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August 29, 2005

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The Honorable Linda Springer
Director
United States Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20415-0001

Dear Director Springer:

Thank you for the participation of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in the August 12, 2005, Subcommittee hearing titled, *Tension in the Tinderbox: Finding Fairness for Federal Firefighter Compensation*. I would like to follow up with you on an issue that arose during the hearing regarding classification of Wildland Firefighters.

As you know, Wildland Firefighters employed by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior are currently classified as either a GS-0455 Range Technician or as a GS-0462 Forestry Technician. Similar to structure firefighters (0081 Fire Protection and Prevention Series) who are primarily responsible for fires in Federal buildings and military bases, Wildland Firefighters are the Federal Government's primary source of protection for Federal lands, including our national parks and forests. According to OPM, though, these employees have duties in addition to fighting fires, and therefore their classification description indicates that the duties of these employees are: "practical technical support in forestry or range research, marketing of forest or range resources, and the scientific management, protection, and development of forest or range resources."

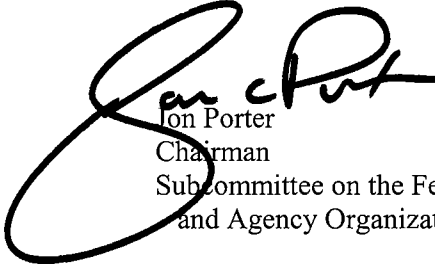
First, I believe that this definition may not adequately reflect the firefighting duties inherent in these positions. For example, a position description on the National Park Service website for a Wildland Firefighter [GS-0455/0462-04 Range/Forestry Technician (Fire)] explains that 70 percent of this type of employee's duties is related specifically to firefighting and only 30 percent of the duties is related to forest/range management. This seems to conflict with the classification description above, which indicates that forest/range "protection" is only a minor duty of a Forestry/Range Technician.

Secondly, and more importantly, I believe that this issue is fundamentally one of respect for our Wildland Firefighters who risk their lives to protect our natural resources, our property, and often our lives. It has come to my attention, at the hearing and otherwise, that the classification series title of Forestry/Range Technician may have a demoralizing effect on employees in this occupation whose duties are primarily those of a firefighter. These dedicated men and women are proud to be firefighters

and would like to be recognized as such. It is important that they be given a title that more accurately reflects the firefighting duties inherent within their positions.

I appreciate the commitment from OPM at the August 12 hearing to work with the Subcommittee on reevaluating the classification of Federal Wildland Firefighters. In light of this, I would request that OPM conduct a thorough evaluation of the duties assigned to Wildland Firefighters at each of the wildland firefighting agencies within the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior for the purpose of determining if any change is appropriate in the area of classification. Thank you again for your help on this matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Porter", is written over the typed name and title. The signature is stylized with large loops and a cursive-like flow.

Jon Porter
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce
and Agency Organization