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To: David C. Childs A-76comments/OMB/EOP@EOP
cc: "Dan Duefrene/R5/USDAFS" <dduefrene@fs.fed.us>
Subject: A76 Comment

December 18, 2002

Dear Mr. Daniels

I am a Forest Service employee that lives and works in a remote station. The Hayfork, Yolla Bolla, and Big Bar Ranger Stations (comprising 50% of the Shasta-Trinity National Forests) are all over 50 miles from the nearest sheriff's office. All Forest Service employees are level one law enforcement officers. The local population as well as visitors rely on the Forest Service for law, fire, and emergency medical response. In addition to cooperating with law enforcement officers, Forest Service personnel have an excellent record of cooperation between the various disciplines of resource management. For example, just last season as a wildlife technician I also reported the locations of salvage timber to the small sales officer, the condition of the riparian rehabilitation project to the hydrologist, road and culvert conditions to the watershed monitoring team, and the absence of campground maintenance at specific sites to the recreation technician. A private contractor in any of these disciplines can not operate in this most efficient manner.

Hunting is an integral part of our economy. The local businesses experience their highest profits during hunting season. As a field technician I have frequently been asked about the condition of the deer herd and forage while on the job. As a level one law enforcement officer I report fire and/or fish and game violations to the proper authorities. Although most field technicians are available to work overtime for hunter patrol, I have had more interactions with the public en route to my regular project work.

The town of Hayfork (Hayfork Ranger District) is still dealing with the economic downturn the area took with the closing of the Sierra Pacific Mill and the continual loss of local federal positions. The local economy cannot withstand the loss of even more local jobs. Already 50% of the businesses are closed and boarded up. The substantial downsizing and reorganization programs (resulting in local job loss) that have been occurring in the Forest Service since I joined the organization in 1986 have also decimated the economy of the Platina (Yolla Bolla Ranger District). Platina used to have 30+ students in the K-8 local school. Currently, there are seven students. When it drops to six the school will close. There is also talk of closing the Platina Post Office.

The number of persons actually out patrolling the forest has continually gone down while the number of managers, especially at the Supervisor's and Regional Offices continues to go up. A private contractor will have neither the obligation, time, or knowledge to deal with integrated resource management or visitors. The American people, the owners of the National Forest lands, deserve more responsible stewardship of the resource. It will negatively impact the resources and visitor trade if Smokey's representatives are not available to inform, direct, advise, and if necessary, rescue visitors or enforce federal regulations.

Sincerely,
Sandra Fleming