

Forest Service Recruitment:  
Human Resources Policy Memo

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To: Director, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service

From: Delilah Raybee, Director of Human Resources

Re: Recruitment Strategy to Boost African American Employment

### **Overview**

The Forest Service must increase employment of ethnic minorities, especially African Americans, in order to bring its workforce in line with the general population and address allegations of discrimination. A diverse workforce which reflects the population of the country is better suited to fulfill the broader goals of American government, beyond specific agency goals. Human Resources advocates a recruitment policy to encourage active recruitment of underrepresented ethnic groups, especially African Americans. The military has been successful in recruiting a diverse group of young people looking for challenging and rewarding opportunities. The Forest Service should adopt a similar recruitment strategy in order to benefit both the agency and the workforce.

### **Definitions and Background**

Recruitment is the first step in the employment process, and if that does not yield a substantial number of qualified candidates, the rest of the process will be compromised (Shafritz, 2001, p. 242). In order to recruit qualified applicants, the U.S. Merit System Protection Board (1994) advocates methods to reach potential candidates where they are, such as maintaining relationships with university career centers. Currently, African Americans feel discriminated against in the Forest Service (Spencer, 2004). Discrimination can lead to low motivation (Shafritz, 2001, p. 423) and is also unaccepted by the general population.

The changing demographics of the workforce have impacted Forest Service recruitment. As the workforce gets younger and more diverse, the traditional white, male Forest Service workforce has changed. A watershed change occurred as a result of the 1994 Federal Workforce Restructuring Act. Many top managers, who were mostly white males in their 50's or older, accepted early retirement and accompanying incentives, known as buyouts. The hiring freeze that had been in place was lifted, creating opportunities to further diversify the workforce through hiring. Hiring targets were changed with the goal of having fewer managers and more field staff (Walsh, 1994). Now, ten years later, the Forest Service is still working toward diversity. The next logical step is targeted hiring of ethnic minorities, especially African Americans.

The changing nature of Forest Service work also affects workforce needs. A change away from traditional forestry and towards watershed management means that the agency needs to hire scientists from a growing number of specialties, not just foresters (Walsh, p. 4).

### **The Legal Environment of Forest Service Recruiting**

Attention to race in recruiting is a complicated social, moral and legal issue. As the Supreme Court has moved from generally enforcing to generally discouraging Affirmative Action, no one would argue that race is not an important issue in analysis of hiring and employment. U.S. code Title 5; section 7201 encourages a special effort to recruit underrepresented minorities. Employment of African Americans is lower in the Forest Service than in other federal agencies (Spencer, 2004). As a result of this and other perceived discriminations, several EEO complaints have been filed against the Forest Service. These complaints have gone unprocessed, while complaints by other racial groups have not. Consequently, class action lawsuits have been filed by African Americans against the agency.

Resolving these claims and lawsuits will help the image of the agency among African Americans. Resolution is a necessary step to increase successful recruitment and retention of African Americans in the Forest Service workforce.

### **Implementing Active Recruitment**

When using agency executives in recruitment, it is important to manage their time so that participation in recruiting does not take away from other work. During certain seasons, more time may be spent on recruiting. If everyone sees recruiting as essential to the success of the agency mission, valuable time spent on recruiting will not be seen as wasted. Former seasonal workers can be employed or asked to volunteer as recruiters. A recruitment budget should be created and maintained. In an effort to maximize the impact of recruitment dollars, the agency should follow Merit Board (2004) recommendations and cultivate relationships with universities and employment centers.

Students in summer employment programs gain knowledge of Forest Service work. Those students who demonstrate exceptional potential should be targeted for recruitment. If African American students do not see African Americans in the full-time workforce, they could be discouraged from seeking permanent positions themselves. This dynamic creates a self-perpetuating cycle which can be counteracted through student hires. The more African Americans are employed and promoted by the Forest Service, the more likely they will be to employment in the Agency.

### **Active Recruitment as Practiced by the U.S. Military**

As the needs of the Military and the demographics of the workforce have changed, recruitment strategies have changed (Williams 2004, pp 11-14). The military sought to transform its personnel system to employ larger numbers of individuals at lower ranks, and give higher

compensation to those in higher ranks (p. 8). Positions such as highly skilled technical workers or clerical workers can receive much higher pay in the civilian workforce than in the military (p. 19). Qualified staff in certain areas, including recruiting, can receive Special Duty Assignment Pay (SDAP) (Hogan in Williams, p. 41). Other suggestions include hiring bonuses and pay differentials in hard to fill units (Gotz in Williams, p. 76).

The military employs experiments to test new policies before implementing them on a large scale. Testing indicated that educational benefits are valued by those that do or would enlist (Lien & Quester in Williams p. 244). Also, offers of enlistment bonuses were successfully implemented to recruit specific target groups into particular assignments (p. 245). Although widespread use of enlistment bonuses is not practical for the military, due to lack of resources and support, they could be implemented in the smaller-scale workforce of the Forest Service.

### **Why Implement Active Recruitment?**

Hiring bonuses, applied in targeted way to summer employees or highly sought-after applicants, could increase representation of those groups in the workforce. Specific applicants, such as African American male biologists, will likely be courted by many employers, due to their relative scarcity in the marketplace. Private companies or universities might be able to offer higher salaries. However, the Forest Service can leverage resources of other government agencies (such as educational loan repayments, health care, or retirement) to make federal employment more attractive, without extra costs to the agency. Small cash awards would be less costly than losing knowledge gained by summer employees who leave.

The agency should be aware of possible pitfalls to an active recruitment strategy. It is possible that the agency will receive too many applications. Applicants turned away will share this knowledge with their peers, and recruitment of African Americans could continue to be

challenging. An additional challenge is that recruiting is a particular skill that not all executives might have. Successful recruiting is demanding in terms of energy and time spent traveling to many college campuses. These challenges could be addressed in creative ways, such as by teaming up with other Federal agencies or state and local agencies, or training for top executives in recruitment methods. One more good option is implementing recruiter bonuses, such as done the military SDAP program.

### **Objections: White Male Backlash**

White males, and other groups not particularly targeted for recruitment, might object to the increased recruitment and hiring of African Americans. However, the attitude of the current generation towards race issues is informed by a general concept of tolerance. Working together will positively reinforce open minds. If attrition is used to manage diversity, the agency can continue to hire whites, while hiring more non-whites than it has in the past. According to a USDA (2000) report, the number of white males hired remained almost constant from the previous year, while minority recruitment increased. All members of the Forest Service workforce might benefit from general training on the benefits of diversity to organization.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The Forest Service has the opportunity to hire more African American employees, in order to create a more diverse workforce, and counter allegations of discrimination. Qualified candidates exist for the employment needs of the agency, and special effort should be made to find and hire those individuals. The military has successfully recruited a diverse workforce, and the research done by that agency can be used to benefit other federal agencies. A more diverse workforce will mean a better Forest Service.

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