



June 14, 2021

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The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) would like to commend Chief Vicki Christiansen for her leadership in working to address the many complex natural resource and internal challenges the agency faced when she was appointed. She did a remarkable job given the additional backdrop and associated disruption resulting from a global pandemic. We wish Vicki the best in her retirement.

In pivoting to the future, it is essential that the next Chief possess the skills and personal attributes that will maintain 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. The individual should be highly regarded and respected and understand the mission and culture of the agency.
2. The Chief must possess strong leadership ability as evidenced by successful agency assignments and have the courage and passion to make decisions that will continue moving the agency forward in addressing the many challenges including, but not limited to: climate change, landscape restoration, wildfire risks, planning, and increased recreational demand.

3. It is imperative that the Chief work closely with your administration and be provided the resources to address the serious lack of field-going personnel. As you are probably aware, over the past 15 years there has been a significant reduction, both in numbers and experience of natural resource professionals on the National Forests and Grasslands. As a result, the agency is below critical mass in its ability to actively manage and effectively address the many demands associated with climate change, landscape restoration, and escalating public recreation. The Chief must have the budget and means to deal with this serious staffing shortage if substantial progress is to be made on the Administration's goals, including the predicament of large catastrophic fires.

4. The Chief must have a demonstrated a passion and ability for maintaining and expanding a diverse workforce, and be dedicated to continuing efforts toward maintaining an agency culture free of sexual harassment, that makes it attractive as an employer of choice, and one where employees can enjoy a fulfilling career.

5. The Chief must exhibit the ability to develop close working relationships with the Department of Agriculture, Congress, and other Federal agencies; and to continue building on the constituency for the agency and its programs with Tribal, State, and local governments, communities of interest, users, and cooperators.

6. 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 allowing the agency to move forward in successfully addressing the challenges ahead. We sincerely appreciate your consideration of our recommendations in filling this key leadership position. NAFSR values our relationship with USDA and the Forest Service and look forward to working collaboratively and productively with you and the new Chief on the many issues facing our National Forests and Grasslands.

Sincerely,

*James L. Caswell*

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