



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Washington, D.C. 20250



FEB - 8 2005

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

As required by Public Law 107-203, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) hereby submits its investigative report of the Forest Service (FS) fatalities that occurred in the Cramer Fire in the Salmon-Challis National Forest in Idaho on July 22, 2003.

This statutory requirement stipulates that whenever an FS fatality is caused by wildfire entrapment or burnover, OIG shall “*conduct an investigation of the fatality . . . completely independent of, any investigation of the fatality that is conducted by the Forest Service.*”¹ After completing such an investigation, OIG is required to submit a report containing its investigative results to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Congress.

The OIG investigative report of the Cramer Fire fatalities is our third work product since September 2004 related to FS wildland fire activities and programs. On September 23, 2004, OIG issued two separate reviews. The first was the OIG audit report of the FS Firefighting Safety Program.² The audit examined FS procedures to implement safety recommendations and FS compliance with established firefighting safety practices. On the same day, OIG also issued an Informational Memorandum to the Chief, Forest Service, which provided an analytical overview as to whether common factors existed in the three most recent wildland fires involving FS fatalities.

To place OIG’s investigative findings on FS fatalities in the Cramer Fire in a broader context of how FS firefighting safety programs and management controls can be improved, brief summaries of the key findings of OIG’s Firefighting Safety Program Audit and its accompanying Informational Memorandum are contained in the first enclosure (Enclosure 1) to this letter. OIG’s official report to the Congress on our investigation of the fatalities at the Cramer Fire is provided in the second enclosure (Enclosure 2).

We hope you will find this report informative. Our intention is that the entirety of OIG’s work regarding FS firefighting actions and capabilities in 2004 will assist agency managers in improving their firefighting training, oversight, and effectiveness. Each year thousands of

¹ Public Law 107-203, enacted July 24, 2002.

² OIG Audit Report No. 08601-38-SF.

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FS personnel display dedication and skill in protecting vast areas of public forests and neighboring communities from devastating forest fires. A thorough examination of the facts and circumstances surrounding any FS fatalities that occur during these efforts can help agency officials refine and strengthen their firefighting policies and procedures and, thereby, limit such tragedies in the future. OIG extends its appreciation to the Chief, Forest Service and FS officials and regional personnel for their assistance and cooperation as OIG conducted this investigation.

A similar letter is being sent to The Honorable Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate, and The Honorable Mike Johanns, Secretary of Agriculture. Copies will be provided to the leadership of the congressional committees and subcommittees with oversight for the Forest Service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Phyllis K. Fong". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "F" and "g".

Phyllis K. Fong
Inspector General

2 Enclosures