well represented in the development of processes, organizations and services essential to meeting the mission. Include significant ranger district involvement (SSS’s, Staff, District Rangers) in addressing the current problems in Human Resources.
- Be careful in starting new initiatives prior to ensuring that the old ones are working as intended. Focus on making our systems work to support the organization.

We stand ready to assist you in addressing these challenges and issues!

Sincerely,

*/s/ Robert Thompson*  
Robert Thompson  
Black Hills NF

*/s/ Oscar Martinez*  
Oscar Martinez  
Medicine Bow-Routt NF  
& Thunder Basin NG

*/s/ Randy Hickenbottom*  
Randy Hickenbottom  
Pike-San Isabel NF  
& Cimarron-Comanche NG

*/s/ Daniel Lovato*  
Daniel Lovato  
Arapaho-Roosevelt NF  
& Pawnee NG

*/s/ Tony DeJoy*  
Tony DeJoy  
Nebraska-Samuel R.  
McKelvie NF, Buffalo  
Gap-Fort Pierre-Oglala NG

*/s/ Steve Kozel*  
Steve Kozel  
Black Hills NF

*/s/ Misty Hayes*  
Misty Hayes  
Medicine Bow-Routt NF  
& Thunder Basin NG

*/s/ Mike McNeill*  
Mike McNeill  
Nebraska-Samuel R.  
McKelvie NF, Buffalo  
Gap-Fort Pierre-Oglala NG

*/s/ Joe Hartman*  
Joe Hartman  
Pike-San Isabel NF  
Cimarron & Comanche NG

*/s/ Richard Gilbert*  
Richard Gilbert  
Nebraska-Samuel R.  
McKelvie NF, Buffalo  
Gap-Fort Pierre-Oglala NG

*/s/ Connie Clementson*  
Connie Clementson  
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre  
& Gunnison NF

*/s/ Jon Morrissey*  
Jon Morrissey  
Pike-San Isabel NF  
Cimarron & Comanche NG

*/s/ Robert Sprentall*  
Robert Sprentall  
Medicine Bow-Routt NF  
& Thunder Basin NG

*/s/ Michael Lloyd*  
Michael Lloyd  
Black Hills NF

*/s/ Terry Root*  
Terry Root  
Shoshone NF

*/s/ Charles Marsh*  
Charlie Marsh  
Nebraska-Samuel R.  
McKelvie NF, Buffalo  
Gap-Fort Pierre-Oglala NG

*/s/ Mark Booth*  
Mark Booth  
Bighorn NF

*/s/ Rhonda O'Byrne*  
Rhonda O'Byrne  
Black Hills NF

*/s/ Kevin Atchley*  
Kevin Atchley  
Nebraska-Samuel R.  
McKelvie NF, Buffalo  
Gap-Fort Pierre-Oglala NG

*/s/ Patricia Barney*  
Patricia Barney  
Nebraska-Samuel R.  
McKelvie NF, Buffalo  
Gap-Fort Pierre-Oglala NG

*/s/ Brent Botts*  
Brent Botts  
Pike-San Isabel NF  
Cimarron & Comanche NG

*/s/ Bill Schuckert*  
Bill Schuckert  
Pike-San Isabel NF  
Cimarron & Comanche NG

*/s/ Sara Mayben*  
Sara Mayben  
Pike-San Isabel NF  
Cimarron & Comanche NG

*/s/ Christine Walsh*  
Christine Walsh  
Arapaho-Roosevelt NF  
& Pawnee NG

<i>/s/ Glenn Adams</i> Glenn Adams White River NF	<i>/s/ Jeff Stoney</i> Jeff Stoney Pike-San Isabel NF Cimarron & Comanche NG	<i>/s/ Levi Broyles</i> Levi Broyles Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre & Gunnison NF
<i>/s/ Rick Metzger</i> Rick Metzger Shoshone NF	<i>/s/ Ruth Esperance</i> Ruth Esperance Shoshone NF	<i>/s/ Andrew Archuleta</i> Andrew Archuleta Rio Grande NF
<i>/s/ Stephen Best</i> Stephen Best Medicine Bow-Routt NF & Thunder Basin NG	<i>/s/ James Dawson</i> James Dawson Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre & Gunnison NF	<i>/s/ Jamie Kingsbury</i> Jamie Kingsbury Medicine Bow-Routt NF & Thunder Basin NG
<i>/s/ Clarke McClung</i> Clarke McClung Bighorn NF	<i>/s/ Judy Schutza</i> Judy Schutza Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre & Gunnison NF	<i>/s/ Paul Crespin</i> Paul Crespin Pike-San Isabel NF Cimarron & Comanche NG
<i>/s/ Scott Ludwig</i> Scott Ludwig White River NF		

**Exhibit 2, Accompanying Testimony of Ron Thatcher, NFFE-FSC  
Restoring the Federal Public Lands Workforce—March 19, 2009**

*The following is an email from a Fire Crew Supervisor, received on Feb. 27, 2009 in response to the Council's solicitation of employee comments on workforce morale and effectiveness.*

I am no longer a member of the union, but I supervise 18 union employees. The centralization of HR functions has greatly impacted the morale of the Forest Service employees by degrading the quality of HR service provided to employees, and by taking valuable time and energy away from supervisors as the functions have been transferred down to inexperienced supervisors.

I routinely have issues in every facet of HR process. The hiring process (AVUE) is confusing for applicants and was shut down during a critical hiring period this year. Once applicants navigate the AVUE process, then they get a confusing form letter from ASC with very little direction for the Eforms they must complete online. Then they arrive on the unit and face problems with access to Agency computers because their earning statements are available only after they can Eauthenticate which takes several weeks after they have been in pay status. Many employees have issues with delayed initial pay, incorrect transfer of sick leave, and a host of other issues. As a supervisor, the worst aspect of centralization is that as bad as any individual process may be, the processes are changed so often that there is no chance to learn and work the bugs out. I spend an average of several hours each day dealing with HR services that previously were handled by dedicated HR experts on the unit that felt a stake in the success of my program. The HR folks knew the employees and took pride in taking care of them. To ASC, I am just a problem. ASC has no stake in the success of the program, and no understanding of the challenges I face. Since I am not an HR expert, I require assistance in many of the HR functions, but obtaining help is not a simple phone call away. I am still waiting on a request from last year on a hiring process question. Processes are implemented before being tested, and with limited training for supervisors. The corresponding waste of time and money is staggering.

The problems are not limited to hiring. After the seasonal were terminated for the year, they had to wait four months this year (October to February) to receive lump sum payments for their unused annual leave. That is terrible service. Other examples abound, but universally, the complexity and number of HR processes and the constant change of policies make it nearly impossible to provide employees qual-

ity service. How can we expect high employee morale when basic functions like hiring and pay cannot be effectively handled on a regular basis? The quality of service to employees is an embarrassment.

**Exhibit 3, Accompanying Testimony of Ron Thatcher, NFFE-FSC  
Restoring the Federal Public Lands Workforce—March 19, 2009**

*The following is an email from a Fire Crew Supervisor, received on Mar. 6, 2009 in response to the Council's solicitation of employee comments on workforce morale and effectiveness.*

I think employee morale at the field level is at the lowest I've ever seen it in my 29 years with the Forest Service. We've made it through many tight budget years, low staffing years, and constantly changing processes, but never has it taken the emotional toll it's taking now. We are too inundated with new processes/help desks/acronyms/systems. I see managers who would normally come to work, deal with office issues in the first half hour, and then take off to the woods where their real job is. They'd come back late at the end of the day tired but satisfied that they'd done what they were here to do. Now, they have a completely overloaded computer inbox to deal with, full of multiple messages from the CIO, the HRM, the HRM liaison, the Govtrip, the Aglearn.....many of them have to schedule whole days in the office to deal with all this. If the new systems and processes would happen one at a time, and work correctly and smoothly and actually be an improvement on how things were done previously, and people were allowed to absorb the new processes before moving on to the next one, things might be easier to deal with. But we have been bombarded with new processes in every area we deal with, and 99% of them have so many bugs when they're given to us to use, it's become severe process overload. People feel like there's a huge weight on their shoulders and they feel hopeless to do anything about it because it just keeps coming.

The new purchase card system is a prime example of one of these problems. We were told to start using the cards November 29, 2008. It's now March 2009 and we still haven't been able to "reconcile" or "reallocate" because they don't have the job codes and the supervisors in the system. Why weren't they in the system before we were even allowed to start using it? We had to take the training immediately, and when we finally can use the system, we won't remember it. I went in and tried to look around and had a really hard time, so I downloaded the user guide, and the user guide is full of statements like "if your organization uses such and such" or "such and such depends on your user setups and access rights", so it's not even written for the Forest Service—it's written for the world in general that uses this system. It was no help at all. So meanwhile, we can't reconcile, and all our charges are going to a default job code, which is skewing the financial statements because those charges need to be moved to where they actually belong. Another problem is the idea that the supervisor has to approve each purchase (before, they had to review a list of purchases every quarter). I'm the main office purchaser, and my supervisor is the Ranger, who is about 700 messages behind on her emails. The last thing she needs is to go in and approve each one of my purchases. I know she's not the only one with this problem. The people at the upper levels will say we just need to do a better job at managing our emails, but that's not going to change the way it is.

Govtrip is another fine example. An employee who sits next to me spent a whole day on the phone with Govtrip trying to schedule flights for a certain date from here to where his training was. The response was "there are no flights from here to there on that day". That is incomprehensible because both areas have busy airports with outgoing & incoming flights constantly. Finally they got to the point of saying there was a flight out, but not back. And then finally they were able to find one coming back. AND, all of this was going to cost an OUTRAGEOUS amount compared to what he could get going through Expedia or Travelocity. The person on the other end of the line obviously didn't care about saving the government money. This employee talked to someone in another office who was going to the same training, and found out he got a flight in and out for \$300 less, from the same airports. So our employee called Govtrip back and told them this, and then they were able to find him one for \$200 less. In summary, not only did the employee waste a WHOLE DAY trying to get this done, when he could have spent maybe 15 minutes with Expedia or Travelocity, but he also is going to pay hundreds more for the ticket. What is the logic here???? I suppose the government wants to somehow track the travel and maybe they think Govtrip is the way to do it, but wouldn't the simple old travel voucher system do that? And the old travel voucher system was just that—a computer program that was easy to use and free. The new Govtrip charges each em-

ployee \$13.50 every time they file a travel voucher. Summer field crews will have to file a voucher every 2 weeks according to the Govtrip rules, and they'll get charged \$13.50 each time. \$13.50 is not a lot of money by itself, but it will really affect the budget of a trail crew in the summer, at a time where there is no extra money.

This all has the appearance of someone at the top scrambling to meet some target about e-government that was put out there by people who have no clue what goes on at this level. They obviously didn't check to see what the effects would be—it appears all they were concerned about was getting the new programs “out there”. It has resulted in a very decreased level of accomplishment, and a very decreased level of job satisfaction and employee morale.

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**Exhibit 4, Accompanying Testimony of Ron Thatcher, NFFE-FSC  
Restoring the Federal Public Lands Workforce—March 19, 2009**

*The following is an email from a Fire Administrative Office Assistant at a Smokejumper Base, received on March 6, 2009 in response to the Council's solicitation of employee comments on workforce morale and effectiveness.*

- We cannot get leave corrected. ASC does not send out Leave Error Reports so in order to get them, someone in the field has had to pull them (behind ASC's back). Once we get them and try to get them corrected, ASC does not respond. They told us last summer not to expect any leave corrected and that it was not their priority. Leave is critical to correct. The process to get it corrected is terribly time-consuming, and then they won't deal with it.
- eAuthentication does not work for everyone. Now in order for employees to get their pay trailers, they have to go through eAuth. All computer programs have to go through eAuth so the employees that do not have it, are sunk. Our seasonal employees come on in the spring, but within a couple weeks are out on fires. They apply for an eAuthentication password, but by the time it gets here, they're gone. When they come back from the fire, the password has expired. This goes on all summer and never gets resolved.
- Terminated employees and those put into Non-Pay Status at the end of the season still show up on the rolls months after they're gone. ASC has standards to follow just like us, but they're not meeting the required deadlines.
- We are not allowed to process retroactive SF-52's. What ASC does not understand is “stuff happens”. During the wintertime, we are constantly sending employees to training and last-minute burn details. The Burn details are coordinated between 2 forests which is difficult in itself, but last-minute calls are the norm, not the exception. In order to keep the burn program going, we have to work on a tight schedule.
- The LincPass does not work for remote locations. To require our employees to travel 240 miles round-trip is ridiculous. Then we have to go back again to pick up the pass. If our security is that bad, someone's doing something wrong.
- When ASC emails things to employees, they usually use their Lotus Notes email address. A lot of our employees can't get onto Lotus Notes because of our lack of IT help. And just like eAuth, when they finally get a password for Lotus Notes, they're gone on a fire.
- Last summer we had several employees not get paid. We called ASC to help us. They will not talk to Admin folks, only to Supervisors or the employee. Problem is, they're all in the field working. When we finally got someone to help, they asked U.S. for the correct banking information. According to them, they were not supposed to have that due to security issues. It took us pestering them to the point of insanity before they would help.

There are hundreds of examples of how ASC does not work. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

Finally, computer programs are great for the 8-5 crowd who sit in front of a computer most of the day. But for the seasonal employees who are field-going, it does not work. They certainly did not bother to ask the field how things should work.

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**Exhibit 5, Accompanying Testimony of Ron Thatcher, NFFE-FSC  
Restoring the Federal Public Lands Workforce—March 19, 2009**

*The following email was received from a Deputy Forest Fire Management Officer on March 3, 2009. This individual had contacted me for information about how to meet the education requirements for GS-0401 Fire Management Specialist positions,*

*because he was receiving none from agency sources. I asked him to describe his situation for me, which he kindly did.*

Information regarding the GS-401 series has been very slow in coming to the field to say the best. The last information the field has received was a letter from Deputy Chief Kashdan dated November 5, 2008. This letter has continued to create confusion and has not helped provide the field with information as to what courses/classes will or will not count toward the 401 series and how employees may move toward meeting the requirements of the series. Currently I have not been able to provide adequate council to our younger firefighters that will be our future leaders. Without clear direction the training and educating of our future leaders has been basically put on hold. All I can tell them at this time is go to college and then I cannot tell them with certainty what courses will count and what courses help them in the careers in fire management. The November 5, 2008 letter states the following: "However, since the positions are established as GS-401, selections must be made in the GS-401 series if there well qualified candidates. If there are no well qualified candidates, managers may select from the GS-462 referral list. And must be prepared to provide training and education opportunities to meet the GS-401 qualification requirements". How are managers supposed to identify what is a well qualified candidate? Current our referral list just show qualified candidates. Currently the thought in this Region is that if there is someone who meets the requirements, you must hire that individual regardless of overall qualifications.

On unit that I am currently on, there are seventeen encumbered positions. Of that number 65% (11 positions) do not currently meet the GS-401 series. These individuals are at varying stages of the educational requirements ranging from needing 6 credits to the full 24 credits (at what level do these credits need to be?). All individuals lost meeting the requirements when the ability to count National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses was dropped. All of these individuals currently meet or exceed the IFPM skill requirements for a complex Forest. Skills include Operation Section Chief Type 2, Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 1, Prescribed Fire Manager Type 1, Safety Officer Type 1, Fire Use Manager Type 1 and Division Supervisor to just name a few. With our current budget level we cannot afford to send every one to college; so how do you chose?

I am the individual who needs all 24 credits. My current position is that of a Deputy Forest Fire Management Officer with approximately 28 years of experience. Prior to the dropping of the NWCG courses I was short 6 credits to qualify for the GS-401 series and was in the process of scheduling courses to get those required credits. But when the NWCG courses were dropped it was hard for me to make the case to complete those courses since I will be eligible for retirement in approximately 7 years. Fire Managements skills are built with experience as shown by the required task book system. Maybe the 401 series is not the way to go, if "our objective is to secure the best long term fire management organization with world-class expertise, and which is safe, proud and efficient."

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Bill Wade, Chairman, Coalition of National Park Service Retirees, Executive Council. Sir.

**STATEMENT OF BILL WADE, CHAIR, EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, COALITION OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RETIREES, TUCSON, ARIZONA**

Mr. WADE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Bishop, and other distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify here this morning.

I spent over 30 years as a career in the National Park Service, the last nine years of which were the superintendent of Shenandoah National Park. I also spent about eight of those years in formal positions in the Division of Training in the National Park Service.

Much of what I have written in my formal testimony has been touched on already, and I will not go into a lot of detail because some of it has already been mentioned. I will say that in preparing my testimony I contacted a number of existing field managers, career leaders in the National Park Service, mid-level managers, and

we constantly get information and conversation with employees throughout the National Park Service.

Our 700 members with over 21,000 years of accumulated experience managing national parks and programs still get quite a bit of information from the field people.

Let me touch briefly on a few issues. All of these things I have included in my testimony, I think, are considered demoralizers, if you will, or aggravating factors to the employees of the National Park Service. I will touch on a few them very briefly and then come back and hit a couple of them in a little more detail.

