The Honorable Robert C. Byrd  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
S-128 Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-6025

Dear Senator Byrd:


Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary  

Enclosure
The Honorable David R. Obey
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-218 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6015

Dear Congressman Obey:


Sincerely,

Ann M. Veneman
Secretary

Enclosure
The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Committee on Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-6250

Dear Senator Lieberman:


Sincerely,

Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure
The Honorable Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Committee on Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6143

Dear Congressman Waxman:


Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure
The Honorable Ted Stevens  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
S-128 Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510-6025  

Dear Mr. Chairman:


Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary  

Enclosure
The Honorable C.W. "Bill" Young  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
II-218 Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6015

Dear Mr. Chairman:


Sincerely,

Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure
The Honorable Susan M. Collins
Chairman
Committee on Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-6250

Dear Madam Chairman:


Sincerely,

Ann M. Veneman
Secretary

Enclosure
The Honorable Tom Davis  
Chairman  
Committee on Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6143

Dear Mr. Chairman:


Sincerely,  

Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure
The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW., Room 7000
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

We are enclosing two copies of the Department of Agriculture’s statement of action taken on
the recommendations in the U.S. Government Accountability Office Report GAO-04-652,
dated June 14, 2004, entitled “FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT: Additional Guidance on
Community Involvement Could Enhance Effectiveness of Stewardship Contracting.”

Copies of the statement, prepared by the Department’s Forest Service, are also being furnished
to the U.S. Senate Committees on Governmental Affairs and Appropriations, the U.S. House
Committees on Appropriations and Government Reform, and the Office of Management and
Budget.

Sincerely,

Phyllis K. Fong
Inspector General

Enclosure
NOV 16 2004

The Honorable Joshua B. Bolten
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Bolten:


Copies of the statement, prepared by the Department's Forest Service, are also being furnished to the U.S. Senate Committees on Governmental Affairs and Appropriations, the U.S. House Committees on Appropriations and Government Reform, and the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

Sincerely,

Phyllis K. Fong
Inspector General

Enclosure
The Consolidated Appropriations Resolution of 2003 allows the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (FS) to enter into stewardship agreements and contracts until September 30, 2013. Stewardship contracting allows the agency to achieve land management goals while meeting local and rural community needs. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) was asked to conduct a review to determine the contracting and financial controls agencies use to ensure accountability in managing stewardship contracting projects and the steps agencies have taken to involve communities in the projects. The following addresses GAO's recommendation made to the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior as a result of their review.

GAO Recommendation

To enhance the ability of stewardship contracting projects to meet local needs and improve public trust in the agencies, GAO recommended that the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior direct the agencies to issue additional guidance on community involvement. Such guidance should identify and encourage the use of best practices in seeking and incorporating community input and establish minimum requirements for seeking community involvement on each stewardship contracting project.

USDA Response

The USDA FS plan is to provide guidance on the basic principles and practices of collaboration, including some suggestions on how to initiate collaboration and continue it through the life of the project, in the stewardship contracting chapter of the Renewable Resources Handbook (FSH 2409.19, chapter 60). This material should be available in the Renewable Resources Handbook by August 2005.

In addition, FS is contracting with the Pinchot Institute for Conservation to develop stewardship contracting collaboration training materials for use by the agency and local communities. We anticipate that the training materials will be available to the field by June 2005.

FS is committed to monitoring and assessing the use of stewardship contracts. The results of monitoring and assessments will be shared with field staff to assist in designing and implementing projects. FS has posted on its website lessons learned from the field on collaboration, along with a contact name and phone number, as well as key resources on collaboration. The address of the website is:
http://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/projects/stewardship/collaboration/index

FS will be continually adding resources and lessons learned to this website.

We believe that an independent third party evaluation is the best way to gauge our performance in community involvement. FS has used an independent third party to monitor and evaluate the agency's successes and failures in stewardship contracting since 2000. FS will continue use of an independent third party to monitor and evaluate our performance in working with local communities on a programmatic basis in accordance with the stewardship contracting legislation. The feedback from the third party will assist the agency in refining policy and handbook direction for stewardship contracting and how the agency interacts and engages local communities.

Our intent is to provide tools to our front line managers in the form of (1) guidance on the basic principles of collaboration in FSH 2409.19 Chapter 60; (2) training in collaboration; (3) teaching by example, by sharing the lessons learned online in collaboration and community involvement; and (4) monitoring the effectiveness of our performance with local communities using an independent third party.