

RURAL VOICES FOR CONSERVATION COALITION

Working together to find solutions to the ecological and economic challenges of the rural West.

April 2008

Workforce and Labor Talking Points

Congress

- 1. Congress should conduct an oversight hearing to follow up on the 2006 hearing to learn about any progress that the Forest Service and Department of Labor have made in tracking working conditions for forest workers, and whether working conditions have changed on the ground.*
- 2. Congress should ask the Bureau of Land Management what they have done to improve communications with the Department of Labor and increase labor law compliance through their contracting administration processes.*

Administration and Agencies

- 1. The Forest Service and the Wage and Hour Division should communicate regularly to the public about labor law enforcement and contract administration, and what these efforts have accomplished.*

The Administration's testimony and responses to questions for the Congressional Record about the working conditions hearing of March 1, 2006 promised a number of reports about the effects of their efforts to step up enforcement of contract provisions and coordination with the Department of Labor. We think it is critical for the Forest Service and the Wage and Hour division to help the public understand the improvements that they have made and to identify remaining gaps. To date, however, we have not received these reports. We would like:

- To receive any written information about these efforts;
 - For this information to be readily available on a web page, such as the Washington Office acquisitions web page; and
 - To work with the agencies to identify any gaps in information gathering and dissemination and search for solutions to address those gaps.
- 2. The Forest Service should make full use of best value contracting opportunities to:*
 - Reward contractors that perform high quality work, treat workers well, train workers, and provide rural community benefit;
 - Ensure that these criteria are equal or more important than price; and
 - Monitor the use of best value contracting to track progress towards these ends.
 - 3. The Forest Service should create performance measures that focus on outcomes, such as the quality of ecosystem improvements and economic opportunities rather than on "acres treated" and other outputs. This will help to reduce the pressure to accept below costs bids and increase incentives to investigate and report potential labor-law violations. Performance measures should include:*
 - a. Number and percentage of contracts that were collaboratively reviewed by the Department of Labor and Forest Service for labor law compliance.
 - b. Percentage of service and stewardship contracts that included non-monetary best value criteria and that these criteria are equal or more important than prices.
 - c. b. Percentage of service and stewardship contracts that are awarded to local communities.

Who We Are

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is comprised of western rural and local, regional, and national organizations that have joined together to promote balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the West. We are committed to finding and promoting solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and well being of rural communities. We come from California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, New Mexico, Montana, Arizona, and Colorado.

For More Information

Cassandra Moseley
Ecosystem Workforce Program
541-346-4545
cmoseley@uoregon.edu

Lynn Jungwirth
Watershed Research & Training Center
530-628-4206
lynnj@hayfork.net

To learn more about RVCC visit: www.sustainablenorthwest.org/rvcc