



## USDA Forest Service Presidential Management Fellows Program

Unique among federal agencies, the Forest Service (FS) cultivates future leaders through a comprehensive leadership development program largely run by the future leaders themselves. We recruit and hire new talent through the federal Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program, and then welcome our future leaders with an extensive network of peers, direct engagement with agency leadership, challenging high-level assignments, and exposure to diverse parts of the agency.

Since 1982, the Forest Service has recruited new leaders through the PMF program, with more than 140 hired in the last 10 years. These new employees include recent Masters, JD, and PhD graduates from a variety of disciplines—including public policy, business management, economics, biology, forestry, natural resource management, landscape architecture, and law. In recent years, the Forest Service has averaged 12 to 15 new PMF hires per year.

Current PMFs and alumni hold a variety of positions within the agency and are stationed all across the country. The PMFs have proven themselves with demonstrated leadership, creative thinking, and passion that is helping the agency address challenging mission-related issues such as climate change, rising wildfire costs, emerging ecosystem service markets, and urbanization.

*The improved quality of life provided through public lands stewardship is something my family and I have experienced personally. I can think of no more rewarding professional mission.*

**Karl Malcolm**, PMF Class of 2011, Wildlife Ecologist  
Watershed, Wildlife, Air, and Rare Plants Program, Washington, DC

### Forest Service Innovations within the PMF Program

The FS PMF Program, in its current form, was established in 2002 and has earned a strong reputation for recruiting excellent talent. Thus, hiring managers across the agency compete to hire PMFs. PMF positions are filled at the GS-9 level or higher, and are aimed at hiring top-notch recent graduates.

**Partnering with Colleges and Universities:** FS PMFs help sustain, diversify, and expand the program by maintaining relationships with colleges and universities across the nation. This helps potential candidates get more information about the program from current PMFs and get questions answered by those currently in the program. The skills new employees gain through engaging in recruitment will be carried with them as they move into leadership roles within the agency.

**High-Level Leadership Involvement:** The PMF Advisory Board is distinctive in that it includes high-level FS leaders, including the Associate Chief of the Forest Service, in addition to Washington Office Staff and former PMFs. The Advisory Board also plays a role in mentoring the next generation of leaders. Furthermore, the Chief of the Forest Service directly supports the program by allocating funding for several PMF positions each year.

**Mentoring:** The FS PMF Program has garnered a high level of respect for its systematic support of new hires. Newly hired PMFs entering into the FS are immediately assigned a mentor from the

previous year's PMF graduates, and have the opportunity to learn and grow with the help and mentorship of advisory board members and senior FS leaders.

**Trust From the Start:** Each year, the PMFs host an orientation that provides new PMFs the chance to connect with one another and develop a sense of camaraderie.

*“Out the gate, the PMF program has offered me professional experiences that have been exciting, challenging, and exceptionally rewarding - I'm proud of what the program has done to further the agency's mission, and I'm grateful to have begun my Forest Service career as a PMF.”*

**Aaron Mayville.** PMF Class of 2012. Budget Hearing Coordinator for the Office of Strategic Planning, Budget and Accountability, Washington Office

**Self-Governing:** The success of the Forest Service PMF Program stems primarily from an autonomous and systematic organization run entirely by members. Each new PMF serves on one or more committees dedicated to ensuring the sustainability of the program. Committees include: Recruitment, Orientation, Mentoring, Retention, and others.

*“I love the sense of community that is created by the PMF cohort, and the unrivaled support of the Forest Service in the PMF program is phenomenal.”*

**Carter Deems,** PMF Class of 2013, Assistant Lands Officer  
Sierra National Forest, Region 5

## **Impacts of the PMF program in the Forest Service**

The program aims to break down cultural norms and challenge the agency's perception of leadership in order to help keep the Agency relevant in a rapidly changing world. Leadership positions held by current and former PMFs vary from forest supervisors, safety officers, project managers, district rangers and even advisers to the Chief. These positions demonstrate that individuals with strong skills, talent, a good work ethic, and commitment are great investments for the agency.

## **How the program works**

Presidential Management Fellows are identified by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) through a national competitive process. OPM gauges competency in critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and commitment to public service. These core competencies are built upon throughout the fellowship. A typical PMF fellowship consists of the following elements, but can vary somewhat with each individual's experience and qualifications:

Two-year, excepted service appointment at the GS-9 level, with promotion after the first year to GS-11, and conversion at the GS-11 or GS-12 level.\*

- Rotation assignments to other staffs, federal agencies, and/or outside organizations.
- Developmental assignments and at least 80 hours of formal training per year.
- OPM-sponsored orientation.

The Forest Service goes well beyond the required elements of the PMF program and also provides new employees with:

- An extensive and cohesive network of peers to give support and guidance.

- Direct leadership and management experience through stewardship of the program.
- Access to and mentorship from top executives and other current leaders.
- High-level, challenging assignments and leadership opportunities.
- Continued career support and mentorship for program alumni.

Through a unique innovation, the Forest Service PMF program was largely created, developed, and is implemented by the fellows themselves. We put future leaders in charge of their own development program with advice and counsel as needed from current leadership. The program is continually expanding and evolving to meet the needs of PMFs, helping these new employees quickly assume leadership roles in the organization and fully capitalizing on their fresh ideas, creativity, and passion. Together, each year, current and former PMFs:

- Organize the agency's PMF orientation and training sessions,
- Coordinate and manage an executive-level advisory committee,
- Run a competitive process within the agency to select and fund new positions,
- Provide mentoring for their peers,
- Recruit new employees, and
- Collaborate on tackling and soliciting priority assignments from top executives