One thing that was mentioned by many, many managers is something I have called technology systems and processes. There seems to be an increase in process-driven issues, process-driven activities in the National Park Service, and you have heard others comment about it already as well. One superintendent said, "Overwhelmingly, process has become the goal." Another commented that "More and more people are sitting behind computers inputting information into these administrative systems and complex technology systems than are out in the field doing work, such as in maintenance and in resources management."

Another aggravating issues seems to be recruitment, hiring, retention, and diversity. This has also been touched on. The NPS has not done an adequate job at diversifying its workforce. Hiring and retention is aggravated by things that have been mentioned before which have to do with the consolidation of human resources. The current process for hiring seasonal and temporary employees sometimes takes nine months now from the lead time, the recruitment action to actually seeing the employee on duty.

Overwhelmingly, the single biggest thing that people commented on was employee development and training, and this has been something that I think has contributed to the things that Mr. Simpson mentioned: the lack of effective leadership. I think that comes in two forms. One is certainly a deficiency in training first level, maybe second level supervisors. The other has to do with the higher-level leadership, sometimes political leadership in terms of how they influence things that go on in the National Park Service, and I suspect other Federal agencies.

Second, the next biggest aggravating, frustrating factor I think has already been mentioned several times. That is the consolidation of contracting and human resource capacity in the National Park Service. Acting Director Wenk said that they have not consolidated as much as within the Forest Service, but there has been consolidation in a number of parks. Each time you do that, and you remove the capacity from a park you lose the knowledge of what goes on in that park, and you have levels of separation. You have competing priorities and so forth that hinder certain parks in being able to carry out those programs.

There is a serious concern right now as to whether or not the stimulus package will be able to be implemented effectively because of the lack of contracting and human resources capacity.

Last, I will comment on a question that you asked the first panel, Mr. Chairman, and that was the extent to which political influence is affecting the morale. I would say as of the end of the last of the eight years or so most of our members and others that I have

talked to would say that morale is the lowest that anybody has seen in the National Park Service in probably 50 years or more. That probably also contributes to some of the findings in the best places to work thing, and I think that along with just the deficiencies in first level supervision, it really was the process of political-driving decisionmaking and policymaking that was imposed on the carrying out the mission of the National Park Service. It goes well beyond just the management policies. There were a number of examples, but certainly that was a big frustrating factor and along with the others that I mentioned in my written testimony contribute to the overall morale.

I think it is on the way up. I agree with Mr. Wenk in that factor; that the attempt to increase science-based decisionmaking and transparency, people have a lot of hope about that, and we think that that might move upward if the emphasis continues.

I would be happy to answer any questions for the Committee after the rest of the panel.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wade follows:]

**Statement of J. W. "Bill" Wade, Chair, Executive Council,  
Coalition of National Park Service Retirees**

Mr. Chairman and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing and thank you for inviting me to express my views, and the views of our Coalition of National Park Service Retirees (CNPSR) on the important topic of workforce issues in the National Park Service. I retired in 1997 from the National Park Service after a 32-year career, including serving the last nine years of that career as the Superintendent of Shenandoah National Park. I am now the Chair of the Executive Council of the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees.

The Coalition now consists of more than 700 individuals, all former employees of the National Park Service, with more joining us almost daily. Together we bring to this hearing over 21,000 years of accumulated experience. Many of us were senior leaders and many received awards for stewardship of our country's natural and cultural resources. As rangers, executives, park managers, biologists, historians, interpreters, planners and specialists in other disciplines, we devoted our professional lives to maintaining and protecting the national parks for the benefit of all Americans—those now living and those yet to be born. In our personal lives we come from a broad spectrum of political affiliations and we count among our members four former Directors or Deputy Directors of the National Park Service, twenty-three former Regional Directors or Deputy Regional Directors, twenty-eight former Associate or Assistant Directors and over one hundred and seventy former Park Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents; as well as a large number of other former employees, including seasonal employees.

**BACKGROUND:**

In preparing for this testimony, I contacted, by email, about 30 park managers and division chiefs in the National Park Service (NPS) and asked them to identify what they believed the 2-3 most serious issues currently affecting the NPS workforce are and what the consequences of those issues are. In addition, I drew on conversations and communications that I and other members of the CNPSR Executive Council have had over the past several years with dozens of current employees of the NPS about various issues, including those affecting the NPS workforce.

Many, but not all, of the issues of concern can be directly attributed to, or closely related to budget deficiencies. However, it is too easy for NPS leaders to make that the scapegoat and to fail to take appropriate action based on priorities and consequences. Clearly, some of the issues of concern, especially as perceived by those in the lower-ranks of the NPS, are the result of a lack of principled leadership and decision-making; and inappropriate priorities.

*Employee Development*

This issue is at the top of nearly everyone's list. As with many organizations, when there is a tightening of the budget, one of the first program casualties is training and employee development. This has certainly been true of the NPS.

This deficiency is pointed out in the Partnership for Public Service 2007 Rankings of “The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government.” In this survey, NPS ranked 203 out of 222. Several of the other items with low rankings also may result from an inadequate employee development program.

One of the most significant deficiencies is “effective leadership” (ranked 191 of 222 in the aforementioned survey). The general belief in the NPS is that there are two parts to this perceived deficiency:

- Inadequate training and development of lower-level (first- and second-line) supervisors; and
- Ineffective and unprincipled leadership practices and decisions by high-level agency leaders, particularly political appointees.

There is little question that there needs to be improved training and development of lower-level supervisors, since such development is critical to how these leaders perform as they move upward in the organization.

One program recently implemented by the NPS that shows significant promise is the “Superintendent’s Academy” This program is designed to provide individualized, comprehensive leadership development for those individuals either selected for, or likely to be selected for their first NPS superintendent position.

However, career development for other fields is not as organized. One NPS manager said, “We have no logical, organized, progressive developmental programs for any of our career fields, and it shows! The NPS has committed to revitalizing their ED program in the last year, but we have yet to see substantive results. The Employee Development program must be focused on the KSA’s [knowledge, skills and abilities] needed in each of the career fields, and clearly identify the available developmental opportunities to obtain them.”

Another said, “Continuing failure to adequately plan, fund and execute the Employee Development program will result in a continuing deterioration in our employees’ abilities to perform the mission-critical work; will manifest itself in employee dissatisfaction with the NPS as an employer, increasing rates of attrition with concomitant loss of valuable potential, and ultimately in a decreasing ability to effectively protect our natural and cultural heritage.”

### **Succession Planning**

Effective succession planning in the NPS is still a significant deficiency. In the last 2-3 decades there have been several succession studies and plans conducted, but each seemed to have ended up as a report on the shelf. One manager said, “We not only need to do effective succession planning at the unit, region and Servicewide levels, we need to take appropriate action to implement the succession plans today, not sometime in the future! We need additional base funding to allow the Service to fund training and apprenticeship programs and shadow positions, so that when our older employees retire, they have had the opportunity to effectively pass on the knowledge and skills developed over the past 25-30 years. Failure to do so will cause a dramatic loss of institutional knowledge and memory, causing us to repeat the mistakes of the past, and slowing our evolution to more effectively meeting our growing mission challenges.”

### *Contracting and Human Resources Capacity*

Nearly every park manager with whom we consulted mentioned the serious situation involving “bottlenecks” in human resources and contracting. The NPS simply does not have the capacity in these program areas to keep up with the needs.

One manager said, “[There is a] deficit of trained and certified contracting officers. Compounding the difficulties with changes in procurement policies, the lack of contracting officers with warrants, and the quality of [applicants] we get when we advertise for these positions has put our contracting program in a tail spin. As a result we have diminished capacity to complete projects and to handle economic recovery projects. The inability of the NPS to get contracts out the door has drawn fire from Congress, who look at the backlog of projects we have on the books and the amount of unobligated funds, which has brought criticism to our request for additional funding.”

Another said, “The current “corrective action plan” for contracting has had a debilitating impact on the ability of parks to execute contracts and enter into cooperative agreements. The implementation of the plan has demoralized the procurement and contracting staff and pushing many into retirement or to other agencies. With recovery act funding pending we need to formulate a strategy to provide for a more nimble and effective contracting services.”

Another superintendent gave a specific example:

“Contracting in the NPS is still problematic; both for in-park part time purchasers, and for larger contracting at the regional level. The dollar limits

for in-park purchasing, I believe, are from the 1960's or 1970's. Any card holder can purchase up to \$2,500 in services 3,000 in supplies and \$2,000 in construction (which is widely defined to include painting and putting up a fence). However, in order to have the ability to purchase up to \$10,000 in supplies, \$2,500 in services and \$2,000 in construction, our employee had to attend 227 hours of training. These dollar limits are obsolete and need to be brought up to date so we can effectively get the work accomplished. This is very broken; but the basic idea that one must attend over 200 hours of training and still only be able to purchase up to \$10,000 is ridiculous. For the dollars spent to attend the training, and this employee's time, we can now purchase \$7,000 more in supplies but we still have to go to region to contract to get the building painted."

Another superintendent cited the Cooperative Agreement guidance that has recently been implemented in at least one NPS Region, as another case in point:

"Up to now our Cooperative Agreements have been executed using basically a 3-party process involving agreement formulation by the park procurement official, technical review by a contracting officer and by the regional solicitor. It now seems that we are adding up to 7 additional layers of process:

1. A new Regional point of contact (POC)
2. A new Agreements "IN BOX"
3. Automatic posting to GRANTS.GOV of all Cooperative Agreements over \$25K
4. A contract specialist (in addition to the contracting officer)
5. New involvement of Washington Office Contracting/Procurement
6. A decision to forward every agreement and task agreement to DOI [Department of the Interior]
7. A 'review of the proposed action will be assigned based on availability of specialist or contractor personnel."

In addition to the examples cited above, the NPS continues to "centralize" all personnel and contracting functions into a very few parks (example: into four parks in the Northeast Region) in each Region. This "Servicing Human Resources Office (SHRO)" and "Major Acquisition Buying Office (MABO)" consolidation is scheduled for full implementation by October 1, 2010, though partial implementation has already occurred.

The consolidation of the acquisition functions seems to be a consequence of GAO review in which the NPS drew fire on its acquisition management. The centralization of human resources functions is largely a result of recent "competitive sourcing" (or "outsourcing") efforts by the Bush Administration.

The consequences of these actions include:

- Great frustration in parks and NPS offices relative to their abilities to get things done.
- Demoralized employees in the fields of human resources and contracting.
- Demoralized and sometimes angry customers and vendors.
- Delays in executing contracts.
- Demoralizing partners participating in Cooperative Agreements.
- Not being able to complete projects in the time frames required due to inadequate staffing.
- Loss of effectiveness and bolstering adverse public opinion about government efficiency.
- Loss of credibility with the public, because work is taking too long to get done.

There is a great likelihood that the NPS will have a very difficult time meeting the requirements of the recent "stimulus package" because of these deficiencies. NPS has already initiated efforts to "call qualified individuals out of retirement" to assist with the expected increase in workload in these administrative functions.

#### *Technology Systems and Processes*

A number of NPS managers cited the increasing requirements of "systems" and "process-driven activities" as a serious problem and growing frustration. One manager spoke of the "dominance [of these systems and activities] over independent situational judgment and agility." Mentioning examples, this manager said:

"FMSS [Facility Management Software System], the PST [Project Scoping Tool], the lengthy process for using FLREA ["fee demonstration"] funds, the 5-year comprehensive plans—cumulatively these squelch creativity and effective action. Long range consistent planning is a good thing, but it should not be the only thing. It seems to be the only thing right now. Now, we have to try to get employees to understand the requirements of feeding all their projects through highly constrained and hugely complicated processes, with 3 to 5 years before they can hope to do the project."

A park superintendent lamented:

“Overwhelmingly, process has become the goal. GPRA [Government Performance and Results Act], FMSS, are two big examples, but it is in everything. We spent 100 hours on an Environmental Management System so that we are more “green.” I would rather our Resource Management Specialist spent those 100 hours directly protecting our resources. I do not know the enormous number of hours spent on FMSS. It has a life of its own. Instead of working on our historic structures, our employees are on the computer entering data about the need to work on historic structures. I have never asked for, or used a report created from FMSS to inform my decision making. Some may say that makes me a poor manager; I believe it shows that FMSS is not an effective management tool at the park level.”

Consequences of these problems include:

- Spending lots of money (salaries) on care and feeding of systems instead of on work more clearly aligned with the NPS mission.
- Demoralized employees who feel devalued by the dominance of systems.
- The widespread feeling among employees that computer programs now trump human intelligence.
- Loss of credibility with the public, because “we are soooooo sloooooow to act or react, and we respond by saying, ‘I can’t do anything about it—it’s the system’”.
- Ineffectiveness.

#### **Core Operations Process**

Another process initiated with questionable motives and implemented several years ago is the “core operations” process.

The experiences of one park, as related by a concerned employee best serve to describe the concerns of many:

“When the superintendent presented “Core Ops” at an all-employee meeting, I was very encouraged. He said we would go back to our fundamental, guiding legislation to establish our core responsibilities, then determine how best to fulfill them. Being rather familiar with NPS history and the guiding documents, I knew that if this were an honest endeavor, there could be but one outcome—a significant shift in staffing, funding and emphasis on protecting park resources for future generations. I was wrong. While the #1 park priority that emerged from the process was to inventory and monitor resources and assess their conditions, none of the action items reflected that priority. One position (GS-12 assistant division chief) in the Science and Resource program was abolished and the division chief was promoted to a GS-14, creating an even greater disparity between the chief and the GS-11 resource scientists. I don’t deny someone receiving their just rewards, but how did this serve the resource? No apparent staffing, funding or emphasis was shifted to protecting park resources. Our (the rest of the resource staff) contribution to the process was the privilege of working harder and more efficiently, to do more and more with less and less.

“So, the process was not about our core responsibilities, but about “efficiencies.” By naming a cost-savings, efficiency exercise a “core operations analysis,” we further degrade any remaining credibility with staff or those in the public who take the time to scrutinize what we’re doing. It’s like calling cell towers “visual enhancements.” If it’s about cutting costs, then call it a cost-savings process that supports our current operations. If you call it a core operations analysis, then go back to the core documents, identify the basic responsibilities and address them.”

It is clear from the above comments and from others we have heard from that the core operations analyses are being utilized—regardless of perhaps some good intentions by some NPS leaders—as a means to justify cost-cutting in a manner that obscures the adverse impacts to what should be the core programs of NPS: to provide for resource protection and to provide for a quality visitor experience.

The core operations process, originating in one region, spread throughout the NPS because of emphasis from the political leadership in the Department of the Interior. However, leaders in several regions successfully altered the approach and refused to carry out the prescribed process because, in their words, “it legitimizes an illegal process of non-compliance with the Organic Act.” In other words, most park units have already reduced operations to the core—any further reductions would, in fact, threaten the resource and would be against the law. Implementing this process has cost substantial amounts of money and frustrated many leaders and employees because its emphasis is on “efficiency;” and “effectiveness” (in terms of law, policy and mission of the NPS) is relegated to a much lower level of importance.

*Recruitment, Hiring, Retention and Diversity*

One superintendent states:

“We need to become more effective at attracting and retaining younger employees, and employees from underrepresented groups. Our diversity recruitment programs are relatively inefficient and ineffective, especially as compared to those of other agencies, including the USDA. Failure to recruit effectively further disconnects the National Parks and the Service from growing numbers of minorities and immigrant groups in America, contributing to the growing “irrelevancy” of the National Parks to today’s citizenry. Our workforce must much more closely mirror the “face of America,” if we hope to remain vibrant, relevant and important to our citizens of today and those to come.”

The NPS has not done an adequate job of diversifying its workforce. The responsibility continues to be put on parks, which competes with all other existing priorities. A park superintendent suggests:

“To be more effective the NPS needs to develop a few geographically based intake programs. The programs should be comprehensive in nature, including a recruitment strategy, a training strategy, a mentor and the funding to support the program. Without a diverse workforce we continue to have challenges connecting to diverse park visitors who look at our workforce and believe the NPS does not offer opportunities for them.”

The current process for hiring seasonal and temporary employees requires unreasonable lead time. Often it takes over nine months from the initiation of the recruitment action to actually seeing the employee at work. This is problematic as the park manager often is unaware of what project and initiative dollars will be available at the beginning of the fiscal year.

*Law Enforcement/Emergency Response Retirement Decisions*

Amendments in 1976 to the General Authorities Act (PL-94-458) gave trained National Park Service Rangers law enforcement authority within national park areas. These authorities include the ability to make arrests, carry weapons, and serve warrants issued by other jurisdictions. In 1994, the National Park Service issued a new position description for those positions that would provide federally established enhanced retirement benefits to those rangers who occupied those positions (5 USC 8336—commonly referred to as “6c” or “20 year retirement.”) These position descriptions describe the multiple tasks that rangers are asked to undertake in addition to their law enforcement duties, including search and rescue, emergency services, and resources education.

Rangers who occupied these positions prior to 1994 have been required to submit affidavits to prove that they exercised the same law enforcement responsibilities that exist under the revised position descriptions. A team of DOI employees called the Federal Law Enforcement Review Team (FLIRT) is charged with reviewing the submitted information and determining whether the applicants qualify for the enhanced retirement benefits. This team has applied a very narrow interpretation of the eligibility requirements for enhanced retirement benefits. This has resulted in the rejection of several hundred claims from rangers who are retired or still on active duty.

