

VERMONT FOREST SERVICE EMPLOYEE NAMED REGIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR

ROCHESTER RESIDENT PUT COMMUNITY BEFORE SELF IN EARLY TROPICAL STORM IRENE RECOVERY EFFORT

RUTLAND, VT. U.S. Forest Service (USFS) officials announced today that Michael Klingensmith has been named the Eastern Region's 2011 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. Klingensmith has served as a law enforcement officer assigned to the Rochester and Middlebury Ranger Districts of the Green Mountain National Forest since 2000. He served as a U.S. Park Ranger for the National Park Service for ten years before joining the U.S. Forest Service. Klingensmith is being recognized not only for demonstrating a significant commitment to the agency and his profession, but also for earning the respect of his peers, the public and members of cooperating law enforcement agencies. Klingensmith's professionalism and dedication to public service is obvious to those that know and work with him.

In August 2011 the remnants of tropical storm Irene caused extensive road and bridge washouts, knocking out power and phone lines and heavily damaging many homes. Several small communities within the Rochester Ranger District were without power and were not accessible by road for a week or more. In the initial response to the devastation caused by tropical storm Irene, Klingensmith and the Rochester District Ranger, Greg Smith, scouted and identified possible ingress and egress routes for multiple medical situations and identified routes suitable for carry out evacuation of time critical patients across mountain roads that had not been used for decades.

"Michael's response in the crisis that followed Tropical Storm Irene is a testament to his professionalism and his ability to get things done. His actions were critical to keeping employees and members of the local community safe and informed," said Mary King, Special Agent in Charge for Forest Service's Eastern Regional Office in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. "Through Michael's leadership and resourcefulness we were able to not only serve the public but reassure them that emergency relief, equipment and supplies were on the way, relieving some of their stress regarding immediate needs for assistance," added King.

A single Vermont State Trooper was the only other law enforcement officer in the area. The Trooper and Klingensmith made dozens of initial contacts and checks on people with critical needs, using a list that had been generated through the State Emergency Operations Center and routed via radio to Klingensmith. Because of Klingensmith's knowledge of the Incident Command System, the Vermont State Police requested that he set up Incident Command in the community of Stockbridge. Klingensmith organized public meetings, set up an emergency shelter, food and fuel distribution systems, two helispots, and a communications hub using a satellite internet connection in a private residence. While his friends and neighbors were reeling from the storm, Klingensmith rose above the call of duty and worked with municipal leaders to organize a successful and safe relief effort in their devastated communities.

“Michael’s integration of the work of the Forest Service with those of the local community earned both him, and our agency, an immense amount of respect for our mission and our capabilities,” said Colleen Madrid, Forest Supervisor for the Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests. “Following Irene, Michael demonstrated an unusually high degree of stamina and willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty. His actions are most definitely deserving of recognition as Forest Service Regional Law Enforcement Officer of the Year,” concluded Madrid.

Klingensmith, his wife, and family live in Rochester, Vermont where they are active in the community.

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