

Back Country Horsemen of America • Destination Management Advisors • Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance • Friends of the Breitenbush Cascades • Greater Hells Canyon Council/Blue Mountains Trail • Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust • National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance • Northwest River Guides, LLC • Northwest Trail Alliance • Oakridge Trails Alliance • Oregon Motorcycle Riders Association • Oregon Trails Coalition • Orogenesis Collective • Outdoor Alliance • Pacific Crest Trail Association • Pacific Northwest Trail Association • Resilient Headwaters • Sisters Trails Alliance • The Mountaineers • Trailkeepers of Oregon • Travel Salem • Washington Climbers Coalition • Washington Trails Association • Washington Wild • Westside Trail Federation • Wild Rivers Coast Mountain Bike Association • Willamette Valley Visitors Association • Winter Wildlands Alliance

September 26, 2024

Chief Randy Moore
201 14th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: FY 2025 Temporary and Seasonal Hiring - Request for Exemption Process

Dear Chief Randy Moore:

The signed organizations write to express concerns with the budget crisis facing the agency. We understand that federal appropriations for the Forest Service have not kept up with rising expenses, including cost of living increases. We also acknowledge that if the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (H.R.8998), passed by the House of Representatives, became law it would further cut Forest Service funding. In this uncertain fiscal environment, the agency must make hard choices to ensure that it can fulfill its commitments and pay permanent employees. Forest Service employees across the country are working to preserve public services while navigating the current budget crisis. Our organizations ask that your office assist local units in adjusting to this evolving situation by creating an exemption process that allows Regional Foresters the authority to issue exceptions to the current hiring restrictions in specific situations.

On the call you hosted on September 16, 2024, you shared that exemptions to the direction not to hire (1039) temporary employees outside of fire will be made by your office¹. Our organizations ask that you review this policy. There are many temporary positions that are funded entirely by outside grants and other nonappropriated dollars. In Region 6, one example is the Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) program. In Washington, NOVA currently provides more than \$1.5 million in funding

¹“September 2024 Chief’s All-Employee Call | Budget, Hiring Update.” Inside the Forest Service, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/excel/september-2024-chiefs-all-employee-call-hiring-update>.

to the Forest Service for developed and dispersed recreation programs and personnel, as well as education and enforcement. These grant-restricted project dollars come from Washington state taxes and greatly enhance recreation in Region 6. Under the current hiring direction, local units may not be able to use these types of grants because units won't have needed staff. If this happened, the agency would miss out on funding and future costs would increase as the agency would add to its maintenance backlog. This unintended negative outcome can be prevented. **We ask that you delegate the authority to Regional Foresters to issue an exemption to the prohibition on hiring 1039 employees**, *"If a unit has a grant or agreement which requires the hiring of temporary employees and those employees would be fully and only paid through an external funding source."* The language in italics has been shared in the Southwestern Region by Regional Forester Michiko Martin, but for consistency it ought to be the national policy. Furthermore, the Regional Offices should handle exemptions to move the decision one level closer to on-the-ground opportunities and impacts.

Additionally, our organizations note that the Forest Service has invested significant resources in training key 1039 employees, including trail workers who have mastered traditional skills (for example blasting, crosscut falling and mule packing). Regional Foresters are well positioned to issue a limited number of exemptions focused on retaining key employees who the agency has invested large amounts of staff time to train over numerous years of seasonal work. We ask that your office allow Regional Foresters to review requests to rehire 1039 employees who preserve essential skill sets, have critical certifications, or perform roles that are vital for assuring the health and safety of the public and agency staff. Retaining these critical personnel will reduce costs and maintain agency expertise beyond the current fiscal year.

As organizations who partner with the Forest Service and support shared stewardship goals we are bracing for the ripple effects of these hiring restrictions on our own organizations and operations. The current fiscal situation and its impacts on Forest Service personnel will reduce the agency's ability to coordinate with partner organizations. Losing temporary positions will delay critical work in forest restoration, impact resource management and negatively affect rural communities. Please consider the requested changes as an opportunity to mitigate some of these challenges, as well as supporting public access and safety.

Thank you for considering our input. We recognize the deep challenges that you and your team are facing. We hope that you will provide exemptions to the hiring direction that best allows the agency to complete its mission.

Sincerely,

Randy Rasmussen, Director, Public Lands & Recreation, Back Country Horsemen of America

Becky Hope, Public Lands Chairman, Back Country Horsemen of Oregon

Kathy Young, Public Lands Chairman, Back Country Horsemen of Washington

Jean Clancey, Public Lands Chair, Back Country Horsemen Oregon/Emerald Empire Chapter

Jon-Paul Bowles, Principal, Destination Management Advisors

Eddie Espinosa, Executive Director, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance

Woody Jackson, President, Friends of the Breitenbush Cascades

Emily Cain, Executive Director, Greater Hells Canyon Council/Blue Mountains Trail

Jon Hoekstra, Executive Director, Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust

Joelle Marier, Executive Director, National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance

Justin Rae, Partner, Northwest River Guides, LLC

Lisa Olivares, Executive Director, Northwest Trail Alliance

Michelle Emmons, Executive Director, Oakridge Trails Alliance

Barrett Brown, Land Use Director, Oregon Motorcycle Riders Association

Stephanie Noll, Director, Oregon Trails Coalition

Gabriel Tiller, Director, Orogenesis Collective

Louis Geltman, Vice President for Policy & Government Relations, Outdoor Alliance

Mark Larabee, Advocacy Director, Pacific Crest Trail Association

Jeff Kish, Executive Director, Pacific Northwest Trail Association

Sophia Brownlee, Resilient Headwaters

Stephanie Presley, Executive Director, Sisters Trails Alliance

Betsy Robblee, Conservation and Advocacy Director, The Mountaineers

Steve Kruger, Executive Director, Trailkeepers of Oregon

Kara Kuh, Chief Marketing Officer, Travel Salem

Taylor Luneau, Board Member, Washington Climbers Coalition

Kindra Ramos, Chief Program Officer, Washington Trails Association

Tom Uniack, Executive Director, Washington Wild

Ryan McLane, Trail steward, Westside Trail federation

Eddie Kessler, Trail Program Coordinator, Wild Rivers Coast Mountain Bike Association

Jessy Fabrizio-Stover, Destination Development Manager, Willamette Valley Visitors Association

Hilary Eisen, Policy Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance

cc:

Sen. Maria Cantwell

Sen. Patty Murray

Sen. Jeff Merkley

Sen. Ron Wyden

Chris French, Deputy Chief

Jacqueline Buchanan, Regional Forester, Pacific Northwest Region

Sally Butts, Director of Recreation, Lands & Minerals, Pacific Northwest Region