

February 1, 2007

Chief-Designate Abigail Kimbell
U.S. Forest Service
Sidney R. Yates Bldg.
201 14th Street, SW
4th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Ms. Kimbell:

We are writing you to express our concerns about your past involvement in retaliation against U.S. Forest Service whistleblowers during your tenure as Supervisor of the Bighorn National Forest. As you know, the independent U.S. Office of Special Counsel found you culpable in acts of illegal retaliation against several of your employees.

Your promotion to the top position at the Forest Service may be regarded as an ominous sign by conscientious employees within your agency who may feel the need to express disagreement with agency actions they feel are illegal, imprudent or contrary to agency policy.

We would urge you to take affirmative steps to reassure your workforce that you do not regard candor as a career killer. In particular, we would strongly suggest that you –

1. Adopt a zero tolerance policy towards whistleblower retaliation and make certain that policy is directly communicated to all managers and supervisors;
2. Review all pending personnel cases, especially whistleblower complaints, and seriously consider immediate settlement of any cases that you believe have merit; and
3. Put forward an explanation to all agency employees of your actions on the Bighorn National Forest relative to the settlement of whistleblower claims negotiated by the Office of Special Counsel.

Failure to address these issues could be interpreted as a signal that you intend to use improper reprisal as a management tool. We sincerely hope that is not the case.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ruch
Executive Director
Public Employees for
Environmental Responsibility (PEER)

Tom Devine
Legal Director
Government Accountability Project