This is an injustice needs to be corrected. Currently, the NPS has a Protection Ranger workforce of “haves and have-nots.” This has caused widespread and substantial discontent among the Service’s 1300 commissioned law enforcement rangers and could negatively impact the Service’s ability to recruit and retain high-quality employees for the ranger profession. If not corrected, this could result in diminished protection for park resources and visitors.

**SUMMARY**

The aforementioned concerns have contributed to a decline in the morale in the National Park Service in addition to some inefficiencies and ineffectiveness. However, two other problems that have been “on the rise” over the past several years have led to the morale in the NPS being as low as anyone can remember—in at least the last fifty years; although there is evidence that this situation is changing with the new administration and there is renewed hope and encouragement on the part of the NPS workforce.

The first of these contributing factors is the quality of decision making, but—more importantly—the continual erosion of decision making by qualified NPS professionals whose actions and decisions are overridden or “second-guessed” by political appointees who pursue a political agenda rather than a resource agenda. One superintendent offered an example:

“During the rulemaking process resulting in allowing “concealed-carry firearms” in national parks, park professionals and subject-matter experts in the NPS were never consulted about what impacts to resources, visitors or employees in the parks might result. It was clear that this rulemaking was intended to satisfy a political agenda and that resource, visitor and employee protection had no bearing on the outcome.”

Key to “restoring the workforce” is the need to restore the validity of the decisions for which the NPS is responsible; based upon science, law and resource principles. In other words, restore the power and authority of the Director of the NPS and his/her professional leaders and technical experts to make agency decisions instead of making those agency decisions higher and higher in the Department—to the point where it neuters the agency’s professional leadership.

Organizational leadership and reputation at the national and international levels have been compromised. The NPS is no longer considered the national “expert” or leader relative to managing parks; interpreting and educating; carrying out science and research; and valuing appropriate recreation and visitor enjoyment activities. The NPS is no longer considered an international leader because it has been prevented from fully embracing the international role that parks and protected areas fulfill and the helpful role that the U.S. can play in that international arena. If we are to “restore the workforce” we must restore the capacity and the competence for organizational leadership both nationally and internationally.

The second contributing factor is the disturbing trend to “corporatize” and “privatize” national stewardship responsibilities of our most sacred places, conspiring against the inherent responsibility of our nation to care for these places through its established government on behalf of all the American people. Escalating collaboration, partnering, and contracting-out of these inherently governmental functions is increasingly becoming a subterfuge for our national failure to meet the financial and leadership responsibilities our government must exercise on behalf of our citizens and their national patrimony. National environmentalism, in response to a barrage of threatening ideological conservation values, responds accordingly with an increasingly shrill and extreme message, partitioning and polarizing communities, government officials and citizens who yearn to see the debate focus on quality of life approaches rather than environmental extremism.

Viewing national parks as essentially “cash cows” for local and regional economies increasingly skews interpretation of law toward the notion that recreation and visitor use are as important, or even more important, than the protection of the resource. The mounting overwhelming attention that is placed on parks’ revenue-generating capabilities creates a dilemma that often threatens long-term ecological health and diffuses core resource protection duties at the macro scale in favor of smaller incremental reactions to a continual barrage of park development plans and mechanisms to increase visitor use scenarios that now seem to prevail more often than not. As a result of these trends, the role of environmental stewardship and carrying out core resource protection missions are being systematically diminished across the National Park System with increasing frequency—deferring instead to economic impacts to communities and special interest groups.

These trends, along with recent attempts (and substantial expenditures of money) to contract-out, or outsource, certain work functions in the NPS have had a demoralizing effect on the workforce.

It is time to return the NPS to a professional organization; driven by law, science and principled leadership. With this renewal will come the pride and enthusiasm of the NPS workforce that Americans have come to expect of those who protect and interpret the nation’s National Park System.

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Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Ms. Elaine Downing, Vice President, Union 2152 [California BLM employees], National Federation of Federal Employees. Thank you for being here and look forward to your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF ELAINE DOWNING, VICE PRESIDENT, UNION 2152, CALIFORNIA BLM EMPLOYEES, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES, NEEDLES, CALIFORNIA**

Mr. DOWNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee. Thank for this opportunity to testify.

I am Elaine Downing, and I serve as the vice president of Union 2152 who represents approximately 600 Bureau of Land Management employees throughout the State of California. I am a 20-year veteran of BLM, and I work in the Needles Field Office, and we are a part of the California Desert District.

First, I would like to tell you how much I love my job. To me working for BLM is a dream come true. Every day I am surrounded by the most beautiful country in the United States the American people entrust in me, along with my co-workers, to care for and protect our natural resources, and I take pride in doing that.

I also take pride in representing the BLM employees of California. Our agency is staffed by extremely dedicated and talented civil servants, most of whom love their job as much as I do, and it is a honor to serve them and speak on their behalf today.

I would like to speak frankly about the state of the employees for BLM, California. Overall, our morale is poor, and here are a few reasons why:

First, there are too many managers and not enough rank and file workers to actually do the work. BLM is returning to a three-tier management structure from the previous two-tier structures in most offices. There are still a few offices that have three tier in place, and I happen to work in one of those districts.

On the ground, we have seen—we have seen no real benefit of this three-tier organization, and we have seen some several negative consequences of it. The restructuring will pull much needed funding from the field offices where the mission of the agency is being carried out, and route those resources to the district and state offices where the positions, though important, are not as critical to the agency mission. This shifts the collective burden to fewer workers who are feeling micro managed and overworked.

We would like to see the BLM organization structure flatten so that the field offices are getting the resources they need to get the job done. This is extremely important to BLM workers who, more than anything, want to see their agency succeed.

Second, performance appraisals at BLM are being administered unfairly. BLM recently switched from a pass/fail to a five-level appraisal system. There have been major problems with the implementation and transition. In numerous cases management has not followed OPM guidelines in properly developing the appraisals that accurately describe the critical elements and performance standards of the employees' duties. As a result, employees are often not being rated on critical elements of their job; they are being rated on everything in their job description. These errors strike at the credibility of the appraisal system. Until appraisals are done properly, BLM employees will not trust that the performance awards are tied to performance and that they will continue to experience great frustration in the appraisal process.

Third, BLM's decision to transfer IT and HR functions to a central location in Denver is weighing on the employees. Most of those directly impacted by this reorganization are upset because it is a major disruption to their lives. Many are at or near retirement age feel as though they are being forced out. Others are taking voluntary downgrades, sometimes three and four grades below their

current grades, just to end the uncertainty. Promises of career development have not come to fruition.

This initiative is similar to the changes the Forest Service has made recently to the centralization of their administration functions to Albuquerque. By many accounts, the Forest Service reorganization has been a disaster. Making matters worse, BLM has not engaged the union at all in this major change. It is no wonder employees are concerned considering they have had no opportunity to provide input through their designated representatives. We are against this ill-conceived reorganization and would like to see it stopped.

Fourth, and finally, labor/management relations has been poor at California BLM in recent years. The 2001 abolishment of the Labor/Management Partnership Council set the tone for the eight years of strained relations. In that time, BLM employees have effectively lost their voice in the workplace as management has chosen to engage the union to the smallest degree possible. In fact, the agency has not even met with minimum levels of engagement spelled out in our contract. The union has effectively become stonewalled.

We would like to see the Labor/Management Partnership restored at BLM so that the workers can once again have a voice in their workplace.

Although I have painted a gloomy picture. I want to leave you with a genuine sense of optimism I feel going forward. I and many other BLM employees have strong belief that our working environment will soon improve. We strongly support the efforts of President Obama and Secretary Salazar to bring fairness, integrity, and accountability back to the Department of the Interior.

I would like to thank you again for this opportunity to provide this testimony. BLM employees have had a lot of say about morale but we have lacked the venue to say it. It is a great relief to finally voice some of our concerns before such a distinguished panel. We commend the Subcommittee for asking BLM employees for their concerns and evaluations of our morale, and I will be happy to answer questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Downing follows:]

**Statement of Elaine Downing, Vice President, National Federation of Federal Employees, Local 2152, California Bureau of Land Management**

Thank you, Chairman Grijalva and distinguished Committee members, for the opportunity to submit the following testimony.

My name is Elaine Downing. I serve as the Vice President of the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), Local 2152, representing approximately 600 Bureau of Land Management employees throughout the state of California. Additionally, I keep in close contact with numerous employees from other BLM offices, both represented by NFFE and other unions.

Overall, employee morale within BLM is relatively low, as evidenced in the recent government-wide employee satisfaction survey. I believe the results of the employee satisfaction survey actually misrepresent the true level of employee morale. In my estimation, morale is lower than the survey indicates, because many employees are fearful of retaliation if they answer the survey honestly. Many rank and file employees do not believe that the survey is actually anonymous, regardless of the agency's assurances, and many chose not to even respond to the survey.

It is difficult to point to one or two solitary reasons for low morale, as there are a multitude of reasons for low morale within the Bureau. What I hope to do is to explain some of the more often heard complaints that the union hears and witnesses in representing employees, or has experienced firsthand. Our issues revolve around

ethics, labor relations, workforce planning, resource protection, performance appraisals and awards, and the balance between home- and work-life. In my testimony, I have also included recommendations for improvements regarding some of these concerns.

### **Workforce Planning**

There is much concern among rank and file employees at BLM that upper level management officials do not adequately manage how the work within the department is done. With critical vacancies in the field for long periods of time, new software implementations that are impacting all programs, unprecedented wildfire seasons in California, national emergencies like Hurricane Katrina, and alternative energy development mandates, employees at BLM are constantly trying to handle too many top priorities at once.

In my opinion, far too high of a percentage of agency resources are allocated toward supporting higher level managers residing mostly in district and state offices, while the field offices, where the majority of the agency's mission is actually accomplished, get too small of a percentage. Many field offices are severely understaffed and overworked. There is also concern that management officials build hierarchies to protect their position and grade at the state and district levels, while leaving protracted vacancies in critical positions at the field level. Having too many managers and not enough rank and file employees to do the work has several undesirable consequences; it is a waste of much-needed resources, it causes understaffing of critical positions, it causes rank and file employees to be overworked, it has a tendency to make rank and file employees feel micromanaged and pulled in different directions, and it ultimately hurts the ability of the agency to carry out its mission.

Some people, particularly high level management officials, will point to budget shortfalls as a primary cause of low employee morale. It is true that most employees are disheartened by inadequate funding within their programs. However, we hear more complaints about the lack of integrity in how and which vacancies are filled than complaints of a shortfall of appropriated funds.

Here is an example of the kind of action that has frustrated BLM workers: Management will allow for the advertising of a realty specialist position in an office where there is already one or two, while in the same period, the agency will leave a critical realty specialist job in a field office vacant for months, even though that field office does not have a single realty specialist on staff. Failing to fill this critical vacancy tied the hands of the agency so that it could not carry out a key function. That field office was unable to process alternative energy development applications for a period of several months. In this critical time of alternative energy development, this should not have been allowed to occur. We see lots of cases where BLM inappropriately fills non-critical vacancies ahead of critical ones in this way. It hurts the mission and it frustrates workers.

Additionally, upper level management seems to lack an ability to manage workload. Rank and file employees at all levels, but particularly in field offices, are bombarded by data requests and work assignments from many sources including: Washington office, state office, district office, other field offices, etc. In my experience, management places very little if any emphasis on BLM employees following a chain of command when requesting work to get done. There is also little to no guidance for employees to make decisions on how to prioritize their work. In addition, there is a considerable volume of work that comes through the door that BLM employees are forced to perform, but the time it takes employees to handle these duties is often overlooked by management. BLM employees often feel they are getting pulled in too many directions at once, and they are unsure of how to prioritize their assignments. This common problem has hurt morale at BLM.

### **Law Enforcement Officers**

For law enforcement Rangers at the California BLM, morale is particularly low. These Rangers are responsible for protecting resources and public safety across 15.2 million acres in California and 1.6 million acres in northwestern Nevada. The Law Enforcement Ranger program started in the California Desert District with the passage of the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, which specifically mandated the focus toward protection of natural resources within the California Desert Conservation Area. There is strong pride in California for that reason.

Prior to 9/11, the ranger corps of BLM was dedicated to resource protection as prescribed under FLPMA. After 9/11, and with the formation of Homeland Security, several high level BLM law enforcement officials were hired into the Bureau from outside the agency.

Generally speaking, these new managers were less oriented toward natural resources and more focused on homeland security. These new law enforcement man-

agers also brought a stricter, more militaristic style of management to the Ranger force. This shift in focus has caused a lot of distress for many BLM law enforcement rangers and field office managers. Confusion as to who these law enforcement officers answer to and who can delegate the work to them, is beginning to cause friction within the offices, and it is affecting morale for all. Recent funding earmarked for the California Desert Ranger program has not found its way to California, and there is a growing concern that it was sent elsewhere.

A common concern we have heard from BLM law enforcement Rangers is that upper level management does not value law enforcement officers with natural resource backgrounds. Many law enforcement Rangers have speculated that they were passed up for promotion because management was promoting from outside the agency for higher level positions. In addition, our union has had to defend several Rangers against what I would consider to be questionable disciplinary actions. These suspect disciplinary measures have had a strong tendency to be taken against Rangers with natural resource orientations, hired before the creation of DHS. Regardless of whether there is any validity to the concern some law enforcement Rangers have that they are being treated unfairly, there can be little doubt that morale has fallen due to the perception that they are not being given equal treatment.

### **Consolidation of Functions**

There are two specific groups of employees at BLM that have recently been targeted for consolidation, the Information Technology (IT) and Human Resources (HR) personnel. Even though we as a union do not represent the HR staff (BLM considers them "confidential employees," and therefore outside the bargaining unit), they are our coworkers and are a critical part of our mission. I will use this venue to share some of their major concerns.

In 2005, BLM's Executive Leadership Team (ELT) started discussing a new initiative called "Managing for Excellence." This initiative was supposedly developed with the aim of improving effectiveness and cost efficiency within BLM. Our union believes there were areas that needed to be improved, but the agency has not demonstrated that the changes they have implemented, nor the changes they are planning for in the future, have saved or will save any funds or improve efficiency.

In fact, one of the primary decisions the team made—to put the three tier system (as opposed to the two tier system) back in place—will most likely hurt efficiency within BLM. The three tier system adds another layer of bureaucratic supervision to the field offices, which are actually accomplishing the work right now, and could accomplish much more if they had adequate staffing.

According to the ELT's frequently asked questions document about the restructuring, the rationale for moving to a three tier system read as follows "We've learned that being closer to the ground with a three-tiered organization allows us to provide better service to the public and better quality control. It also gives us the opportunity to reduce duplication and overhead services."

I respectfully disagree with this conclusion, and have seen no evidence to substantiate it. Adding a third tier does not accomplish what they have claimed it does. Having worked in an office that continued to have a district office (three tiers), while others went to two tiers, I have found that the district does not bring consistency to the field offices. Rather, it adds a layer of management that is costly and unnecessary. It also seems to justify additional grades to those employees who often have the same knowledge, skills, abilities, and responsibilities as our field office staffers. I do not believe that adding this layer of management eliminated any meaningful duplication of effort or overhead. The three tier system has actually created more overhead and duplication of effort.

Another one of the Managing for Excellence decisions was to transfer the functions of IT and HR to a central location in Denver, Colorado. This decision alone is responsible for a drastic decrease in employee morale. Not only has it impacted the IT and HR employees, but it has affected all of the employees throughout the BLM.

Our most experienced IT and HR employees have begun looking for jobs elsewhere in their same communities. Those who are mobile have started looking for jobs outside of BLM. Promises of assistance regarding career counseling have yet to be fulfilled. Shortages in HR have been very difficult to overcome, creating a backlog of work, especially during fire season. In my estimation, it is taking several months longer on average to fill vacancies. Most employees at or near retirement age feel as though they are being forced into retirement, while others are taking voluntary downgrades, sometimes 3 or 4 grades below their current level, in order to end the uncertainty of their future.

The initiative came with promises of union involvement, but we have only been engaged in an ad hoc fashion. A Washington Office management official said it is

the responsibility of the state offices to negotiate with their local unions. However, local labor relations employees in the state office cannot engage in meaningful discussions on topics when they do not know what is going on themselves and they have not been included in the initiative planning. In fact, there has not been as much as a conference call to collaborate and discuss the impacts of these changes on BLM employees. A labor-management partnership council would be extremely helpful in addressing employees concerns with regard to this reorganization.

Although, I have stated our union would like to bargain the impact and implementation of this reorganization, I would like to make clear that we are adamantly opposed to this reorganization. We are confident that this change will hurt BLM's ability to perform HR and IT functions. This initiative is very similar to the changes the U.S. Forest Service made a few years ago to centralize IT and HR functions to Albuquerque, New Mexico. By many accounts, Forest Service's reorganization has been a disaster, yet BLM is intent on going down that same road. A reorganization of the IT and HR functions at BLM will be damaging to the agency and promises to be a tremendous waste of tax-payers' dollars. BLM is going to lose immeasurable institutional knowledge and talent as a result of this reorganization.

