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## Director's Update

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*Vaughn Stokes*  
*Director of Engineering*  
*Washington Office*

It has been an exciting few months since I last reported to you. During the holiday season the Office of Inspector General auditors requested verification of our real property—an integral part of achieving a clean audit of our financial welfare. Despite the unfortunate timing of the unanticipated request, the volume of work, and the attendant safety issues, you rose to the occasion and completed the surveys safely and effectively, completing more than 98 percent of the required records. All of you deserve a round of applause!

Although we did not receive a clean bill of health on the FY 2001 financial audit, your efforts have brought us much closer to that goal. With your continued effort, we expect to achieve a clean bill of financial health in the near future.

We have had a few surprise personnel moves over the last few months. Mike Ash has left his duties as the Deputy Director of Engineering to lead a team in reviewing the Sierra Nevada Framework in Region 5. Chief Bosworth and Regional Forester Blackwell personally requested Mike's services. Mike will be missed tremendously in this office, but our loss is the region's gain.

Sam Morigeau has been appointed as Mike Ash's successor in the Deputy Director position. Sam brings a wealth of experience to Washington Office Engineering from the private and Government sectors. The next edition of *Engineering Field Notes* will feature an article on Sam to let you know more about him. Please congratulate Sam and wish him well in representing us in the future.

We are still moving forward on our journey to implement the Working Capital Fund (WCF) for facilities. Although typically we are the primary caregivers of our buildings and utilities, we are not the owners. The field line officers are ultimately responsible and accountable for the facilities condition. Line officers from the field led the WCF team in developing the policy and are now providing team leadership in directing its implementation. As team members, we at the Washington Office, with regional assistance, provide information to the line officers leading the teams.

What changes are in store for you? An integral part of the WCF policy is identifying which facilities we need to keep and maintain. Most units have a facilities master plan (FMP) in place that was completed primarily by engineering personnel. A key change under the new policy stipulates a second-level review and approval of the forest FMPs by the regional offices. It is strongly urged that all plans be reviewed by an interdisciplinary team and updated to reflect future needs. We are required to have an updated FMP by the end of 2003.

The Washington Office is also providing direction to clarify significant misunderstandings about issuing permits for commercial use of National Forest System Roads (NFSRs) through an interim directive to the Road System Operations Handbook (FSH 7709.59). The directive makes it clear that the public, including commercial users, is authorized by 36 CFR 212.6c to use open NFSRs. There is no decision to be made regarding whether to allow commercial use of open roads in the National Forest System.

This changes the practice of the last 10 years. During that time, it was incorrectly believed that there was a decision to be made about allowing commercial use of open roads and that any ramifications of activities on private land facilitated by the use of NFSRs had to be analyzed through National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) procedures. The Interim Directive (ID) will end the era of lengthy consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service prior to issuing road use permits. The ID also clarifies when NEPA and ESA procedures are applicable to road use permits, such as when a commercial hauler requests to reconstruct a road to facilitate a proposed haul. Requirements in FSH 7709.59 for commercial haulers to perform and/or share maintenance will remain in effect. (For more details, see our Web site at <http://fswweb.wo.fs.fed.us/directives/fsh/7709.59/>)

The regional engineers and I continue to work with outside interests to promote the concept of seamless transportation through the use of the Public Forest Service Roads (PFSR). Based on your hard work, we have produced a booklet for each State that shows the proposed PFSR system. This thorough documentation should greatly further efforts to encourage funding support for PFSRs under the next reauthorization of the Transportation Act in FY 2003.

With our summer field season rapidly approaching, I want to place special emphasis on working safely. **Safety is our number one priority.** Don't hesitate to stop an action immediately if you see an unsafe action unfolding. It is always best to err on the side of safety to prevent a possible accident rather than having to deal with a fellow employee's injury or death or a trauma to yourself.

Thanks again. Keep up the hard work, but do it **safely.**