

October 4, 2024

Randy Moore
Chief, United State Forest Service
United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: FY 2025 Temporary and Seasonal Hiring - Request for Exemptions for Avalanche Forecasters

Dear Chief Moore,

The 42 undersigned organizations and businesses have a shared interest in winter recreation and avalanche safety on Forest Service lands. We are extremely concerned that the recently announced FY 2025 1039 seasonal hiring freeze and decision not to extend tours for permanent seasonal employees in FY 2025 will be detrimental to the functionality of the fourteen Avalanche Centers operated by the U.S. Forest Service and result in significant negative impacts to public safety this winter. While we understand that the Forest Service is facing significant budget constraints, for reasons of public safety, we request that you exempt 1039 avalanche forecasters from the hiring freeze. Furthermore, we request that you allow forecasters employed either as seasonal or permanent seasonal employees to extend their tours of duty beyond the established 13 or 18 two week pay periods, as necessary to complete the work required to fulfill the obligations of each Avalanche Center.

Forest Service Avalanche Centers provide critical services to winter recreation communities and are models of efficiency. Only a small number of people, all highly trained professionals, work as Forest Service avalanche forecasters. There is no excess capacity within the Forest Service avalanche program and any reduction in personnel will directly translate to reduced avalanche forecasting and a reduced ability to investigate major avalanches and fatalities. Timely investigations yield important information about the causes of an avalanche, providing critical information to prevent future tragedies. This information can also provide closure to loved ones when an avalanche results in a fatality. In the midst of a storm cycle an avalanche center may be fully taxed investigating multiple avalanches while also doing the work necessary to provide regular forecasts across the entire forecast area. As you said in your recent remarks, it is not possible to get the same amount of work done with fewer employees. Forest Service Avalanche Centers provide crucial tools for public safety and it is critical that these centers operate at full capacity this, and every, winter.

Forecasting is weather-driven work. Accurate avalanche forecasting requires significant time in the field alongside early mornings in the office analyzing data and disseminating reports. In many places, the public expects, and relies upon, avalanche centers issuing daily forecasts. In order to be fairly compensated, it is crucial that forecasters can earn and use comp time. Often, it is only possible to use accrued comp time at the end of the season, which may fall after the employee's tour of duty ends. Furthermore, avalanches do not follow a predictable daily or

monthly calendar. Avalanche season may extend beyond a tour of duty - it is not uncommon for the avalanche season to begin October and extend into June across much of the United States.

Snow is already falling in many Western mountain ranges and avalanche season will soon begin. Tens of millions of Americans engage in winter recreation on Forest Service lands and rely on the tools provided by Forest Service avalanche forecasters to work and recreate safely in avalanche terrain. Immediate action is needed to ensure that Forest Service Avalanche Centers are fully staffed before the end of the year.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue and request, again, that 1039 avalanche forecasters be exempt from the hiring freeze and that forecasters employed either as seasonal or permanent seasonal employees are allowed to extend their tours of duty as necessitated by the circumstances of this upcoming avalanche season.

Sincerely,

Winter Wildlands Alliance, Boise, ID
Access Fund, Estee Park, CO
The Avalanche Journal and American Avalanche Association, Driggs, ID
American Avalanche Institute, Longmont, CO
American Mountain Guides Association, Boulder, CO
Backwoods Mountain Sports, Ketchum, ID
Beartooth Mountain Guides, Inc., Red Lodge & Cooke City, MT
Big Mountain Dreams, Park City, UT
Bridger Bowl Ski Area, Bozeman, MT
Cascade Backcountry Alliance, Issaquah, WA
Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, Twain Harte, CA
Colorado Mountain Club, Gunnison, CO
Cooke City Sinclair and Lodging Inc, Cooke City, MT
Cryosphere Geophysics and Remote Sensing Research Group (CryoGARS),
Boise State University, Boise, ID
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, North Bend, WA
Friends of the Inyo, Bishop, CA
Friends of the Routt Backcountry, Steamboat Springs, CO
Granite Backcountry Alliance, Conway, NH
High Country Conservation Advocates, Crested Butte, CO
Lookout Coffee, San Jose CA
Montana Alpine Guides, Bozeman, MT
Montana Backcountry Alliance, Missoula, MT
Montana Mountaineering Association, Bozeman, MT
Nordic and Backcountry Skiers Alliance of Idaho, Ketchum, ID
Outdoor Alliance, Washington, DC
Outdoor Alliance California, Truckee, CA
Perpetual Weekend, Glenwood Springs, CO

Public Land Solutions, Moab, UT
Rtpacific, Santa Cruz, CA
Snowbound Solutions LLC, Boise, ID
Snowlands Network, Los Gatos, CA
Stock Alpine LLC, Anchorage, AK
Tahoe Area Mountain Bike Alliance, South Lake Tahoe, CA
Taos Mountain Alliance, Taos, NM
Tenth Mountain Division Hut Association, Inc, Aspen, CO
Teton Backcountry Alliance, Wilson, WY
The Gear Room, Cottonwood Heights, UT
The Mountaineers, Seattle, WA
The Northwest Avalanche Center, North Bend, WA
Wasatch Backcountry Alliance, Salt Lake City, UT
Wild Montana, Helena, MT
Wyoming Wilderness Association, Jackson, WY

Cc:

Chris French, Deputy Chief
Chad VanOrmer, Alaska Regional Forester
Jacqueline Buchanan, Pacific Northwest Regional Forester
Jennifer Eberlien, Pacific Southwest Regional Forester
Leanne Marten, Northern Regional Forester
Mary Farnsworth, Intermountain Regional Forester
Tony Dixon, Eastern Regional Forester

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