In addition to the problems I have already discussed, the process that has been developed using USAjobs.gov has become a tremendous source of frustration for supervisors and HR specialists, as well as applicants who want to work for the Bureau. Most non-federal applicants, as well as current BLM employees, have found this system to be overly burdensome and give up after being aggravated by the software system. In a recent job application for a realty specialist, there were over 80 questions that had to be answered in addition to submitting a comprehensive resume within the structure of this system. This is hurting the agency's ability to recruit the talent it needs to carry out its mission.

#### **Employee Performance Appraisal Plans and Awards**

In 2005, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) required BLM to switch back to a five level performance appraisal system from a pass/fail system. The handbook is clear and concise, describing a comprehensive system to develop critical elements, how to measure or quantify the level of performance, and the proper procedures for rating employees. However, implementation of this system has been very problematic.

Our union has reviewed a myriad of performance appraisals throughout the state of California. When reviewing these appraisals we have discovered that typically everything that is listed in the position description is listed in either one or two critical elements, while the quantifiable measurements are ambiguous and subjective. Favored employees of course, get glowing reviews and non-favored employees are saddled with having to defend themselves against vague, subjective, and indefensible measurements. BLM needs to do a better job of creating appraisals that accurately describe the critical elements and performance standards of employees' duties. Until these performance appraisals are done properly, BLM employees will continue to experience great frustration in the performance appraisal process and eventually become disengaged.

The system would work well if the agency would implement a structure for annual oversight and make a commitment to adequately train all BLM employees. I believe this change would lead to tremendous improvements in morale, performance and accountability. All too often, we find government agencies are blaming the inadequacies of a system on the structure of the system, when the real problem is the lack of training, oversight, and accountability.

There is no oversight on appraisals within each state or within the agency. There is no consistency from employee to employee, office to office, or state to state, in both how they are written and how employees are rated. I recently had the opportunity to discuss this issue with a realty specialist from New Mexico BLM. This realty specialist had only one critical element on which to be rated, and that was "safety." It stands to reason that a GS-11 realty specialist would have at least one critical element having to do with something other than safety. This example shows that BLM is not following OPM guidance in determining critical elements.

Likewise, the awards system at BLM is highly flawed. There is little attempt by BLM to conduct oversight to ensure consistency. Management officials in the state offices do not review performance appraisals and ratings for quality or consistency and awards may or may not be tied to them. Some offices give token awards to everyone. The only person that we know of that reviews the appraisals and awards in the state of California office is a human resource specialist whose only objective is to make sure the documents were received. There needs to be more fairness and accountability in the distribution of awards and it should have a nexus to performance.

### **Alternative Pay Systems**

We have been closely monitoring so-called pay-for-performance systems that have been developed and implemented at other agencies. We think it would be a very bad idea for the Department of Interior to attempt a move to a subjective pay system like ones that have been developed at the Department of Defense and elsewhere. These alternative pay systems have had a poor record of success in the federal sector, and in my opinion, the BLM lacks many of the prerequisites for a fair, transparent, and effective merit pay system. The only way a pay-for-performance system would work in the federal sector is if there was a fair, objective, and consistent appraisal system; real accountability demanded from managers; a true 360-degree performance review of each and every employee, including top management officials; and a significant increase in funding to support the pay system. All of these requirements are a tall order to achieve in BLM. Increased funding is particularly difficult with constant pressure to contain the expense of government services.

### **New Technology**

The effects of the newly implemented software for government travel (GovTrip) and the new Financial Business Management System (FBMS) system, has been problematic. BLM is unable to pull reports, pay vendors, reconcile accounts, transfer funds, or process travel authorizations and vouchers in a timely manner. Travel vouchers that once took approximately one hour, now take several hours or even days, depending on the availability of the software system. The software is not user friendly and we have heard many complaints from users at all levels, including management officials. This is affecting all BLM employees across the agency.

Practically everyone at BLM has been negatively affected by the transition to these software programs. The acronyms used in the new FBMS are not user friendly and very little guidance and training has been provided. Employees have been forced to learn the software by soliciting help from someone else who has had training. It is inconvenient for an office to rely on just one person for this kind of expertise, which is often the case. Any one person could be out of the office for an extended period of time. BLM employees are in need of more training on the new software. This is not just a matter of employees not liking change. It has been extremely aggravating to all employees because they are unable to perform their duties.

### **Labor Relations**

Under the previous administration, California BLM management became almost completely unresponsive to union concerns. Under President Bush, a lot of the Clinton era Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) guidance used to facilitate labor-management relations was disregarded, and it caused a lot of confusion about how to resolve labor-management disputes and how to handle unfair labor practices (ULPs). Not only was this action antagonistic toward labor unions, I believe the confusion caused by this move cost taxpayers millions of dollars in lost time and efficiency, as labor and management struggled to establish new terms for their relationship. This is particularly true within BLM where labor-management relations became extremely difficult and burdensome.

Management officials do not come to the table to negotiate collective bargaining agreements in California BLM. They delegate the task to labor relations specialists. They do this because the State Director and the Associate State Director do not seem to care about employees' concerns relating to working conditions and morale. Our current contract calls for quarterly meetings between the union and our State Director or his Associate to discuss problems. During the last eight years we have yet to meet with the State Director or his Associate.

Our union is hopeful that Congress and the new Administration will re-establish basic labor-management relations at BLM. We believe that a labor-management partnership council, like the one in place at the Forest Service, would be an effective way of bringing employee concerns to the attention of management and addressing them.

Some agencies have elected to retain their labor-management partnerships when both labor and management found it to be an effective avenue to address issues impacting labor relations. In contrast, BLM was very quick to terminate their state and national partnership councils when the opportunity arose. Employees within BLM have seen the lack of follow up on numerous issues that have been brought to the attention of management. There is serious disconnect between management and the employees of BLM that we would like to see resolved by reestablishing partnership councils.

### **Disparate Treatment between Managers and Rank and File Employees**

Our union has witnessed disparate treatment between managers and rank and file in many different areas. This disparity exists in the awards program, performance appraisals, training, accountability, discipline, and in the addressing of unethical behavior.

For example, a management official who was caught with inappropriate material on a BLM-issued computer was disciplined with a suspension, while rank and file employees would be, and have been, fired for virtually identical offenses. This unfairness has caused a lot of frustration among BLM employees.

Management officials and management-favored employees have often been allowed to violate agency policy regarding such things as: internet use and security; use of government vehicles; use of government equipment for personal use; improper reimbursement during official travel for personal business; agency policy on pets; and fiscal accountability. Morale would be better at BLM if the same rules were applied to and enforced on everyone.

Management team meetings during lean times of budget are often held at resort locations, which are not well received by employees who have been told there is not enough money for their project, training, awards, office, field supplies, or to implement safety committees as per our collective bargaining agreement and the law. Disparate treatment between management and rank and file workers, at many different levels, is hurting morale at BLM.

### **Whistleblower Protection**

Our union believes that current whistle blower protections, as they have been enforced by the Office of Special Counsel, are inadequate to protect federal workers. Whether it is through stricter enforcement of existing whistleblower protections, or through legislation, we strongly support strengthening these key protections, which are such a critical element of government accountability. BLM employees are in desperate need of a Special Counsel that will protect employees who open themselves up to reprisal when coming forward with information on waste, frauds, and abuse. Until a better system is put in place to ensure accountability and protection from retaliation and adverse actions against whistleblowers, BLM workers will be reluctant to come forward. Inadequate whistleblower protection at BLM has hurt morale within the department.

### **Going Forward With Optimism**

Going forward, I and many other employees at BLM have a strong sense of optimism that our work environment will begin to see marked improvement. We strongly support the efforts of President Obama and Secretary Salazar to bring integrity and accountability back into the Department of Interior workforce. The agency will be well served by reevaluating the ethics regulations and removing politics and ideology from Bureau decision making. There are hundreds of talented and dedicated employees working throughout BLM who love their job and love their country. To most of us, working for the American people at an agency that allows us manage our country's natural resources, is very rewarding. I consider it a dream come true. We are surrounded by beautiful scenery and are charged with its protection. It is an honor of mine to come to work each day.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, I would like to thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony. Employees at BLM have had a lot to say about morale but have lacked the venue to say it. It is a great relief to finally voice some of these concerns before such a distinguished panel. We commend this Subcommittee for asking BLM employees for their concerns and evaluation of employee morale at the department. I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have. I can be reached at Elaine—Downing@ca.blm.gov.

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Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much. Mr. George Leonard, National Association of Forest Service Retirees. Welcome, sir, and thank you for being here.

### **STATEMENT OF GEORGE LEONARD, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FOREST SERVICE RETIREES**

Mr. LEONARD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Bishop, and Members of the Committee.

As I sat here this morning, I could not help contrasting what was going on with the other congressional hearings that we have been hearing on television this last week, stories of corporate greed, corruption, wrongdoing and incompetence, employees that could not come to work unless they had a big bonus to encourage them, give them the initiative, and never a word about the public good.

At this hearing we are hearing from public servants motivated by the love of the land and dedicated to caring for the lands that they are responsible for and for serving the public good. Caring for the land and serving the people. These and the thousands of people that they represent deserve our thanks and our support.

There are morale issues in the Forest Service and other Federal land agencies. Since I spent my career in the Forest Service, I will talk about it. For more than 15 years, the Forest Service has been downsizing. Budgets under both democratic and republican administrations have been severely constrained. The rising cost of fire suppression within these constrained budgets has required reductions in every other program in the agency. From 25 percent of the budget in Fiscal Year 2000 to 50 percent of the budget in 2008, this has required terrific shifts in all the other activities of the agency.

The result has been a 35 percent reduction in the number of people working on the national forest; doing essential work in the stewardship of these lands. There have been reductions in other Forest Service programs as well. These reductions have severely compromised the capacity of the agency to carry out its work in caring for the land and serving the people.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your co-sponsorship of the FLAME Act. Separating the cost of emergency fire suppression from the regular budget of the agency is absolutely essential to maintaining programs that are reasonable and meet the stewardship requirements. It will set the course for stabilizing the agencies and beginning the possibility of rebuilding their capacity to serve the American people. The National Association of Forest Service Employees strongly supports enactment of the FLAME Act.

We have heard today about the attempts to respond to the budget reductions. The agency has consolidated ranger district and forests, moving people further away from the lands and the communities that they need to serve. Driven by the need to reduce support costs and, frankly, by pressure from so-called efficiency experts at both the Office of Management and Budget and the General Accountability Office, the agencies have centralized services such as finance and personnel, and we have heard today the consequence of those actions.

I hope that Hank Kashdan is right that they are beginning to get over the troubles associated with those shifts, but we really need to get the support services back to functioning as support services that enable the people that have jobs to do on the land to get out there and do them.

People like to be productive, and pushing paperwork around is not job satisfaction. The amount of time spent in the office on paperwork detracts from the time that is available to get something done on the job. Many of the requirements that we have imposed over the years are well meaning and do serve a useful purpose.

Frankly, the environmental analysis process that has developed over the last 20 or more years result in better decisions and better work on the ground, but cumulatively these impacts often result in the impossibility of actually getting time, essentially work done on the ground when it is needed.

This Committee took important steps in simplifying the process of getting forest restoration projects done on the ground. I would hope the Committee would continue to look at processes with the idea of streamlining them to the point where work can get done in a timely manner.

There was something else about this hearing today that I think is worth noting. The timing was such that the political appointees in the various agencies were not here to testify. You heard from the career personnel who understand their agencies, are familiar with the work and know what needs to be done to be productive on the ground.

The Forest Service has a long tradition of career professional management. It does not assure that it is always the best, but the batting record is very good. I believe that we should continue the tradition of career professional leadership at the Forest Service. I believe we should establish that tradition at each of the other land management agencies. The Congress needs to be able to get advice from these agencies that is not colored by the political direction of whatever administration may be in place.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Leonard follows:]

**Statement of George M. Leonard,  
National Association of Forest Service Retirees**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today to talk about the U.S. Forest Service. I spent 37 years working for the Forest Service, starting as a fire crewman on a Ranger District and finishing as Associate Chief in the Washington Office. I was proud to be a member of the Forest Service. I remain proud of the agency today.

I want to start by noting that I have been retired for 15 years. Much has changed in the agency since I retired and my comments should be evaluated in recognition of this. Retirees, particularly those of us who are members of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees<sup>1</sup>, remain interested in the agency and are dedicated to its statutory multiple-use mission. We have many contacts with our former colleagues, so perhaps we can offer some useful perspectives.

The Forest Service has been in a continual downsizing mode for more than 15 years. For most of the Post WWII period the agency was a major supplier of timber to a dependant timber industry. There was strong political support for this role and the timber program, as well as supporting programs, was well funded. For various reasons, political support for the program was lost in the early 1990s. The sale program was reduced by more than 80 percent. The timber organization within the agency was largely dismantled over the next few years.

In more recent years, rising costs for fire suppression, within a constrained agency budget, have resulted in significant reductions in money available for basic stewardship of National Forest resources. The portion of the Forest Service budget devoted to fire has risen from 25 percent of the agency budget in 2000 to nearly 50 percent in 2008. This has necessitated major reductions in agency personnel working on programs other than fire. The number of foresters, wildlife biologists, hydrologists, other resource management specialists and technicians has dropped 35 percent in this period. The ability to carry out important stewardship activities on the Forests

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<sup>1</sup>The National Association of Forest Service Retirees is composed of people who spent their careers involved in protection and management of the National Forests and Grasslands, doing Research, managing the State and Private Forestry Program and in International Forestry activities. They are dedicated to the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield mission of the agency. As retirees they continue their dedication to the agency's statutory mission and work to support it.

had declined commensurately. I do not know of any organization that can maintain morale in the face of such continual reductions.

I want to thank the Chairman, Chairman Rahall, Chairman Dicks, and other members of the Congress for their recognition of the funding problem and their efforts to remedy it. The National Association of Forest Service Retirees supports enactment of the FLAME Act that you have sponsored. This Act will separate the cost of emergency wildfire suppression from the rest of the Forest Service budget. Hopefully this will set the stage for restoring the capability of the organization to properly carry out its mission.

People that work for an organization want to be productive. People in government service want to feel they are accomplishing something that contributes to the public welfare. People in the Forest Service have a long tradition of working to make the National Forests an asset both to the Nation and to the small rural communities that are dependent upon them. Unfortunately, it is becoming harder and harder to get things done. Part of the problem is the lack of consensus on just how and for what purpose our National Forests should be managed. We have created a vast body of procedural requirements that must be completed before a project, no matter how simple, can go forward. Many of these processes have merit and, in fact, make for a better result. But, way too often, the cumulative impact of all the requirements becomes overwhelming or so time consuming that nothing gets done. Former Chief Dale Bosworth characterized this as the paralysis of analysis.

Let me tell you what I mean. In the 1950's I was a young forester on the Stanislaus National Forest in California. On a hot July day a fire escaped initial attack and burned about 300 acres of National Forest land before it was controlled. About 6 million board feet of mature ponderosa pine was killed. As soon as the fire was controlled we began the steps needed to offer the timber for sale. Within a month a timber sale had been prepared and sold. Logging began in late August and was completed that Fall. Because of the prompt action the timber had little loss in value. Deposits to the KV fund were adequate to cover the cost of replanting the burned area. The following Spring we hired a planting crew and completed planting. In less than 12 months, the area was returning to productivity.

Today, it would be difficult to complete the environmental assessment process within a year. If there were appeals, and there routinely are on salvage sales, the project might be delayed for another logging season. By that time, the fire-killed ponderosa pine timber would have deteriorated to the point that it might not be saleable. The Forest would be left with a sea of snags, a long term fire hazard, and no money to restore a functioning forest. In that scenario, there is little reason for the local employees to feel pride in their accomplishments.

Because retirees recognize the difficulties that current employees encounter in caring for our forests, we have set up a program to recognize people or units who are successful in finding their way through the morass of paperwork, gaining public support, and getting good work accomplished on the ground. Let me tell you about a couple of projects we have recognized.

Hurricane Katrina did severe damage to the forests along the Gulf Coast. Thousands of acres of trees were blown down, blocking roads, damaging facilities, and threatening endangered species habitat. The jackstrawed, down and broken trees posed a severe risk of insect epidemic and the potential for catastrophic fires as the down trees dried out. National Forest lands immediately adjacent to Biloxi, Mississippi were among the most severely damaged. When the winds died down, Forest Service employees immediately began to open roads. They worked effectively with local groups to develop plans for clearing trails, rehabilitating campgrounds and other facilities. After surveys for endangered species, they made provision for protecting their habitat and quickly sold the damaged trees. The damaged trees were promptly harvested. The threat of insects and fire was removed. Within an incredibly short time, the land was restored to a productive functioning condition. I had the opportunity to meet many of the employees when I presented the John R. McGuire Award in Jackson, Mississippi. Cooperating agencies, local interest groups, and representatives of the entire Mississippi congressional delegation participated. I can tell you that the sense of pride and accomplishment was palpable. Morale was high.

Last year I presented an award to the Enoree Ranger District in South Carolina. The District has put together a large partnership organization in order to carry out a wildlife habitat improvement project that extends across ownership boundaries to include both public and private lands. A multitude of partners is involved. The pride of accomplishment among the public and private partners was apparent. Morale on this unit was not an issue.

Of course, there are many more success stories out there, but there are also many stories of frustration where well meaning people have been unable to overcome ob-

stacles in a timely fashion. All too often projects are frustrated or settled for less than their full potential.

