



January 8, 2021

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Ms. Vicki Christiansen
Chief of the Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Chief Christiansen:

The year 2020 presented the Forest Service with events and challenges unlike any ever encountered during the history of the agency. On behalf of the membership of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR), I would like to express gratitude for your continued efforts to build and maintain a strong working relationship with agency retirees. Your willingness to engage in open communication and discuss Forest Service land management challenges and potential solutions is profoundly appreciated. I believe the National Forests and American people are better served as a result of our working relationship.

We would also like to take this opportunity to recognize leadership's professional response to a fire season that required the Forest Service to "limit the spread" on two fronts: the fire front and the pandemic front.

With only a few months to prepare and spring coordination meetings and training largely relegated to virtual sessions, agency personnel were able to develop sanitation and distancing policies that enabled thousands of personnel to fight fire with minimal spread of COVID-19. It is extremely impressive that during the peak of the summer firefighting season it is estimated that **fewer than 2%** of firefighting personnel were affected by the extremely contagious virus. This could not have happened without leadership's efforts to care for the land and serve people while protecting the men and women who persevered through an intense and prolonged fire season. The logistics required to achieve these remarkable results must have been almost overwhelming.

The membership of NAFSR applauds your strong leadership as well as that of Deputy Chief Phipps, his staff, Regional Foresters, Incident Commanders, and firefighting partners. We also commend the thousands of men and women who fought the massive conflagrations under very trying circumstances of the Covid-19 virus. We often do not take the time to say “thank you” when a particularly difficult set of circumstances turns out with positive results. As retirees we recognize, and take pride in, the agency’s accomplishments.

Sincerely,

James L. Caswell

James L. Caswell, Chair
National Association of Forest Service Retirees

cc: Deputy Chief John Phipps
Associate Deputy Chief Jaelith Hall-Rivera
Regional Foresters
USDA Undersecretary James Hubbard