



September 30, 2024

US Forest Service
Att: Randy Moore, Chief
201 14th Street SW
Washington DC 20250-1124

RE: Seasonal hiring and budget guidance

Dear Chief Moore;

The above Organizations are contacting you regarding the USFS budgeting situation generally and more specifically on the somewhat ambiguous guidance around hiring of seasonal employees and prohibition on hiring of employees from external sources that is being provided across the Country. We are aware that the agency is facing unprecedented budget shortfalls in the upcoming seasons and these guidance documents are issued in response to this situation. We also believe that limiting the hiring of seasonals is often seen as low hanging fruit for a response to budget constraints. Often seasonals are hired with partner funding rather than direct agency budgets, which will limit any benefits to agency budgets from not filling these positions and could result in significant additional costs to USFS from not hiring these positions. The Organizations are aware

that current efforts appear to focus the issuance of guidance around seasonal hiring through the Regional Offices. While there is value in this Regional Office flexibility, some Regional Offices have addressed this situation in a very proactive manner. Some Regions have chosen to address funding sources, specific positions or programs and levels of seasonals (1039, 13/13 and 18/8) while others have remained silent on these types of issues.

The silence or inconsistent messaging on funding sources or comparative values of the types of seasonals being addressed is concerning to the Organizations. Many of these positions are critical to the agency providing safe opportunities to the public in the upcoming season, such as avalanche center employees or firefighting resources in the Western US. While concerns around avalanche and fire may not be significant in the Southern Region, the use of seasonals in emergency response will be a major concern after Helene's impact in the Southern Region. As a result, partners have stepped up to directly fund particular positions in areas facing these challenges and partners would like to see these resources used effectively. The lack of guidance on partner funded seasonal positions is leading to inconsistency and possible long-term conflicts as many Ranger District or Forest level hiring roles continue to be unfilled or filled with employees in acting or temporary positions and they simply don't understand the nuances of these positions. This lack of clarity is creating confusion and alarm for the public and with many partners as well.

The Organizations are asking that you help us help you in the short and long term. The Organizations believe there is value nationally in this model of partnership, which if proven successful could be a model for many other uses as well. This partner driven management model for public lands that has been championed by the National Office for many years and ensuring these resources are effectively used should be a national goal as mandated by the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. Our Organizations have championed partner efforts, through our voluntarily created OHV programs that provide significant partner funding to the agency to address previous budget shortfalls through the funding of seasonal positions. These programs were created to partially address these types of budget shortfalls. The Organizations are concerned that some of the hiring guidance we have seen would disproportionately impact these

programs, when compared to other interests that may not have actively sought to address this type of a situation. This sends a negative message to the public that cannot be overlooked. We are hoping to mitigate this message and assist in making these partnerships as effective and responsive to the current situation as possible.

This type of staffing has been critical in providing a wide range of benefits to all the users of public lands such as seasonal trail maintenance, avalanche forecasting and these types of staffing questions have been dealt with on a regional basis. The Organizations are aware that in many areas seasonal hiring is largely a motorized issue given the large amount of funding from our programs. It is important to note these decisions will impact all uses and the general safety of the public. Many forests are in the critical position of needing to hire avalanche forecasters for the upcoming winter. We are concerned that if seasonals are simply not hired, discussions on how to improve and refine these partner funded programs will stop as well.

If seasonals are not hired in a timely manner, many partner programs will have to adapt quickly to the unexpected return of this money to provide programmatic services to the public. The Organizations are concerned that the current guidance prohibiting all seasonals is overly broad and could heavily impact partner programs. This will create its own unique challenges for these programs as some programs are funding seasonals that need to be hired for the current winter season. Other partner programs are accepting grants for funding seasonal maintenance crews over the next several years. If these grants are not going to be submitted, these programs should be informed sooner rather than later so other provisions can be made. If seasonals are not hired, are these funds that could be redirected away from USFS to state efforts to achieve the same goals with state employees. While this is possible, we are also aware there are many barriers to achieving this goal and discussions would need to start earlier rather than later with this type of realignment.

The Organizations are also concerned that the current guidance could result in significant cost increases as existing USFS staff will need to unwind existing contracts and commitments to

partners. Rather than saving money, this policy will cost the agency money. The Organizations would vigorously assert that this type of impact would be more effectively used to ask questions such as: "Are there costs associated with the seasonal that are not being covered by partners?" If the answer is yes, we should be discussing how to have these costs covered in both current and new hires.

The Organizations are concerned that if current guidance is implemented seasonals will simply cease to be a resource. We are asking for your assistance in addressing these concerns in a systemic and consistent manner so we can educate our partners on USFS concerns and guidance. The Organizations and our partners remain committed to providing high quality and sustainable recreational resources on federal public lands while protecting resources and would welcome discussions on how to further these goals and objectives with new tools and resources. If you have questions, please feel free to contact Scott Jones, Esq. (518-281-5810 / scott.jones46@yahoo.com) or Fred Wiley (661-805-1393/ fwiley@orba.biz).

Respectfully Submitted,



Scott Jones, Esq.
USA- Vice Chair
CSA- Exec Dir: COHVCO Authorized Rep



Fred Wiley
President and Chief Executive Officer
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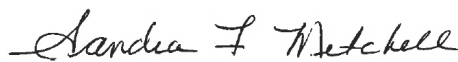
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Cody Richmond
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CC: Regional Foresters