What can be done?

- Restore a level of funding to the agency that is commensurate with the work that needs to be done.
- Look carefully at the procedural requirements for implementing projects so that worth while projects can be accomplished in a timely manner
- Consider providing a threshold that must be met before providing an appeal right to people who have not taken advantage of opportunities to actively participate in project development.

The Forest Service has a long tradition of professional, career leadership. This has served the agency well. It helps to ensure that the Congress and the Administration have the benefit of professional advice on resource management issues that is not colored by political considerations. We urge that the tradition of professional, career leadership of the agency be continued.

If the dedicated employees of the Forest Service have a reasonable measure of job security and the resources they need to provide proper stewardship of our National Forests, to do Research, to implement the State and Private Forestry Program, and the International Forestry program, morale will not be an issue in the agency.

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Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you, sir.

I am going to recess. We have a vote, and should be about 20 minutes, and then we will reconvene so that we have the opportunity to ask you some questions or you can further comment on some of the points that you made. So let me recess and we will see you back here in a little while.

[Recess.]

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much. Let me again call this hearing to order, and let me yield my initial questioning time to my colleague, Mr. Sarbanes, for any questions or comments he might have. Sir.

Mr. SARBANES. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your holding this hearing. I really, really enjoyed the testimony of this panel, and I want to thank the Partnership for the work it is doing, and I have been following that very closely and trying to assist where they can, and I want to thank all of you for the work you have done, and the only way to say it is "for our country" and thank the members and those that you represent as well.

I think it is disgraceful, it is the only word you can use, what has been done, and it has been done to the Federal workforce over the last few years, and we have a monumental repair and restoration job in front of us, to reestablish the morale of the workforce, its effectiveness, its efficiency, all of which has been severely compromised, I think, by a dogmatic view of what the role of government should be.

Now, I join with the comments of a number of you in applauding the President for signaling a new direction and a willingness to commit the resources and the attention to our Federal workforce.

One of the most uplifting things for me as a Member of Congress, I have only been here three years, in touring my district has been to discover that the public, despite the press's penchant for displaying these poll numbers that say the public, you know, hates Federal bureaucracy and all the rest of it, the public I see really wants the Federal workforce to do its job, and appreciates it when the Federal workforce functions well and at a high level, and I believe in their core they want you to have the resources and the at-

tention and the support and the leadership that you deserve to do that job.

I also believe that if good people, really decent, hard working, committed, dedicated, people have a sense of mission are not happy in what they are doing there must be something wrong with the organizations that needs to be fixed, the structure of them and the leadership of them and so forth, and I think that day is here and coming based on the changes that Americans wanted to see. So you are going to be part of leading that effort and I thank you for it.

I am shortly going to be introducing legislation to address this whole issue of competitive sourcing and try to restore the right balance which has been up-ended by the approach of the last few years in terms of making sure that inherently governmental functions are handled by our Federal workforce, looking at whether advisedly governmental functions, i.e., the ones that maybe do not fall in that category but really could be beset done by the Federal workforce, return to that workforce, and this issue of competitive sourcing, so that when there is something that is under consideration for contracting out, that the Federal employees be able to bid on that and demonstrate their competencies to do the job well. So your testimony, particularly on those issues, has been very helpful to me.

I really just have one question along those lines, and that is, the outsourcing that has happened in this kind of wilful manner, we have talked about how it has impacted morale, and many of us have seen instances where the contracts were not performed well, so the whole premise of the outsourcing was undermined by that. Any of you can answer this question, but speak a little bit about just what happens when you take expertise that comes from years of experience and understanding and commitment to the mission on an ongoing basis and you remove that from the equation for a period of years, which I think has happened when you do some of this outsourcing, what is the impact that has on the ability of the various agencies to function well and at a high level? And you can speak to a specific example or you can just speak in general to that question. Anybody.

Mr. WADE. Mr. Sarbanes, I would be happy to offer a couple of ideas. One of the things that I think this whole issue caused in the way of demoralization for the National Park Service anyway, and I suspect it is true for a couple of the other agencies, is in fact that that potential for the loss of institutional memory, and it is especially egregious, I think, when you are talking about a resource agency where the knowledge that builds up about the resource has to be accumulated over a significant period of time. And if the people who have that institutional knowledge or have developed it suddenly finds that their jobs might be up for competitive sourcing or something like that, that creates not only a tremendous worry for their own situation, but for the care and concern that they have for the mission of the agency.

So I think it is particularly aggravating when that sort of thing happens to a resource-based agency.

Mr. SARBANES. Anybody else before my time has expired? Yes?

Mr. LEANARD. Let me go back, I have been retired for 15 years, so I cannot talk to the morale today, but let me talk about some

of the issues that the Forest Service has contracted out. When I was a young forester, we had crews on the ranger district that did the timber stand improvement work—thinning, planting trees and whatnot. Those crews provided backup. When we got a fire, they were there to provide a supplementary fire crew. When we had a rescue situation, we had a crew there.

We decided with some help from outside the agency that it would be more efficient to go to contract for those kinds of jobs, so we contracted for a crew to do the thinning, and in the evening those crews were gone and if you had a fire there was nobody there to help you out with the fire. All of a sudden the cost of fire suppression went up, and we lost a source of people who were working in the forest who could move up into other organizations there.

So there is some real cost. The kind of cost/benefit analysis that people do doesn't seem to stretch out far enough to get the full value that employees in various kinds of jobs, whether they are low level or high level, contribute to the whole organization.

Mr. SARBANES. That is a great example. Thank you all again for your testimony today. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you, Mr. Sarbanes. Mr. Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Mr. Leonard, in your testimony you talk about the need for people that work in an organization to feel productive in some way, and you go on to tell problems within the Forest Service. Do you believe there is a problem there with what we sometimes call "paralysis by analysis" or what the Acting Director said is 80 percent of the time spent trying to justify the other 20 percent of the actual work? Do you believe that there is such a problem?

Mr. LEANARD. Mr. Bishop, yes, I do, and it is not because the requirements individually do not make sense. It is because we have made so many layers of requirements together that it is just difficult to get there, and, frankly, in some cases the cost of doing the analysis becomes more than the cost of getting the job done on the ground.

And I certainly do not advocate a rolling back of the kinds of analysis and environmental analysis that we need to do, but you know, a lot of these requirements, there is at least a half a dozen committees of the Congress that are writing legislation, whether it is with Endangered Species Act or things having to do with commerce and whatnot, there is just all kinds of committees in Congress that are writing rules, and there, frankly, is no mechanism for saying that you have a 30-day comment period to meet this requirement, and over here you have a 90-day comment period for public input, and maybe those can be run consecutively, and maybe they cannot. There needs to be continual look both by the agencies and by the Congress those requirements, the hurtles you have to go through to make sure that there are not some opportunities to streamline them so that we can get the job done on a timely manner.

Mr. BISHOP. So if Secretary Salazar changes a 60-day comment period to a six-month comment period, maybe we could streamline those types of things in a way.

Let me ask you another question that is probably a little bit more significant. When you worked at the Forest Service, you were under both Republican and Democrat administrations.

Mr. LEANARD. Yes.

Mr. BISHOP. Did you see efforts to politicize the decisionmaking process during any of that time?

Mr. LEANARD. When I first came to the Washington office, the Forest Service, frankly, benefitted from a period of benign neglect in the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Agriculture was busy doing the things the Department of Agriculture is good at, and we only attracted the attention of the Department when we created a problem for them, a political problem that they had to get involved in.

Over time what used to be the Assistant Secretary, now the Under Secretary position was more concerned, spent more of his time with the Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and less with the Forest Service. Starting with the Carter Administration, the Assistant Secretary positions spent more time with the Forest Service than with the agriculture interest, and they have become progressively more involved in the day-to-day operations and decisions of the agency.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you. I appreciate that. Appreciate your time in service, and I appreciate all the witnesses that are here. I think, Mr. Thatcher, you made one comment that it is probably not wise to have a top-down secretive decisionmaking process, rather it would be better to tap into the collective wisdom. I think what you are seeing what is happening in Congress today, maybe Congress should take that advice, not just simply the Department of the Interior.

With that, I do not have anymore questions of this panel. I appreciate all of you for being here.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Mr. Simpson, I think through your testimony and through the written testimony you talk about leadership as being key, and employee satisfaction. Give us an example of an agency that excels in this area of leadership, leadership development and how they do it.

Mr. SIMPSON. Well, one of the consistent high performers in the best places rankings would be NASA, and they actually have an extremely developed and sustained attention to development of leadership qualities. They try to understand and try to—first of all, what I think is important as a general matter is to understand what are the qualities that are going to make a leader successful within your organization; how is that leader going to be able to incentivize and engage employees so that they can give their discretionary energy, to give them a sense of purpose, and to give them a sense that their work is directly linked the mission of the organization. Those are the basics of leadership development. And I think NASA, I would commend their leadership development programs to you. You could invite them in, have them describe to you in greater detail exactly how they do it, but they are certainly a model within the Federal government.

The high performers include the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the General Accounting Office, I think they all have a very deliberate conscious approach to understanding that you want to be able to cultivate your leaders before the opportunities come up for promotion. You want to be able to understand that I have a set of people, all of whom need to be—their leadership capabilities need

to be cultivated before I place them into leadership positions. You need to have some sense that there are succession challenges coming up, and not do what a lot of agencies do, which is, let us have a selection board, let us promote this person into a leadership position, and now just when they are being asked to perform we are going to throw them some training at them so they are actually learning while they are actually doing it at the same time. That is not the ideal situation. So you really want to be forward-looking in your leadership development activities.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Mr. Thatcher, share for us if you could a simple example of how changes in the Forest Service organization, the example we are talking about today over and over again, centralization, directly impacts an employee, that employee in the field that you were talking about, and how that affects their ability to manage the resource.

You know, centralization, I use the example it is like calling India to get tech help on your computer.

Mr. THATCHER. Sure.

Mr. GRIJALVA. It is detached, but how does that affect that person, that employee working in the field, and trying to do their job.

Mr. THATCHER. Well, you know, where would I stop? I mean, I could go on and on—

Mr. GRIJALVA. One example.

Mr. THATCHER.—on those kind, but I will give you a simple example of the average typical Forest Service employee who used to have a clear understanding of what his mission was with the agency for the work that he did out in the field typically now is going to spend countless hours, if not days, trying to get the menial tasks that need to be done for him to do his job.

The IT reorganization now a persons cannot even open a box if he is going to get a computer replacement. He has got to wait for a person to come down from outside of town that may take days just to open the box and set his computer up. He is tied to his desk waiting for that kind of response. If an employee has a pay issue, now they are required to call a 1-800 number, receive a ticket, and then wait for that phone call to be returned to them. Those kind of things are what is impeding our employees from their ability to go out and do what they love to do, and that is work in the national forests and grasslands and care for that land.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Let me, perhaps an unfair question, Mr. Thatcher—or anybody on the panel can answer—the question referenced by the Ranking Member, Mr. Bishop, is centralization in the organization, new computer systems, different kinds of management requirements that have been put in place that you have just spoken to one example of, are they impacting work as say—the work and productivity say as much as litigation?

Mr. THATCHER. Well, I think that would be fair to say. You know, I work at a national forest office, and a preponderance of the time that our resource specialists spend is responding in litigation.

Mr. GRIJALVA. OK. Mr. Wade, I appreciate the perspective that you have brought. Let me ask this question and then turn over to Ms. Lummis for her questions.

You cited the lack of contracting officers is a very, very serious concern. Elaborate on that issue and how it affects the agency's mission.

Mr. WADE. Well, right now I think the biggest concern in the National Park Service about the capacity for contracting and procurement and that sort of thing has to do with the increase in the money through the stimulus package. Certainly there has been concern about the centralization of these functions, and this degree of separation that I talked about where you lose the immediate knowledge of the park and the program and so forth because that function is now moved to some other location, whether it is a greatly centralized function, like in the Forest Service, as Mr. Wenk talked about in several parks in the region. But the fact is right now there is just a real shortage of contracting capability within the National Park Service, and I think the workforce is very worried. Certainly the management of the National Park Service, superintendents and so forth is very worried about how that is going to be carried out with this extra stimulus package money and anything else that might come out of a couple of years' budgets that are coming down the road.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Ms. Lummis, any questions or comments?

Ms. LUMMIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the panel's indulgence with our busy schedules today, and appreciate your being here.

My first question is for Mr. Simpson. I want you to know that I appreciate the portions of your testimony about clearing red tape associated with filling a growing number of open positions in public land management agencies. But I also had some concern about the recommendations in the Federal Applicant's Bill of Rights Act, and my concern is that they could actually have the opposite effect. So my question is this.

Have you considered the risks of such additional hiring mandates from a litigation perspective, such as notification of non-hires within 10 days, or prohibitions against requesting certain background documentation as being a couple of examples?

And I can tell you those are examples within the portion of my working life that I spent managing public agencies, seem to be sort of ripe for creating litigation rights that actually drag out the effort to fill positions.

Mr. SIMPSON. Sure. I mean, I think we offered those legislative suggestions on the assumption that they would be well executed, and I think it is perfectly appropriate to try to take into account real world considerations about how effectively some of these notices can be given and so forth. I think our underlying point is simply that the status quo is unacceptable, and that the current Federal hiring process is completely inadequate to the challenges of recruiting and retaining the next generation of Federal employees.

And so I would be happy to engage with you or your staff on any of these details. I think they are perfectly legitimate considerations, but I think our underlying point is that we have to move off the dime from where we are right now because the processes are not adequate to the task.

Ms. LUMMIS. Thank you. Quick follow up on that. You also stated that Congress and the administration need to work together to ensure that adequate resources are available such as making sure that agencies are using all of the tools at their disposal, and ensuring that those tools are being used effectively. So, of course, I wanted to ask about what types of resources and tools that you are referring to. Is it funding, or communications, or regulations?

Mr. SIMPSON. I think in that sense that part of the testimony was referencing hiring authorities. Many organizations already have certain kinds of hiring flexibilities and hiring authorities, but often they are not known or not used fully by the agency involved, whether it is a matter of simply following old practices, or not sufficient communication, or not sufficient commitment from top down to really produce results and to move away from the existing status quo, and so that was, I believe, the gravamen of that recommendation.

Ms. LUMMIS. OK. So communications is an issue, in other words. They may not be known by the employer, but they are not communicated to the employees. So are you seeing both sides of that transaction being—

Mr. SIMPSON. I think even more narrowly what I was trying to get across was that sometimes the person responsible for running the hiring process is not aware that they have statutory authorities, certain flexibilities that have been given to them by Congress to respond to very acute talent recruitment needs, but their willingness to embrace those authorities is, you know, I think hindered by a number of institutional factors, and you have to really work it to make sure that those people and that the entire organization uses its statutory flexibilities to the maximum extent by law.

Ms. LUMMIS. Thank you. Now, my last question, Mr. Chairman, is for the entire panel, so feel free to jump in. For those of you representing public employee unions or retiree groups, I would reiterate that I have been an employee of government, I have been an employer or a manager within government, and I know that these lines of work comes with tremendous challenges. But I have also spent a considerable amount of time in the private sector, and when I look at the economic challenges that are occurring now in our country they seem to be borne much more heavily by the private sector than the public sector, and I am wondering, especially with regard to private industry groups that depend on public lands for their livelihood, have you seen some morale issues in those industries, like timber and energy contractors, and the ag community that would be parallel or different? Yes, sir.

Mr. LEANARD. May I address that? Specifically one of the major issues today for the national forests and some of the BLM lands and all is a tremendous build-up of fuels in our forests.

Ms. LUMMIS. Yes.

Mr. LEANARD. I did a little back-of-the-envelope calculation a couple of years ago that on just the roaded portion of the national forest we are adding roughly 4 billion cubic feet of wood a year, and that is the energy equivalent of 750 million gallons of gasoline. If you wonder why we have a fire problem on the national forest, we are adding tremendous amount of fuel.

The other side of that though is that that growth, because of its energy potential, has economic or at least potential economic value. Unfortunately, we do not have a timber industry in place to take advantage of that. We do not have the facilities in place, and the small towns and communities that used to be dependent upon the sawmill no longer have that.

There are some real opportunities to use economic values of the excess and growing amount of wood on the public lands to both use those economic values to address the fire problem and also to make a contribution to our renewable energy needs.

Ms. LUMMIS. Well, that is a marvelous point. Thank you so much for making it. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Mr. Inslee.

Mr. INSLEE. Thank you. I was unable to hear your testimony. I will read it. I want to thank you for being here. And my principal reason for being here is just to say thank you for you and your brothers' and sisters' work, and I just want to tell you why I personally appreciate it.

I am a big user of the national parks, and I have seen dedication by people who work in our national parks that is just extraordinarily. I climbed Mount Rainier a few years ago, and going up there all the way up past the snow level you see these little, tiny like rock careens, and maybe little pink tape showing where people were not to walk on the alpine meadows, all the way up to Camp Muir. Some park employee had gone out there and busted their back to take care of the alpine meadow like that. And just with this exquisite care that people were showing for this amazing resource, I do not know who that person was, but thank all of your fellows for that kind of work.

