



WASHINGTON



THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

February 24, 2003

National Governors Association
Hall of States
444 North Capitol Street
Washington, D.C. 20001-1512

Dear Governors:

We are pleased to inform you that the recently passed Omnibus Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2003 has authorized the U.S. Forest Service (USDA) and the Bureau of Land Management (USDI) to undertake, for a period of 10 years, "stewardship end results contracting projects." This legislation extends a concept that has been successfully tested by the Forest Service over the past five years. Stewardship end results contracts will help us achieve the President's vision of the Healthy Forests Initiative because they offer a way to do more work both in the wildland urban interface and on environmental restoration projects in forest and rangelands, watersheds and wildlife habitat.

This authority will be an important new part of the National Fire Plan that has advantages over traditional management tools. It allows federal land managers to offer long-term contracts for periods of up to ten years, to reduce management costs by exchanging goods for services, and to select local contractors on a best value basis. Stewardship contracts will help us restore and improve forest and rangeland conditions by engaging interested local organizations through a more collaborative process. They will enable us to work with local communities to create jobs, and develop new businesses to boost struggling rural economies, and to improve environmental conditions in the public lands around them. Additionally, any funds received that exceed the costs of the restoration services can be reinvested in additional environmental restoration efforts.

Collaboration with the states and local communities is integral to this effort and will be essential in identifying resource management outcomes we can all agree upon. We intend to involve states, counties, local communities and interested stakeholders in a public process to provide input on how to implement this new management tool. We are excited about the possibilities for stewardship contracts and look forward to working closely with you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Ann M. Veneman

Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture

/s/ Gale A. Norton

Gale A. Norton
Secretary of the Interior