



## Service First



**Background:** Service First was a joint Bureau of Land Management (BLM)/ Forest Service (FS) initiative designed to improve customer service by providing streamlined, one-stop shopping across agency jurisdictional boundaries for public land users. Authority for Service First was provided by legislation in 1997 covering only BLM and FS. That legislation was recently amended to include National Park Service (NPS) and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are currently considering whether or not they should also seek Service First authority.

### **What is Service First?**

Service First provides legal authority for the FS, NPS, FWS and BLM to carry out shared or joint management activities to achieve mutually beneficial resource management goals. Service First authority has been used primarily for collocating offices, joint permitting, shared management and single points of contact for resource programs.

### **Why Do Service First?**

- Reduces costs by pooling human resources and property
- Eliminates redundant efforts
- Increases responsive problem solving
- Provides one stop shopping to the public by reducing points of contacts
- Leverages employee skills and expertise across the land management agencies
- Enables better focus on watersheds and landscape management
- Provides customer convenience and improved delivery of programs
- Enhances communication

### **Lessons Learned**

- Service First is only a tool, it will not provide an answer to every situation
- It offers an on the ground problem solving device but requires senior level management support
- It requires significant effort to overcome institutional and cultural barriers
- It allows employees to be more pro-active and become initiators of change
- Service First works best when clearly perceived by the field manager as an effective tool to increase job productivity and efficiency

### **Sample Results (Oregon/Washington)**



- Heritage protection has been improved by having one Heritage staff and one Native American coordinator for BLM and FS in two states. This has facilitated work with the State Historic Preservation Officers and Tribes by having the single point of contact

- Fleet management under Service First has produced significant savings particularly with heavy equipment and ATVs. All vehicles are available for use by all employees. Vehicle utilization was more efficient after bridging a cultural barrier described by BLM employees as “overcoming fear of green trucks.”

- In Oregon and Washington, many BLM/FS offices have already been colocated. Savings in space costs are substantial and collocation has improved relationships among employees. BLM expects to combine 11 out of 15 of its Oregon/Washington offices within 15 years.

### **Keys to Success**

- Collocation greatly increases the chance of success
- Good communication is essential to overcoming the cultural divide
- Make pragmatic business choices for both the agencies and customers
- Focus employees not on “What can we do” but "What do we want to do”

### **Issues Still Looking for Creative Solutions**

- Radio communications which are interoperable with standardized handheld equipment, etc.
- Shared computer systems with standardized operating systems and software
- “Agency-neutral” office space guidelines and construction requirements to eliminate rigid individual agency standards