And I was hiking up at Mount Daniels, which we did not succeed in submitting on, and I met this guy who was out there, he said it was almost like it was his day off doing trail work because he just loves this area, and I am embarrassed, I cannot remember his name right now, but he spent time telling us about the status of the trail and all the bud worm kill that we were experiencing, and went through and explained to me and everything.

I just want to say how much I appreciate people working so hard for Uncle Sam, and my family appreciates it, my constituents appreciate it. I look forward to some way we can help them, you know, reach your professional goals. It has been a really tough eight years for you, and I appreciate the Chair holding this hearing to help restore some of these issues, and I know a lot of them is budgetary. We are going to try to continue to increase the parks' budget, and now we have to get to the Forest Service. So anyway I just came here to say thank you. Thank you.

Mr. GRIJALVA. I just want to continue with a couple of questions. Ms. Downing, in your estimation or if you had a recommendation to give to Congress, what would be the most important thing we could do to help rank and file members do their job and also to improve their morale? If you had one thing you could say, Congress, I would like you to do this?

Mr. DOWNING. When I tell folks I was coming, there was a variety of reason everybody wanted to, you know, their licks in, but the

one common thread was accountability all the way up the line and down. That is it. That is it. It is that simple.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Mr. Leonard, you mention in your testimony your recent support of the FLAME Act and thank you for that comment, but based on your experience what recommendations would you offer the agency as it reclassifies the one example I used, the forestry technicians, and other long-term wild land fire fighters into a new job series that will have a requirement of a college education? What recommendation would you say to deal with what I think is—as Mr. Kashdan said—something that we are trying to figure out as we are right now?

Mr. LEANARD. I think it is essential that our career fire fighters have a logical avenue for progression up within the fire community. Some of them have the capability of moving out into other jobs, broader management responsibilities, but certainly we should not put classification requirements in that preclude a successful professional fire fighter from advancing to the top of the fire profession.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Thatcher, any comment on that?

Mr. THATCHER. Well, I would certainly, you know, just expand upon that, that what you have to realize is that the fire fighters that the Forest Service have are some of the most well trained, most educated folks that we have. They not only understand fire, they also are the people that sit on interdisciplinary teams to provide the input that is necessary on fire ecology, how to burn, where to burn, when to burn. These folks go through an extensive training, and we need to recognize that and value that, and not say that that be simply replaced by having a college degree in biological science. We need to keep our fire fighters home grown and have the ability to work their way up through the system. They are the best. They are the brightest.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Mr. Simpson, we spoke earlier, I think, also in part of the testimony about the need for land management agencies to do a good job at attracting and retaining well-qualified folk to work in the agency, to work toward a diverse workforce.

From your insight, what are the obstacles that typically prevent agencies from dealing with these two goals or these two issues that are important, and why do they not go after them more aggressively?

Mr. SIMPSON. There is a multitude of answers to that and some of it implicates the factors we talked about earlier in my exchange with Congresswoman Lummis. But many times you see the institutional reluctance to embrace the statutory flexibilities, and hiring authorities that have already been given to agencies. I, myself, if I was looking at an agency that was experiencing those issues, I would start with leadership and try to understand has leadership embraced those goals, and have they communicated their commitment to those goals down through the organization, and that would apply to both political and top-ranking career leadership.

I think that we need to talk about the stewardship of large organizations. It is difficult to think of serious challenges facing that agency that are not ultimately accountable, you know, that are not traceable to leadership. It is either a lack of attention. There is no doubt that numerous smaller issues that are getting in the way. If

you have sustained attention from leadership, you can resolve them.

Mr. GRIJALVA. And I think one general question probably more directed at Mr. Thatcher, Ms. Downing, but also any of you, Mr. Wade. As we go forward the role of the employee needs to have prominence in this whole discussion, the rank and file as you stated. We have talked about partnerships. We talk about once again activating the labor prerogatives that were there and make sure they are utilized. We talked about new and pending legislation.

Could both of you talk about the necessity for involvement of rank and file, one; and two, the one instrument, the one mechanism that you would recommend to us that would be essential?

Mr. THATCHER. Well, I will start out as far as on the Forest Service side. I think it is essential, Mr. Chairman, that we involve and engage the folks that are actually out there doing the work on the ground. These are the people that know it. These are the people that can see where the impediments are. These are the people that can make it work better. It is imperative that we always have that voice, and the mechanism that we have for that voice, now the Forest Service was unique.

In the Clinton administration, or the partnership mandate that the Clinton administration had, we worked together with management to solve those types of problems.

When the Bush administration took office, the first executive order that was issued was to get rid of partnership. The Forest Service was wise. They saw the value, they saw how we could make our agency better by having our employees buy in, get behind, and do what needed to be done, so we kept that partnership. It is working, it has worked, and it will continue to work provided that we continue to have that opportunity to come to the table, discuss those things with management, and work together and collaboratively, not only for the benefit of the employees, but the benefit of the agency which will then benefit the public sector.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Ms. Downing.

Mr. DOWNING. When we lost our partnership council, that started a slow trend of really shutting us out. Our contracts are not enough for us to be able to get our voices heard. People stopped engaging in activities. The Merit System Protection Board just did two studies last fall that hit the nail directly on the head. If you do not engage your workforce, you are not going to have happy employees. Happy employees make happy productive agencies.

Our supervisors are critical to that. We ask them to be supervisors before we train them to be supervisors. I was a supervisor for six years. I have learned more about managing and making good human resource decisions doing my work as a union officer than I did in the six years I was a BLM manager. We have to invest in our management. We have to invest in our employees, and value what they have to say even if they do not agree. To understand and be involved in the decision, and be able to have that open transparent communication is so valuable. We have to have the mechanism in place.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Ms. Lummis, I will extend the courtesy to you. I went over time on my second round of questioning.

But Mr. Wade, the issue from the perspective of your organization in terms of the consultation issue with employees being able to be part of the process that we just heard from your two colleagues at the table.

Mr. WADE. Well, I think it goes back to what Mr. Simpson said earlier, and I had not made this kind of a comparison, but my guess is that agencies or organizations that have highly effective leadership within the organization probably need these external kinds of avenues to engage the workforce and to involve employees and so forth less.

So, I think that what we are seeing now with the Best Places to Work Ratings, particularly in the National Park Service and I suspect others, when you see effective leadership having a very, very low level by comparison, that suggests that the workforce is not being engaged by the leadership and that is what causes these other mechanisms to sprout up in order to make sure that that happens. Not that they are not effective and in some cases needed, but I would put the focus on effective leadership to make sure that the engagement of the workforce takes place, and we have heard examples this morning where that is not happening.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Would that engagement be a requirement?

Mr. WADE. Well, I think it is—I mean, I think it is inherent in a leadership position. I mean, I do not know how else to put it. It is required because it is inherent in a good leadership or management position.

Mr. GRIJALVA. OK. Thank you. Ms. Lummis.

Ms. LUMMIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You are so right that good leadership skills, good people skills and good issue skills do not necessarily all go together, and training is especially important when it comes to designating a supervisor. So thanks for those comments.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit a statement for the record by Steve Eubanks who is a 38-year career employee with U.S. Forest Service, and he was unable to join us today. So submitting it for the record.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Without objection, thank you very much.

Ms. LUMMIS. Thank you.

**[NOTE: The letter submitted for the record has been retained in the Committee's official files.]**

Mr. GRIJALVA. And thank you, and let me thank all of you for the passion and the testimony that you brought to us today; very heartfelt and very informative and very much appreciated. Thank you. Let me invite the next panel up, please.

Thank you very much. Thank you for being here, and let me welcome our final panel, and thank you for your time and being here, all of you. Let me begin with Mr. Jim Austin, Chairman, U.S. Park Police Labor Committee. Welcome, sir, and thank you for your patience today.

**STATEMENT OF JIM AUSTIN, CHAIRMAN, U.S. PARK POLICE  
LABOR COMMITTEE, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Mr. AUSTIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to say thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come here and speak before you today.

My name is Jim Austin, a 20-year veteran of the United States Park Police, and I have the proud honor and distinction of being able to represent over 400 officers within the United States Park Police as their labor chairman.

We have been in existence since 1791. The United States Park Police was founded by George Washington, and we have been providing law enforcement services in the nation's capitol since then. In 1974, we started branching out. We have a field office, a New York field office, as well as the San Francisco field office.

Over the years we have had a proud history that has gone on and a strong tradition in the United States Park Police that seemed to begin to unravel probably three years ago, and one of the things I should interject is that we also have a lot of the same issues and problems as our compatriots in the Forest Service as well as the National Park Service, but I want to focus a little bit on just specifically the park police morale issues and the issues that we have been struggling with over the past few years.

Since 9/11, the leadership on the park police, we have gone through three chiefs of police. We are currently on our third, I should say. Each of the prior two chiefs has brought significant challenges to the force, being that they came from outside of the Federal government. One of the biggest things that got our attention that we started seeing a downslide or a downslope in our agency was back in 2006.

Several concerned members of our horse-mounted patrol unit approached to see what I can do to help out because the funds that were set aside to purchase grain and feed for the horses were in shambles. There was no contract that was up to date, and after we investigated it, we found out that the situation was very significant where the horses were actually almost out of feed, and that prompted us to go ahead and actually purchase horse feed for the unit so that the horses did not have to get cut down on half rations and put out to graze in fields for their nutritional needs.

When that first occurred, there was a lot of contention within the bargaining unit members about why the union is expending funds to purchase something that the department should be automatically purchasing on a reoccurring basis without delay, and as we started looking into our other contracts that we had with outside vendors, we learned were not just with the horse-mounted unit where the hay vendor was not paid for awhile, the farrier services to shoe the horses and take care of their hooves was pretty much canceled, and fortunately the vendor was doing this all on his own, trying to come in and assist the park police only because of our reputation with our horse-mounted patrol unit.

As that sort of come to light, we started to notice and hearing stories about how motorcycle officers who were responsible for a lot of high-profile dignitary escorts as well as the President of the United States were having issues with maintenance on their motorcycles, where they were actually paying out-of-pocket expenses to change, you know, make minor repairs on their motors. Then we learned in the New York field office, the same rang true with the marine patrol unit.

It sort of escalated from there. Unfortunately, there were times when the staffing levels were so low, and I think the IG's report

came out and indicated that pretty well, and in my written testimony it goes in there a little bit about how the staffing, the mandated staffing levels were all smoke and mirrors; where there was people listed on a detail but they were actually on leave.

We asked them, and when we could see some relief from this from our leadership, and they were getting a class put together back in July of the same year, and they told these individuals that they were hired, they gave notices to their prior employers, they were getting ready to come down, and I believe it was two days before they were supposed to report each one of them was contacted and said that in fact the Park Police did not have the money.

And how it comes down to that was a fundamental mismanagement of money. I could go into a long time about our vehicle fleet situation, it was in very poor condition. We had vehicles that had 160,000 miles on them that we were driving around which increased the maintenance costs on them. It was even so bad that different divisions within headquarters were putting out e-mails, hey, we have extra paper clips, we have extra toner, we have extra reams of paper, because effectively our whole budget system was shutdown. The Park Police really could not efficiently operate.

The biggest concern that we have is our staffing levels. Since 9/11, our mandated posts and our mandated coverages have gone up and yet our staffing members have remained the same. Based on our inability and our safety concerns of having such short staff at work sites, especially in these mandated areas, prompted us to come up with that survey which then sparked that whole Office of Inspector General's report.

Since then there has been some positive changes in there which I am glad to report. We have more classes coming up where we can start staffing these more properly, but the concern I think that comes in from the membership goes back to the reasoning that this is a short-term fix based on an IG's report, and we would like to see some long-term goals and accountability come from those who are responsible for ensuring that the officers are able to do their job safely and effectively.

The prior chief took a burden of the responsibility for all this. When he was removed, we noticed that had a great effect on morale. We have been able to work with Chief Lauro as a union to meet on common goals and common cooperation to try to move this department forward, and I think we are slowly but surely getting there.

We still do have some significant concerns and things that we need to see, and I think it is critical that with the Park Police there is no determined size that we should have on our force. Back in 1999, Booz Allen Hamilton released a report that says that we should have 820 officers, and this was before the 9/11 attacks, and the additional responsibilities that we were given, and currently we are at 600. But we need some sort of mechanism to say what is the actual strength of the Park Police.

Somewhere in Interior and Park Service it has come up that 639 is a good number. Well, that is better than what we have now, but it is not going to be enough because when you fill those mandated spots that we have, we still have other districts that we have that have some pretty significant critical infrastructure that is very im-

portant to this nation, and those resources are being pulled away from those areas to cover the icons.

So we need to decide and we need to come up with an actual number of the amount of officers where we can effectively provide assurance to the visitors to the icon areas as well as those critical infrastructures as other Park Service areas that we also patrol.

Another thing that I think really needs to be done——

Mr. GRIJALVA. Pardon me. Let me ask you to wrap it up, and it is a five-minute limit.

Mr. AUSTIN. OK. I am sorry.

Mr. GRIJALVA. That is OK.

Mr. AUSTIN. But basically we need to have more support from the Park Service and Interior. There is a lot of budget and things that we are absorbing when we have to worry about 90 percent of our budget going into personnel costs such as, you know, payroll and benefits. So there is a lot of support that we need from the National Park Service and Members of Congress as well.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Austin follows:]

**Statement of James Austin, Chairman, Fraternal Order of Police,  
United States Park Police Labor Committee**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Committee regarding the United States Park Police. My name is James Austin and I am the Chairman of the Fraternal Order of Police, United States Park Police Labor Committee. I have both the honor and privilege of representing over 400 dedicated men and women who provide law enforcement services to many of the most recognizable symbols of democracy in the United States.

Since 1791, the United States Park Police has been tasked with the responsibility of providing law enforcement services in the nation's capital. In 1974, the Force began to provide the same services in the National Park Service areas within New York and San Francisco. Currently, the Force has approximately 600 sworn members spread throughout the Washington Metropolitan Area, New York and San Francisco Field Offices.

Despite the long, proud history, several issues have emerged the past three years that have thrust the Force into an unfavorable public spotlight. The extent of the poor status of the Force began to surface in July of 2006, when it was brought to my attention that the most highly visible units on the Force, the Horse Mounted Patrol Unit, was about to exhaust its horse feed supplies. After verifying the concern, the Labor Committee contacted the vendor and ordered a supply of feed for the horses. This resulted in the discovery that several vendors that had contracts with the Horse Mounted Patrol Unit had substantial outstanding debts owed to them. Additionally, it became clear that some officers were making minor repairs to their assigned motorcycles to keep them running. In the New York Field Office, some members of the Marine Patrol Unit also purchased minor boat parts to ensure that they could fulfill the mission.

At the same time, several desperately needed recruits were hired and were about to report for their first day on the Force. At the last minute, these recruits were contacted and advised that the class was cancelled. Many of these recruits had already left their jobs and one was actually having a going away party when he received the call. This event further demoralized the morale of the Force.

Mandated and voluntary training had effectively ceased throughout the entire Force. Other than mandatory on-line computer training, all other training was essentially cut. This included the required semi-annual firearms qualifications. As the February 2008 Inspector General's report stated that officers assigned to the San Francisco Field Office had not been through a mandatory firearms qualification for over a year due to the lack of ammunition.

The vehicle fleet was in poor condition and no new vehicles were projected to arrive to help improve the situation. First responder equipment such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits were in short supply.

Different stations and administrative offices were scrounging for simple office supplies, such as paper clips, staples, pens, copier toner and tape.

Contracted services were in complete disarray. Building maintenance services, bottled water replacement, leased vehicles and ballistic vest replacement contracts were at some point stalled or cancelled.

A former senior-level manager informed me that on one occasion the Force had received an eviction notice to remove one of our communications "repeater" systems from a rented radio tower in the Washington Metropolitan Area due to an outstanding payment due. This would have had a devastating effect on the officers that would've lost all communication with the dispatcher and other street units.

Most importantly, however, was the critical Force-wide staffing levels. It quickly became clear during the entire 2007 year that the Force would have great difficulty in fulfilling the minimum staffing levels each shift. Often times, as confirmed by the Department of the Interior Office of Inspector General's report, posts that were required to be staffed were left empty. Often times officers would be reassigned from a patrol beat to a sedentary security post, leaving the patrol beat uncovered. In the New York Field Office, the lack of staff prompted one of the Statue of Liberty supervisors to admit that not all the mandated posts were covered; rather it was "...all smoke and mirrors."

In February 2008, the Department of the Interior Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released a report that was initiated based on an unscientific survey that was conducted by the Union, which encouraged the membership to evaluate the command staff and provide feedback on the working conditions. After two preliminary interviews with Union Executive Board members, the investigators for the OIG interviewed several Force members and gave every Force member, civilian or sworn the opportunity to respond via email. As the Force spoke, a rather telling report was issued that publicly highlighted the ineptness and the struggles that the Force has had to endure. This was a pivotal event that began the process of bringing the necessary change and hope to the United States Park Police.

Since the report was published, the Force has seen several changes. First and foremost, the direct and immediate involvement of the Secretary of the Interior, and the Director of the National Park Service was essential. While there were many other priorities within the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, their prompt attention gave confidence to the members of a grateful Force that positive change would be imminent.

