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## Director's Update

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### Searching for a New Paradigm: No More Business as Usual

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

Another field season has come and gone. The impact on each of you has been heavy this year. The fire situation across the national forests continues to dominate and disrupt the way we traditionally do business. We must do our jobs more efficiently and complete projects in a more timely manner. Again this field season, we supported fire with \$120 million from our construction accounts. Supporting fire efforts is a top Agency priority. At the same time, however, we are obligated to serve the public through funding a wide array of projects. In the near future, we will be working with the regional engineers to look at ways to obligate funds more efficiently and effectively.

Among this year's major accomplishments are the January completion of the Roads Analysis Process (RAP) and the September completion of master facilities plans. I hear about good results from these efforts, and I hope they were not just exercises to keep you busy. I hear how people used these efforts to focus their work and priorities. Units are identifying up to 25 percent of their facilities as unnecessary and adjusting their inventory to meet current needs. Such actions will help reduce our fixed costs and deferred maintenance requirements.

We continued work toward reauthorizing the transportation bill. The President's bill reflects our success in obtaining a designated Public Forest Service Road (PFSR) category. The designated PFSR category will establish funding, as yet undetermined, where no funding existed before. The program will enhance our seamless network with States and counties, enabling the public to better access their national forests.

In this issue we announce the 2002 *Engineering Field Notes* article award winners. Congratulations to these winners. I encourage all of you to look at the unique work that you are doing. If your efforts make projects more effective and save the Agency funds, please take time to write an article and submit it for *Engineering Field Notes*. Sharing this information can save the Agency considerable funds if other units use or adapt your techniques. Please contact *Engineering Field Notes* Editor Sandy Grimm at SandraGrimm/wo/usdafs@fsnotes for help on submitting articles.

Efforts to further the competitive sourcing initiative have demanded a lot of hard work from all of you. The thorough analysis and documentation have already shown positive results by more clearly identifying the quality, characteristics, and volume of the work that is currently being performed by USDA Forest Service employees. Many of the studies have already demonstrated that, in fact, the Agency's employees are providing valuable, appropriate services at a reasonable cost to the public. I especially value

the efforts of individuals in the engineering organization in supporting this initiative with their time, energy, and dedication to providing sound data.

I want to re-emphasize my commitment to valuing all of our employees. In my experience, treating others as we would like to be treated works well. We will have new challenges in 2004. How we address these challenges is up to us. I am very pleased with the innovative hard work you demonstrate time and again in all our programs to better serve the public and maintain or exceed our standards of excellence in our stewardship of natural resources. I encourage you to use your experience, your creative energy, and your mastery of evolving technology to establish new benchmarks for improving our processes and procedures.

The summer field season is behind us. The days are shorter and the air is a little bit crisper. It's time to think about your driving habits and what new safety issues you may encounter in the winter season that brings black ice, rain, snow, sleet, and other challenging weather conditions. Know the weather forecast, carry adequate safety equipment, and be prepared to slow down to meet the unexpected. Your safety is our number one priority, and it should be yours!