

Center
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California
Native
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Native Plant Conservation Campaign

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Testimony of
Emily B. Roberson, Ph.D.
Director
Native Plant Conservation Campaign
Regarding
Botany staffing of USDA Forest Service
and USDI Bureau of Land Management
March 26, 2002

The Native Plant Conservation Campaign (NPCC) is a nationwide network of native plant societies and other plant conservation organizations. The NPCC is a project of the Center for Biological Diversity and the California Native Plant Society. Our mission is to promote appreciation and conservation of native plant species and communities through education, law, policy, land use and management. Currently the NPCC represents more than 46,000 laypersons and professional botanists in 13 states. The NPCC requests that Congress augment the budget of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) by \$19,174,640 and that of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) by \$17,298,860 to adequately staff botany programs within these agencies.

Background

Americans treasure our public lands. They are central to our quality of life and to our economic well being. Botanists are among the most important resource managers on public lands, but Federal land management agencies are severely understaffed in botany. This is a serious problem for a number of reasons.

First, plants are the foundations of ecosystems. Proper management of native vegetation is a primary factor determining the quality and quantity of goods, services and enjoyment that Americans derive from their public lands. Second, eagles, bears, salmon, and other native wildlife that the public enjoys require healthy, well-managed native plant communities for food, cover, and safe habitats to raise their young. Third, rare species conservation, timber harvest, recreation, energy development, livestock management and other important programs all require input and review from qualified botanists to be successful. Fourth, success of these programs means better ecosystem health and fewer costly and time-consuming conflicts under the Federal Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and other laws. Finally, the President's current priorities for public lands include increased emphasis on fire and invasive

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weed management to prevent further ecological degradation. Because both priorities focus on vegetation, botanists are integral to implementing them effectively.

Nationwide, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employs only 68 botanists to manage vegetation on its 264 million acres (1 botanist per 4 million acres). The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) employs 128 botanists across 191 million acres of National Forests (1 botanist per 1.5 million acres). These staffing levels are clearly inadequate to meet the agencies' duty to taxpayers or the needs of the public lands.

Request

We request the following augmentations as the minimum necessary to begin to move the agencies towards adequate botany staffing:

- Each USFS Ranger District should be staffed with at least one full time series 430 botanist.
- BLM office organization varies considerably from state to state. Therefore our recommendation is based on acres managed, rather than numbers of districts or offices. We propose that BLM employ one series 430 botanist for each 500,000 acres under management.

Based on a GS-11 salary (\$41,684/yr), these staff levels would require the following budget augmentations:

Agency	Current FTEs	FTE Goal	Needed	Additional Cost (over current budget)
USFS	128	543 (1 FTE per Ranger District)	415	\$17,298,860
BLM	68	528 (1 FTE per 0.5 million acres)	460	\$19,174,640
TOTAL				\$36,473,500.00

We hope that you will take this proposal and these issues into account as you formulate budgets for FY 2003 and beyond.

Sincerely,



Emily B. Roberson, Ph.D.
Director