Eventually the Chief was reassigned and all of the senior level commanders retired. The Chief Financial Officer had transferred to another agency prior to the release of the report. A retired United States Park Police Major who was employed by the Office of Law Enforcement, Security and Emergency Management (OLESEM) was installed as the "Acting Assistant Chief of Police" until recently appointed as the permanent Chief of Police.

Currently, the vehicle fleet has seen an influx of new police vehicles deployed to the street and there is a reserve of approximately one dozen vehicles. A vehicle committee has been established to develop a plan of action to produce and maintain a vehicle replacement program and determines other vehicle policies.

While voluntary training is still largely considered if it is at no cost to the Force, the mandatory In-Service training in the Washington Metropolitan Area has been broken up in an attempt to be more efficient for the officer and lessens any detrimental impact on the operational needs of the Force. For example, the blocks of instruction are given individually and usually last for about 2 hours per block. Instead of officers being assigned to the Training Branch for an entire week, an officer may be assigned to training for a two-hour period at a time for each block until the mandatory requirements are fulfilled. Although the training may take a few weeks to complete, the impact of street operations are minimal. Mandatory bi-annual firearms qualifications are being conducted at all locations.

The Force has completed the replacement of all the ballistic body armor that contained Zylon material. The uniform/equipment replacement program is in the process of being Force-wide. This will assure accountability of all uniforms and equipment that is issued or replaced.

At the Station Commander level and above, all personnel, including the Chief of Police, have re-instituted regular meetings with the National Park Service. This communication has gone a long way to increase cooperation and progress for each bureau to fulfill each of the missions.

Improvements in financial management and accountability have been made. With the assistance and training from the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior, the Force has hired financial professionals with federal budget knowledge and knowledge of federal purchasing regulations. Additionally, the NPS and DOI budget offices have also assisted the Force to become more accountable and knowledgeable about the budget process, financial management as well as pur-

chasing and contracting practices. It is clear that the Force is benefiting greatly from the assistance from the NPS and DOI.

To illustrate the commitment to preserving and protecting the Icons, the Force has consolidated its resources by realigning the Force, which resulted in the development of the "Icon Security Division." Affecting mainly the Washington Metropolitan Area, the Central District and the Special Forces Branch have been consolidated to form the new Division, which includes the New York Field Office, which emphasizes the protection of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. In the Washington Metropolitan Area, the core Icons areas such as the Lincoln, Korean War, Vietnam War, World War II and Jefferson Memorials, Washington Monument, White House/Ellipse and the National Mall are now patrolled by the "Icon District" officers in addition to the S.W.A.T., Canine, Motorcycle and Horse Mounted units. Although these units were already in the core Icon area, this change streamlines the protection responsibility into one chain of command rather than several commanders with overlapping responsibilities and reporting to different senior level commanders.

Since September 11, 2001, the Force has not had consistent leadership. At the time of the terrorist attacks, three Deputy Chiefs were alternating in the vacant Chief position. Then a Chief was brought in from outside of not only the United States Park Police, Department of the Interior but from outside of the federal government system. This inexperience proved problematic. Further complications arose when an equally inexperienced Chief replaced the terminated Chief. When this Chief was reassigned as a result of the OIG report, it emphasized the fact that the Force is not yet ready to stand on its own. Whether members of the Force agree or disagree, we cannot deny the fact that we need the assistance of the National Park Service resources. Our slow progress has proven this.

While I have highlighted some of the negative issues and some of the changes that have taken place over the past 12 months, there is more vital action that needs to be taken to keep the United States Park Police progressing forward.

Currently in the Washington Metropolitan Area, San Francisco and New York Field Offices, personnel numbers are extremely low. Although approximately 40 recruits have been hired so far this fiscal year, our attrition rate is 35-40 officers per year. Recruit hiring must be increased to stay ahead of the attrition rate.

The following steps must be taken:

- Determine what the authorized strength of the United States Park Police should be.

Within the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, an arbitrary number of 639 officers seem to have been determined as the number of officers to keep the Force functioning. Conversely, an October 1999 "Strategic Counter-Terrorism Plan" conducted for the National Park Service by Booze-Allen & Hamilton indicated that the Force should be staffed with 820 officers. It is important to note that this study was completed 2 years before the 9-11 attacks and the increased responsibilities mandated by the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior. There needs to be a definitive number of sworn personnel to achieve and maintain.

- Determine who has the ultimate responsibility for the individual Icons.

The Department of the Interior and the National Park Service has the overall decision-making responsibility for the Icons; however, the supplemental protection costs (e.g. civilian guards and video monitoring systems) are the financial responsibility of the Force. The funding that is dedicated to this would be better served in hiring personnel, training, equipment or vehicle replacement.

- Ensure that other patrol district beats are required to be properly staffed.

The United States Park Police has many critical infrastructures in all of our areas or immediately adjacent to our primary jurisdiction. Our unique peace officer status in many of the adjacent States provides the United States Park Police Officer to be on the front lines in the war on terror. In addition, the calls for service, proactive and selective enforcement and emergency response must not be compromised due to the Force's commitment to the core Icon areas.

- Increase the funding for the United States Park Police to account for the rising personnel costs.

A large portion of the annual budget for the Force is dedicated to salary and benefits. The Force has officers in two separate retirement systems. Those hired prior to January 1, 1984 are in a system known as the "Title 4" retirement system administered by the District of Columbia. Officers hired after January 1, 1984 are in a retirement system known as "Title 5" and are incorporated in the FERS law enforcement retirement system. The

Force incurs an estimated cost of 7-12 percent of the Title 4 officer's salary to fund the benefits/retirement package on a yearly basis, compared to the Title 5 officer's benefits/retirement package of an average of 35-49 percent on a yearly basis. Both retirement plan costs are reoccurring. This contributes to the fact that although our budget sees incremental increases, our staffing levels fall.

- Ensure that key civilian positions are filled.

The Force has several vacant civilian positions that are vital to our operation. Dispatchers, a safety officer, personnel specialists and a contracting specialist are desperately needed to provide relief to others who are working in several positions to fill the void.

In conclusion, I would like to stress upon the Committee that the men and women of the United States Park Police are dedicated to the mission of the Force. I have witnessed these true professionals handle some very stressful times and conditions with complete grace and professionalism. It is this commitment that truly makes me proud to be a United States Park Police Officer.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak to the Committee and I will be happy to address any questions you may have.

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Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. Let me ask Mr. John Waterman, President, Fraternal Order of Police, National Park Rangers Lodge. Sir.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN WATERMAN, PRESIDENT, FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE, NATIONAL PARK RANGERS LODGE, TWAIN HARTE, CALIFORNIA; ACCOMPANIED BY GEORGE DURKEE, VICE PRESIDENT, FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE, NATIONAL PARK RANGERS LODGE**

Mr. WATERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of you today regarding workforce morale within the Department of the Interior's law enforcement program, and the DOI's progress in the recent OIG's report from a field perspective.

My name is John Waterman, and I am President of the United States Park Ranger Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police, and have been a law enforcement ranger for 13 years. With me to my left is our Lodge Secretary and Executive Director, George Durkee, who has been a seasonal ranger for almost 40 years.

We are composed almost entirely of front-line law enforcement rangers who are deeply committed to the mission of preserving and protecting national parks, to leave the unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

The Ranger Lodge seeks to ensure our national parks have adequate staffing with the level of professional law enforcement ranger that visitors expect from the National Park Service and that those rangers receive training and proper equipment to safely carry out the increasingly dangerous duty of protecting park resources, visitors, and ourselves.

Perhaps the largest issue lodge members face is our attempt to legislatively mandate and codify the United States Park Ranger 6[c] and enhanced law enforcement retirement benefits. Hundreds of rangers have spent large sums of money from personal savings and retirement funds to fight for back time that they have earned for protecting our national parks. Current rangers like me have heard time and again from the Department of the Interior's Federal law enforcement retirement team that our enhanced retire-

ment is in jeopardy and not guaranteed, depending on how they wish to define our current position descriptions at any particular time.

No other Federal law enforcement officer in the DOI faces this arbitrary and capricious scrutiny. Enhanced retirement for law enforcement is a tremendous recruiting and retention tool without which the NPS will not be able to compete successfully for the best candidates. The solution is to codify the enhanced retirement in legislation, just as it is for our fellow United States Park Police officers.

The second largest morale issue that we face is the inconsistent application, enforcement and adjudication of our medical standards. The National Park Service medical standards are some of the most rigorous in Federal law enforcement, and one medical director has characterized the standards as tougher than a flight physical for NASA.

The agency's failure to provide consistent guidance and fair adjudication is costing the government millions in lost cases, millions of dollars in settlements, and rangers spend years fighting, and eventually winning their cases against the agency.

In the 12 years of the existence of the medical program, six people have been in charge of it with no formal medical background. In essence, one person in charge of the program would issue a waiver for a medical condition and a year later a new person would not issue a waiver in the same circumstance. The lodge believes in a medical program based on the Office of Personnel Management's guidelines that is consistently applied, adjudicated, and administered.

If a ranger proves that he or she is performing satisfactorily with a medical condition, then the ranger should continue working in the job they love, and continue working as stewards and protectors of the resources set aside by Congress.

The third progress report from the Office of Inspector General demonstrates that although the Department of the Interior has made recommended changes, at the departmental level it is management of the National Park Service Law Enforcement Program continues to undermine positive bureau successes and thereby fails to contribute progressive and measurable results at the field level.

The greatest threat to the public in our ranger safety is inadequate staffing where a backup for a ranger working alone may be 30 minutes to several hours away. The lower staffing levels create a reactive enforcement program rather than a proactive one.

As both the Office of Inspector General's report and subsequent studies make clear, for the last five years United States Park Rangers have had the highest rates of assault of any other Federal law enforcement officer. Let me repeat that again. For the last five years United States Park Rangers have had the highest rate of assaults against them compared to any other Federal law enforcement officer in this country.

To counter this disturbing five-year trend, the Office of Inspector General recommended "Bureaus will reduce the dependence on collateral duty and seasonal law enforcement officers, and develop contemporary comprehensive and verifiable staffing models within the fiscal year."

This statement was made by The Honorable Earl Devaney back in 2002. To date the National Park Service has failed to meet any of these recommendations, and in some cases has done the opposite. The National Park Service has made some past progress in reducing collateral duty and seasonal law enforcement officers by the creating of the subject to furlough positions.

There is an unquestionable need for an expanded workforce in the National Park Service during a park's busy season. These needs are not a one-time need but rather reoccurring. The SDF position allows the National Park Service to ensure that there is an available cadre of trained, experienced law enforcement officers to staff a park based on that park's needs. Unlike the current 1039 hourly seasonal appointment, an SDF position allows the park flexibility and time for mandatory training, team building, and development of leadership without sacrificing time on the ground, providing law enforcement and emergency service for visitors.

The subject of furlough position also provides officers with law enforcement retirement and Federal benefits which currently the seasonal positions do not. The staffing models and officer assault rates and numerous other studies conducted on a National Park Service Law Enforcement Programs demonstrate a clear need for increased staffing and a well-trained workforce.

Park rangers are the stewards of our nation's heritage. We are extremely grateful to The Honorable Earl Devaney and his staff, Congress and this Subcommittee for all of your attention that you are giving to workforce morale, and the progress of the Department of the Interior implementing the 25 secretarial directives.

The most recent progress review by Earl Devaney and his staff demonstrated that there is substantial work ahead for the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service in order to meet the challenges of those directives and the critical task of protecting the places set aside by Congress for special guardianship.

Thank you once again, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Waterman follows:]

**Statement of John Waterman, President, U.S. Park Rangers Lodge,  
Fraternal Order of Police**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of you today. My name is John Waterman. I am President of the Ranger Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police and have been a law enforcement ranger for 13 years. With me is Lodge Executive Director George Durkee, a seasonal law enforcement ranger for the National Park Service (NPS) for almost 40 years and Calvin Farmer, board member, a Ranger for 23 years. Our Lodge is the largest organization of U.S. Park Rangers in the country. We are composed almost entirely of front-line law enforcement rangers who are deeply committed to the mission of preserving and protecting National Parks to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. The Ranger Lodge seeks to ensure our National Parks are adequately staffed with the level of professional law enforcement ranger that visitors expect from National Park Service and that those rangers are trained and properly equipped for safely carrying out the increasingly dangerous duty of protecting park resources, visitors, and ourselves.

Perhaps the largest issue the Lodge faces with its members is our attempt to legislatively mandate and codify the U.S. Park Rangers 6c enhanced law enforcement retirement benefits. Hundreds of rangers have been denied coverage for service prior to 1994 and have spent large sums of money from their personal savings, retirement funds, personal loans, and second mortgages to fight for back time that they earned protecting our National Parks. Current rangers like me have heard time and again by the Department of the Interior's (DOI), Federal Law Enforcement Retirement Team (FLERT), that our enhanced retirement is in jeopardy and not

guaranteed depending on how they wish to define our current position descriptions at any particular time. No other federal law enforcement officer in the DOI faces this arbitrary and capricious scrutiny, as do U.S. Park Rangers. The solution is to codify the enhanced retirement in legislation just as it is for our fellow United States Park Police Officers (USPP). The USPP is a separate LE organization from the U.S. Park Rangers, also under the purview of the National Park Service. USPP and LE Rangers work alongside each other on a regular and recurring basis in the Washington DC area, San Francisco, and New York, along with joint assignments at many National Park units.

The second largest morale issue we face is the inconsistent application, enforcement, and adjudication of the medical standards. The NPS medical standards are some of the most rigorous in federal law enforcement (LE), and one medical doctor characterized the standards as tougher than a flight physical. The agency's failure to provide consistent guidance and fair adjudication is costing the government millions in lost cases and settlements as Rangers spend years fighting and eventually winning their case against the agency. This is a tremendous waste of money and personnel. The NPS now employs lawyers' at all medical hearings in an attempt to threaten and intimidate Ranger's while they present their case. In the twelve years of the existence of the medical program, six people were in charge of the medical program, with no medical certification. In addition to the lack of professional oversight, there have been numerous cases of inconsistency in the adjudication of these cases. For example, one person in charge of the program would issue a waiver of a medical condition for one case, while another person in charge would not issue a waiver for the same medical condition of another case..

The Lodge believes in a medical program that follows Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidelines, is fair, and consistently applied, adjudicated and administered similar to programs already accepted by agencies such as FBI, DEA, Secret Service, U.S. Marshals Service, and NCIS. If a Ranger proves he/she is performing satisfactorily with a medical condition, then the Ranger should be allowed to continue working in that job. Instead of losing valuable employees, the Service in turn retains a good employee with whom is has invested considerable time and money through training and development. In contrast, the amount of time, money, effort, and energy poured into these cases by the rangers demonstrates how committed rangers are to remaining in their positions as stewards and protectors of the resources set aside by Congress for special guardianship.

The two issues (enhanced retirement and application of the medical standards program) discussed above speak clearly of the significant impacts and effects upon morale in a very personal way to rangers. We would like to take this opportunity to shift the focus from the individual rangers to the NPS law enforcement program as a whole.

We are grateful that The Honorable Earl Devaney of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) has been steadfast in holding DOI accountable for the changes they agreed to make in response to the "Disquieting State of Disorder" OIG report. This third progress report on the OIG recommended reforms shows that even though the DOI has made some recommended changes at the Department level its management of the NPS Law Enforcement programs continues to undermine any positive bureau successes and thereby fails to contribute progressive measurable results at the field level. (Note: The NPS is responsible for managing both the United States Park Police (USPP) and the law enforcement ranger program.) DOI has spent in excess of four million dollars in recent years commissioning studies on the USPP and Law Enforcement Ranger (LER) programs. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), OIG, The National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) and The Partnership for Public Service (PPS) have all conducted studies. Each report has detailed similar issues with both programs, and groups that have conducted multiple studies on the programs express dismay that the same conditions still exist when they conduct a second study.

The Lodge reviewed the Third Progress Report on the Implementation of the OIG's directives and would like to address several of the specific OIG Directives from the "Disquieting State of Disorder" report that are still outstanding.

**Recommendation 4:** DAS-LESEM should review and revise the policies and procedures, which guide the bureaus' interactions with OLESEM. This should be done in consultation with the Board of Advisors. It is imperative that the Office of Law Enforcement, Security, and Emergency Services (OLESEM) issue out standard policies to all the bureaus. Without this standard, each bureau continues to find ways to abuse its authority, leading to a lack of consistency, contradictory policies, and confusion for employees and managers. The revision and updating of Reference Manual 9 (RM-9) last updated in 2000, which covers the NPS LE Rangers has been held up for the past four years, waiting for the updated Department Manual 446

(DM446) to be issued as the NPS did not want to put its officers in the position of operating under contravening policies. Emphasis must be on completing, signing and issuing a final copy of DM 446 and requiring bureaus to follow it. The Lodge is in favor of one homogeneous set of law enforcement guidelines with strong law enforcement principles.

**Recommendation 9:** Develop line item budgeting for law enforcement activities. The Department is currently implementing Activity Based Costing.

