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Dear Secretary Perdue,

We had the opportunity to read your statement to Forest Service employees as a result of last week's resignation of Chief Tooke and appointment of Vicki Christiansen as Interim Chief. We support your decisions and applaud your decisive leadership in this matter.

As Forest Service retirees, we are deeply troubled about sexual harassment in the agency as recently reported and scrutinized in the media. Everyone deserves a safe work environment free of harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. The USDA-Forest Service is a great organization with a highly committed workforce and this is a very difficult time for the Agency. The changes necessary to make this right will not be easy but with good leadership, it can be done.

It is imperative that the next Chief possess the skills and personal attributes that will restore the Agency's reputation and capacity as the leader in natural resource management with a diverse, highly motivated, and proud workforce that love their job and feel safe in performing it.

We respectfully propose you consider the following selection criteria for the next Forest Service Chief:

1. The Chief should be chosen from among those within the Forest Service, or those who have left the Forest Service in the past five years, who understand the mission and culture of the agency.
2. Candidates must demonstrate strong leadership ability as evidenced by successful line officer assignments and have the courage and passion to make bold decisions that will change the culture of the Agency and streamline its decision-making processes.
3. A Chief who has demonstrated a passion and ability for maintaining and expanding a diverse workforce. A Chief who can lead in the face of multiple internal and external challenges and a Chief who will dedicate their efforts to changing the agency culture, so it becomes an employer of choice and one where employees can enjoy a fulfilling career.
4. An essential characteristic is the ability to develop close working relationships with the Department of Agriculture, Congress and other Federal agencies; and to restore the constituency for the Agency and its programs with Tribal, State and local governments, communities of interest, users and cooperators.

5. The Chief must understand the importance of having a strong research and development program within the agency, and use the science produced to improve the management of national forests and grasslands, other public lands, and the nation's private forestlands. The agency is home to half of the nation's research capacity for forests, so the new Chief Forester of the United States needs to be passionate about restoring and sustaining the capacity of the science programs to assure the long-term health and productivity of all the nation's forests.

These criteria are best achieved by providing the Forest Service with strong professional and non-partisan leadership. The selection of a permanent Chief is time sensitive and we ask that a decision be made as expeditiously as possible. This is absolutely necessary for the agency to move forward and begin addressing the challenges ahead. We are prepared to offer our assistance or provide input to your search for the next Chief.

We sincerely appreciate your consideration of our recommendations.

James L. Caswell

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Chair

National Association of Forest Service Retirees