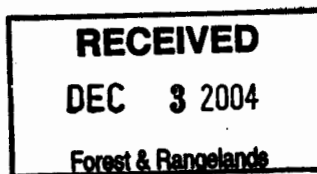




United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250



NOV 16 2004

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:

As required by 31 U.S.C. § 720 (Public Law 97-258), enclosed in triplicate is the Department of Agriculture's statement of the actions 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."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann Veneman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 16 2004

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:

As required by 31 U.S.C. § 720 (Public Law 97-258), enclosed in triplicate is the Department of Agriculture's statement of the actions 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."

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Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 16 2004

**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:**

**As required by 31 U.S.C. § 720 (Public Law 97-258), enclosed in triplicate is the Department of Agriculture's statement of the actions 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."**

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**Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary**

**Enclosure**



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 16 2004

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:

As required by 31 U.S.C. § 720 (Public Law 97-258), enclosed in triplicate is the Department of Agriculture's statement of the actions 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."

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Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure



**United States Department of Agriculture**

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 16 2004

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

**Dear Mr. Chairman:**

**As required by 31 U.S.C. § 720 (Public Law 97-258), enclosed in triplicate is the Department of Agriculture's statement of the actions 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."**

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**Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary**

**Enclosure**



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 16 2004

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As required by 31 U.S.C. § 720 (Public Law 97-258), enclosed in triplicate is the Department of Agriculture's statement of the actions 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."

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Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 16 2004

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:

As required by 31 U.S.C. § 720 (Public Law 97-258), enclosed in triplicate is the Department of Agriculture's statement of the actions 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."

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Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

NOV 16 2004

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:

As required by 31 U.S.C. § 720 (Public Law 97-258), enclosed in triplicate is the Department of Agriculture's statement of the actions 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."

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Ann M. Veneman  
Secretary

Enclosure





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Washington D.C. 20250



**NOV 16 2004**

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



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
Washington D.C. 20250



**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:

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 U.S. Government Accountability Office.

Sincerely,

Phyllis K. Fong  
Inspector General

Enclosure

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Statement of Action on the  
U.S. Government Accountability Office Report GAO-04-652,  
“FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT: Additional Guidance on Community Involvement Could  
Enhance Effectiveness of Stewardship Contracting”

October 21, 2004

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:

***Statement of Action on GAO-04-652, Stewardship Contracting***  
*Page 2*

<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.