With the current budgeting system, there is no accountability for the expenditure of funds specifically appropriated by Congress and through the Washington Office of the NPS (WASO) for law enforcement and homeland security initiatives. Recently Congress requested information on ONPS spending and accountability for specifically appropriated monies. When the Lodge reviewed the report, the Lodge found that often the additional monies were accepted by the parks, and then the park level LE division budget was reduced by the amount of money received from WASO. While there is nothing illegal about this re-direction of money, it clearly contravenes the intent of Congress and WASO to provide supplemental funds for law enforcement needs beyond the parks operating funds.

The Lodge understands and appreciates that the Superintendent of each park is ultimately responsible and accountable for the law enforcement program in each park and desires to allocate the park budget based on what they believe is the best use of funds without interference from someone in WASO who is not necessarily cognizant of the challenges on the ground. The crux of the issue is that the lack of transparency in the park level budget process combined with the decentralized structure of the NPS LE program does not allow NPS WASO to implement the changes called for by the OIG review (along with the many other studies on the LE programs in DOI/NPS). Without the ability to distribute or withhold funds based on needs and or compliance, it is likely that the issues before us today will continue into the future.

**Recommendation 11:** Bureaus should complete an analysis of staffing models and methodologies. The VRAP (Visitor Management-Resource Protection Assessment Program) program in conjunction with the Law Enforcement Needs Assessment (LENA) was to be the end all of assessment programs. Parks worked very hard at putting the information together and when they completed the assessment found that they were terribly understaffed. Together these assessments (LENA and VRAP) demonstrated the need for additional rangers to protect NPS resources based on parameters established by the NPS planners. Once the assessment was completed, the numbers of additional rangers needed was staggering to many people. The IACP agreed with the VRAP assessment of the need for additional staffing for accomplishing the mission of the NPS. In speaking with NPS folks who expressed their dismay at the number of rangers required to protect the resources as the planners envision, the IACP Team recommended that the NPS engage in a validation study of its own program assessment tool. The OIG's office recommended this in 2002. To date that validation study has not occurred, and the VRAP model would need modification to account for the new homeland security, incident management, and other requirements that were not in place when the program was developed for use in 2000.

WASO has reported that the number of rangers decreased less than 200 since 2003. Few parks have experienced a net gain in staff and most have experienced substantial loss of staff. For example, Valley Forge has lost 50% of its staff, Organ Pipe (down 9 rangers after the murder of Ranger Kris Eggle), Yellowstone National Park has lost approximately 40% of its staff, and Delaware Water Gap 35% of its staff, Glen Canyon lost approximately 35% of its staff. Straight numbers on gains or losses of rangers also fails to consider the number of sites added to the NPS system over the same period. As new sites are added, sites already in the system do not benefit from the new hires, as those new hires go to new park units, or the current parks have their folks transfer to the new park, resulting in a loss of personnel. Current ranger staffing levels are significantly below the recommendations of the IACP report and the NPS's own assessment.

The greatest threat to the public and our ranger's safety is inadequate staffing, where backup for a ranger working alone may be 30 minutes to several hours away. As both the Inspector Generals' report and subsequent studies make clear, U.S. Park Rangers have among the highest rates of assaults on officers of any federal agencies. Several studies have found this rate is as high as that of many urban police departments, yet there is a sense that parks are safe places. Reasons for staffing challenges range from budget considerations, to sending officers to mandatory training, wild land fire response, days off, and leave to the sheer vastness of the patrol area where a park may have one LEO for two million acres.

Responses to park incidents are becoming reactive instead of proactive due to staffing shortages. Preemptive law enforcement action was once the hallmark of Rangers, where they would often identify undesirable, dangerous activities or acts and respond with the appropriate measures to deter or halt the act before an incident occurred or was allowed to escalate. In many ways, rangers have continuously enhanced the law enforcement function of protecting the country's natural and cultural resources by the development of intelligence provided through good community relations and the exchange of information provided by visitors, neighbors, and stakeholders in addition to engaging in and conducting covert and drug interdiction operations. Preemptive law enforcement action allows the rangers to protect the resources rather than having to settle for the recording of their loss. For example destruction of gravesites through looting, theft of timber from scenic easements and the subsequent destruction of those vistas, or the greed of poacher leaving a carcass to rot, desiring only the trophy part of the animal. Marijuana is cultivated in environmentally sensitive areas leading to ecological damage through the rerouting of natural water sources, the dumping and soil contamination of fertilizer, garbage, plastic and other items left behind by illegal drug producers growing marijuana on public lands.

Numerous parks have cut the number and types of interdiction operations that once were conducted because it is just too dangerous to work alone. Park researchers and visitors have been threatened on more than one occasion by poachers and drug cultivators armed with semiautomatic rifles and other weapons. Some parks that now routinely assign a LEO to go with groups of resource management personnel for protection. While an inquiry into the comparative number of rangers shows that the NPS has lost several hundred since 2003, those straight numbers do not tell the full story. Rangers are responsible for vastly different array of duties that were not conceived of when the staffing models were developed. In addition, there is an increase in the number of visitors demanding and needing services. Many visitors to National Parks have little to no experience in the wilderness. Their experience with nature is framed largely by relatively sanitized paved trails through the trees, deer in their backyard that seem more like pets than wildlife, and the ever present ability to call for help on their cell phone. The expectations of visitors have changed dramatically in the past two decades, and the staffing models do not account for the shift in attitudes and expectations of the visiting public.

In the 2002, OIG report "Disquieting State of Disorder" the OIG recommended an increase of 615 Rangers to meet the new homeland security requirements, visitor expectations, demands, and the desire of the NPS to continue to provide the level of visitor service that the agency prides itself on. Failing to update the staffing models in light of new expectations and demands hampers the ability of the Service to recruit, retain, and train new rangers. It also disregards the recommendations of the OIG and the Secretary's own study showing that a huge influx of Ranger's are needed to preserve and protect parks to leave them unimpaired for the next generation.

**Recommendation 12:** Each Bureau will assess the extent to which (correct) staffing shortages impact officer safety.

While the third progress report on the original OIG report shows that Directive 12 was implemented, the Lodge cautions that Rangers continue (as we have for five years) to top the Department of Justice list for the most assaulted federal law enforcement officers.

When working alone, particularly in remote areas, reliable, up to date radio systems and communications are imperative for officer safety. Many rangers lack modern upgraded equipment, reliable radio communications with a professional dispatch center that has access to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), allowing an officer to check if a person is wanted on an outstanding warrant, dangerous to police, a registered sex offender, or in possession of a valid concealed carry permit.

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area (WHIS) is a prime example of where the Lodge has concerns of complacency regarding the "implemented" status with Directive 12. Faced with a budget shortfall WHIS initiated a voice over internet protocol (VOIP) radio system without ensuring that the computer hardware and phone lines could handle the high-speed data transfers necessary for the technology to work. In addition to not checking the hardware requirements, WHIS also took down the old radio system, leaving the rangers with no radio communications. WHIS rangers have resorted to utilizing their personal cell phones, which only provide intermittent coverage as a substitute. WHIS is a park experiencing increased gang activity and violence, and rangers do not have the most basic modern police tool, a working radio connected to a professional dispatch center, not someone who is sitting at the visitor center desk trying to answer visitor questions, or complete the payroll at headquarters.

**Recommendation 13:** “Bureaus will reduce dependence on collateral duty and seasonal law enforcement officers.”

In addition to a permanent law enforcement staff of about 1,400 Commissioned rangers, the Park Service has perhaps 500 seasonal law enforcement rangers during peak visitation at various parks. There is an unquestionable need for an expanded workforce in the NPS during certain times, as many parks have a higher concentration of visitation during the summer months. These needs are not a one-time need; the necessity for more staff during a park’s busy season is a recurring need. The STF position allows the NPS to ensure that there is an available cadre of trained, experienced, law enforcement officers to staff a park based on their needs. Unlike a 1039 hour seasonal appointment, an STF position allows the park flexibility to bring their summer workforce in before the busy summer season and ensure that they have all of their required in-service hours, medical exams, updated legal information etc., and to develop a sense of camaraderie, common purpose and teamwork amongst folks who will rely on each other for back up—and life saving action.

The Lodge is also very concerned with the level and type of training seasonal employees receive. There is little to no oversight of the seasonal law enforcement academies, the quality of the training and the curricula beyond basic mandates by FLETC staff. Having a person who completed 360 hours of training, and the only traffic stop training they received was stopping tables (simulating vehicles) before turning an employee loose with their badge, gun, and a police car with no other training or supervision creates conditions that are ripe for poor decision-making and improper use of force. More structured oversight by FLETC of the seasonal academies would allow parks to receive a level of consistency in skills and abilities from the various seasonal academy candidates. This would free parks from teaching basic fundamental law enforcement and allow each park to tailor their field-training program for seasonals to the specific needs of each park.

Some years ago—and after a long-time seasonal NPS maintenance employee died on duty without even death benefits for his widow—Congress recognized the abuse of the temporary hiring system by Federal agencies and passed the Hudson Amendment. As a result, NPS did position evaluations in most parks and replaced some seasonal positions with Subject to Furlough (STF) positions, thus creating ranger jobs with full benefits. In an effort to cut costs and meet the mandate to utilize Centennial Challenge money, parks are now eliminating many STF positions and filling them, once again, with seasonal employees. Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, for example, recently eliminated 10 STF positions and filled those positions with seasonal rangers.

As the third progress report points out, as part of the Centennial Initiative, the NPS was tasked by the Secretary of Interior to hire an additional 1,000 seasonal LEO’s, directly conflicting with the 2002 directive. As demonstrated above, many full time permanent positions are lapsed to meet an artificial hiring quota that was and is not fully funded. The preliminary numbers from 2008 reflect a decrease in full time rangers and an increase in seasonal rangers. With the decline of the permanent staff, there is a greater likelihood that a ranger with less training and experience will not have an experienced officer to provide guidance before, during, and after the contact or incident. These conditions lead to a continued increase in the assault rate of rangers, and inappropriate uses of force (too little or too much) as shown in the Northern Arizona University study which looked at assaults against U.S. Park Rangers.

**Recommendation 23:** OLESEM should develop a consistent Department-wide centralized records system.

The lack of a records management system is unconscionable in the modern age. Modern policing and investigations require hard data to measure performance, track trends, analyze crime patterns, suspicious activities and provide data for chief rangers and managers to justify the need for more staffing, or different staffing models based on data. Currently the “Case Incident Reporting System (CIRS)” is a DOS based system (not compatible with Windows) with very limited capabilities for data analysis—resulting in hand counting of incidents and or a reading of each individual narrative in order for the chief ranger to complete the annual law enforcement report.

The NPS spent \$2.8 million on a Lotus Notes version of CIRS that failed due to out of date software, and lack of hardware capable of running the new version (some computers were still running Windows 98 as recently as 2004). The next incarnation of the records management system is the Incident Management and Record System (IMARS), which to date has cost in excess of \$5 million, prompting a separate IG investigation on IMARS. DOI-NPS is no closer to a legitimate records management program now than it was five years ago. In the digital age, with increasing demands

for transparency the lack of a records management system for data analysis, trend analysis, and investigation is stunning.

The National Park Service is the steward of our nation's heritage. National Park Rangers are the instruments by which the American heritage is preserved and the vast open spaces are protected, and the resources therein to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. We are dedicated to that mission from the 1906 Organic Act, understand, and believe in the importance of the resources we protect.

We are grateful to The Honorable Earl Devaney and his staff, Congress and this subcommittee for the attention all of you are giving to park service inadequacies in the critical task of protecting our nation's heritage, as embodied by our parks. The Lodge and its members will continue to work with the NPS, Congress, and the American people to protect that which Congress set aside for the enjoyment of all people. Thank you.

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Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much, and Mr. Durkee, welcome.

One of the questions I was going to ask you, Mr. Waterman, let me begin with you, was having to deal with the issue of enhanced retirement, and your point about codification of that is important and we will be pursuing that with your organization about the kind of legislative relief that is needed to make that concept a permanent concept.

Mr. WATERMAN. We look forward to working with you on that.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you. And the other one was the medical standards and you have covered that very well. Appreciate that.

The other point I think, you know, the lack of—your testimony—the lack of officers permanent or seasonal—pardon me, the resources and putting people at risk, whether they be employees or visitors. How many additional, if you can, permanent rangers do we need today to begin to address that shortfall?

Mr. WATERMAN. Well, I will give you from Earl Devaney's report in 2002, and it was subsequently by the Secretary of the Interior at the time, they agreed that—Earl Devaney recommended a minimum of 615 officers on top of what the numbers were in 2002. We have decreased since 2003 200 more officers. So if you take Earl Devaney's numbers, we would suggest more than 800 just to get us at the minimum staffing levels.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Yes, and we spoke earlier, you were here, we talked about the challenges that the officers, that law enforcement has on our public lands, they have changed, and in some areas the challenges are particularly difficult, and we mentioned the border situation where my experience with your colleagues there is that 100 percent of their time is spent supporting the efforts of border patrol and homeland security, and I really believe it is not just the need for additional support there, but I think there is an overall understaffing in this very critical position that we hope to be able to try to address either budgetarily or through discussions with the Secretary on that issue. Thank you for that today.

Mr. Austin, I thank you for your testimony and thank you for the candid comments that you brought to us today. Do you feel that adequate progress has been made to this date on resolving some of the issues that you spoke about that the officers have in the field? As of today is there progress going forward?

Mr. AUSTIN. As of today, there is progress going forward. Probably not as quick as the membership would want, but there is progress being made to address the issues and the concerns. We

are getting back. We have regular dialogues with the chief and the management with the Park Police to—

Mr. GRIJALVA. What would you suggest is the most important—one of the most important issues that is still left that perhaps is not being dealt with as adequately as you or your membership would like?

Mr. AUSTIN. I think the one biggest would be the funding. With the Park Police, we have—like I mentioned before—80 percent of your personnel cost go toward salary and benefits—I am sorry, 80 percent of the budget goes toward salary and benefits. It is 90 percent if you factor in the overtime with the big large demonstrations and the uncontrolled overtime that comes in. I believe with the National Park Service, they have other funding sources that can absorb that cost should they have overruns, but with the Park Police it is very difficult—

Mr. GRIJALVA. Fixed.

Mr. AUSTIN. Yes, it is very difficult to do that, and I think what the misconception is, is, you know, we are funded properly to absorb a lot of unexpected expenditures when we are actually not because the majority of our budget is going to directly toward those personnel costs.

Mr. GRIJALVA. You noted a concern about key civilian positions or vacancies in the department that are not being filled. What do you perceive to be the obstacles in not filling those positions? Budgetary?

Mr. AUSTIN. That is going to be a budgetary issue and lack of the actual people to process those applications that are coming in because those are some of the people that we are missing, and our personnel specialists, and without those it is going to make it more difficult to hire the dispatchers that we desperately need. We still do not have a safety officer after several years, and we need some sort of contracting specialist, and I know it is a problem that is systemic through the Department of the Interior, but those are key positions that we do need filled.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Well, I think both of you represent key positions within our land agencies that we have to pay particular attention to, and front-line in a lot of areas, and so your testimony today about where we are at this point is important.

Let me ask both of you, if I may, if you were to gauge, describe the moral of the average officer you represent today let us say versus a year ago.

Mr. WATERMAN. For me, it is based on the number of calls I get. It is even worse. We thought it was bad last year. It is even worse this year.

Mr. GRIJALVA. OK.

Mr. AUSTIN. For us, and we had the—I guess you can say—fortune of having a rather scathing OIG report come in where it sort of forced the hand of individuals to make changes.

Mr. GRIJALVA. It did.

Mr. AUSTIN. So for the Park Police, we are cautiously optimistic of the change, and again we want to make sure that that is a long-term change and not the quick fix that some people suspect that it may be.

Mr. GRIJALVA. One of the things in that report, I believe, was the need to address the issue of an adequate centralized record system.

Mr. AUSTIN. Right.

Mr. GRIJALVA. And that obviously affects the officers in the field and how they protect the resources. Where are we at in response to that part of the scathing report?

Mr. AUSTIN. They are working on it. I am aware that they are working on it. As to how far they are actually getting, I do not have that answer for you right now, but I know it is in progress, and a lot of those recommendations that are in there, in all fairness to the Chief, he is actually, you know, committed to addressing those. So at some point a lot of those are in progress, and we are doing our part to help them.

Mr. GRIJALVA. And without pointing a finger, I think it would be for this Committee to ask for a progress report or where we are on those recommendations. I think that is something that we need to do as well.

I do not have any further questions. I want to thank you for your time and when we scheduled this hearing it was in response to individual request that members have had from their constituents that happened to be also employees of our land agencies, and also from the general sense that there was not attention—enough attention being paid to rank and file membership and what they are doing out in the field, and certainly on the law enforcement side of not only the report, but also issues that have come up with Park Service law enforcement. So we appreciated this, and the follow up for us is what are some legislative initiatives we need to take, resource initiatives we need to take, and also the mechanism, whether it is through the partnership that we talked about, revitalizing that one again so that employees have some say in the process of decisionmaking and in the process of setting the mission.

We have very, very dedicated employees, and I want to share the comments that others have made here. Very proud of them and very proud of their service, and I think our public lands are to some extent the face of our nation for visitors both here and abroad, and I think we need to do as much as we can for the people that keep that face going, to give them the resources, the respect, and the time to help us manage these lands the way they should be managed and protect our resources the way they need to be protected.

So we will pursue these. Thank you for it, for the testimony today, and the meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:30 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

