
It's A New Day

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"It is a new day . . . yesterday's obstacles are not necessarily today's obstacles and yesterday's relationships need not be tomorrow's relationships. Do not be encumbered by what was but explore the new possibilities before you and enjoy the results!"

As I reflect upon these thoughts, as recently shared by the Chief's Transition Team, I realize how fitting these words seem in light of the many recent engineering efforts. We have faced some big challenges and successfully turned them into opportunities to help set the course for the future of the Forest Service and of engineering.

In the January-June 1999 edition of *Engineering Field Notes*, I shared with you a "Vision of Opportunity" for helping the Agency meet its mission of caring for the land and serving people. I focused upon four areas in which we could make short- and long-term impacts: buildings and facilities, geospatial data, watershed restoration, and forest roads. Over the past 6 months, Forest Service (FS) leadership, Congress, and our external customers and partners have demonstrated heightened awareness of, attention to, and support of our forest infrastructure. Through our collective energy, creativity, and technical expertise, we have made great progress and set in motion a new plan for the future of our forest infrastructure.

In my 1999 article, I discussed the magnitude of the facilities problem: over 25,000 buildings (not including recreation facilities), most over 30 years old, many beyond their useful life and failing to meet current codes and standards, and at current budget levels, on a 300-year rotation schedule. Our need to manage and fund facilities differently and more effectively evolved into a new and viable alternative, the concept of a Working Capital Fund (WCF) for facilities.

In November 2000, the WCF concept was presented to the National Leadership Team (NLT). Thanks to the hard work and cooperative effort of a number of folks, we developed a detailed recommended alternative that was further refined and presented at the July NLT meeting in Washington, DC. The team decided that:

1. The WCF program will start up in FY 2004.
2. Facilities master planning will be mandatory and must be completed by the end of FY 2003.
3. Collections for WCF will begin in FY 2004 at \$.50 per square foot and will increase at the rate of \$.50 per square foot per year. There will be no variations in rates between regions or stations.
4. The initial program will only include WCF for maintenance.
5. The NLT will address replacement of facilities in FY 2005.
6. An implementation team will be chartered to work out the details to successfully implement the program.

I applaud the persistent hard work of the regions, stations, and particularly the facility folks, on laying the groundwork for the NLT discussion, understanding, and demonstrated program support. We identified the need to do business differently and we are well on our way to implementing a long-term solution that will help to reduce our facilities backlog maintenance.

We successfully communicated the magnitude of our infrastructure's critical backlog of deferred maintenance. Between the National Fire Plan for fire facilities--Title IV, and the Land and Conservation Fund--Title VIII, our program funding to address the backlog of deferred maintenance was increased by over \$90 million. To accommodate the increased workload for meeting our new program commitments and existing program commitments required us to pool our limited resources. I appreciate the dedication and energy that you have demonstrated in collectively accomplishing a very aggressive program of work.

In 1999 geospatial data was included as one of our areas of opportunity. A lot has happened since then. I've taken the assignment as the Chair of the Geospatial Executive Board (GEB). We've had a couple of very successful conferences, one in Baltimore, MD, and, most recently, one in Salt Lake City, UT, where we hosted over 300 employees from the Forest Service and from other Federal agencies. We are working to integrate all local, national, and international geospatial data for forest and project planning and we've formed a users' group, the Geospatial Advisory Committee (GAC), that has already planned and facilitated training through the Geospatial Service and Technology Center (GSTC) and the Remote Sensing Applications Center (RSAC).

GSTC and RSAC and geotronic and geographic information systems (GIS) units have been providing a lot of training to the field on how to use geospatial information and technologies in solving natural resource management issues through the National Geospatial Applications Helpdesk, Web sites, CD ROMs, and through both onsite and offsite classes. We are working to further enhance the centers' capabilities to effectively produce and acquire geospatial data to serve the field units to support transportation issues, planning and inventory, forest planning, wildland fire suppression, and other major national initiatives and rulemaking efforts.

We've committed to integrating applications with both the INFRA and ALP databases--two areas of immediate concern for engineering through the GSTC/RSAC intranet clearinghouse. On the national scene, we are working to standardize FS geospatial data (fall 2001) through the Federal Geographic Data Committee. My hat is off to all of the technical folks for standardizing their data and their processes. I've been amazed at the substantial progress that's been made across their areas.

I'm proud of you engineering folks who have invested an amazing amount of energy in transportation issues over the past 2 years. Many of you have been involved in the development of a new Road Policy, or the Roads Analysis training, or the Roadless Conservation Rule, or the TEA 21 Seminars for Line Officers. Together you are establishing the Forest Service as a leader in advancing the science and practice of managing a transportation system in an environmentally sustainable way.

Because of your efforts we have substantially completed an inventory of our roads and are well on our way to having the condition and cost data necessary to meet our fiscal accountability goals—Good Work and Thanks to All!

We have made major progress on many forests in reducing the adverse impacts of roads on watersheds. The regions have concentrated their "10 percent funds" on reducing the amount of sediment from roads and trails that is getting into waterways. We have completed several outstanding sedimentation reduction projects. We have been able to demonstrate how forest personnel are working successfully to restore watersheds from the before and after photographs of 10 percent projects that you have submitted. Major progress is being made to identify and replace culverts that are barriers to the passage of fish and other aquatic organisms. You have worked to be full team members in watershed restoration. Through these efforts we are developing better relationships and forging new ones as we continue to find new avenues to further watershed restoration.

We have established ourselves as a public road authority, working to ensure access to National Forest System (NFS) lands by obtaining authorities currently available to other public road authorities. We will begin working with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Congress, and the States to establish clear procedures for providing public road access to NFS lands through RS-2477 and other right-of-way acquisition methods.

Finally, we have worked hard to establish the relationships, educate our stakeholders, and lay the groundwork for funding Public Forest Service roads. Together with our many Federal, State, County, and Tribal partners, we recognize the importance of providing a "seamless transportation system" to the public.

Our new Chief, Dale Bosworth, and our new Associate Chief, Sally Collins, have been very involved with engineering and have made it clear that our roles are critical to the Agency's success as we continue to provide new and better service for the people of the United States.