

BRANCHING OUT

THE US FOREST SERVICE INTERNATIONAL VISITOR PROGRAM

HIGHLIGHTS

August 2012

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US Forest Service
Northern Research Station
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The US Forest Service International Visitor Program (IVP) facilitates participation in a wide variety of professional and educational exchanges, which encourage scientific collaboration and discovery, increase intercultural understanding, and promote cooperation among people of many cultures and countries.

SPOTLIGHT

Keith's Story

Keith Philippe, Visiting Research Scholar from the Bahamas, USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station –Forest Inventory and Analysis (NRS-FIA), St. Paul, Minnesota

I was born in a small and once elusive town called Nassau. Much has changed in recent years in my town. Now, Nassau is still small, but not quite as elusive as it used to be seeing as how so many people now vacation in the Bahamas!

At the age of twelve I moved to south Florida, where I finished my first two years of middle school. Afterwards, I returned to the Bahamas, where I completed high school then moved on to college. After a few months in college I joined a group of international researchers involved in a multi-agency collaborative wildlife project between the Bahamas, the US Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Nature Conservancy. After serving two years on the project as a research assistant, I traveled to Michigan and Minnesota where I completed biological courses at the University of Michigan and then double majored in Biology and Fisheries & Wildlife and minored in Chemistry at the University of Minnesota. During my three years of studies in Minnesota, I had the privilege of interning at the USDA Forest Service – Northern Research Station, St. Paul. There I worked as a program coordinator, serving as the day-to-day face of the US Forest Service Eastern Region in the greater Twin Cities area through Urban Connections outreach programs. I was also involved in several leadership and development groups.

In my current position I have been working with the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program as a visiting Research Scholar. This program has given me the opportunity to collaborate closely with scientists and technicians on state analysis, data collection techniques, and inventory methods and practices across the 24 Northern Research Station states.



What has it meant to you personally and professionally to come to the US to have this work-study experience?

Within the past few years I have been trying to develop a global understanding of ecological research though short-term studies and research opportunities in places like Puerto Rico, Midwestern US and Russia. For example, working as an international visiting research scholar with the Northern Research Station, St. Paul, MN has enabled me to better understand US forest inventorying processes from a scientific and technical perspective. This knowledge, in turn, helps me grasp efficient ways of forest monitoring and management. Moreover, working with some of the world's best experts in the world's largest forest inventorying program does add a bit of wisdom to my developing understanding. So personally and professionally, studying in the US has always provided a sense of purpose, and an opportunity to collaborate with scientists and experts from multiple backgrounds.

What has been the most gratifying part of this experience so far?

The most gratifying part of my experience has been interacting with the scientists and experts and learning about their respective fields of study. I am pleased with the research knowledge base that I am building. It has also been gratifying to have a healthy balance of administrative and fieldwork.

How will this experience help you when you return home?

It has always been my vision that forested ecosystems would be the most stable predictors of global environmental change and one of the most critical long-term suppliers of natural resources. I also believe that a healthy forest translates into healthier communities. This experience will enable me to further develop these philosophies and to share them with other representatives from the Bahamas. Like other countries, the Bahamas, too, is in need of international assistance to help monitor and sustain forest resources.

James' Story

*James Blehm, Supervisory Forester
USDA Forest Service
Northern Research Station – Forest Inventory and Analysis (NRS-FIA),
St. Paul, Minnesota*



I grew up in a small town in western Oklahoma. I attended college at Oklahoma State University where I received a degree in Forestry. Right out of college, I accepted a field position in southern Missouri with the North Central Research Station (NCRS) – Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program. After a year in Missouri, I accepted a transfer to work for NCRS FIA in southern Indiana in a similar field position. I lived there for a year and a half before I accepted a position at the NCRS FIA office in St. Paul, Minnesota. I have been in Minnesota for 12 years now and I have filled many roles since moving up here. I began as a data-quality editor and assistant trainer for the field crew. After several years, I moved into the lead trainer position and maintained my role as editor. After a merger with the North Eastern Research Station to form the Northern Research Station (NRS), I was soon overseeing data editing as well as assisting with field crew training for 24 states. I, subsequently, began my supervisory career. I now oversee a Prefield Group that prepares material for the field crew and edits field data. I have also continued in my role as a trainer.

How did you become involved in hosting international visitors?

Our Program Manager for NRS-FIA approached me with an opportunity to host an international visitor. I thought it would be a great experience for NRS-FIA as a whole as well as a perfect opportunity to enrich the Prefield Group. It was a bonus that Keith Philippe had already interned with Region 9, which at that time held a small office in the same building as FIA. This meant that we were already familiar with Keith and he already had established professional contacts in the building and the area.

What is your favorite part of hosting?

I enjoy the knowledge exchange that has occurred between Keith and me. Keith brings a lot of experience and culture to FIA. He also seems to be learning a lot about FIA and the research that goes along with it.

I was asked by our Program Manager to give Keith a complete picture of how FIA operates. This not only allowed for an opportunity to teach him what occurs in the Prefield Group, but also has given him the chance to learn about our extensive database. He has been to the field to see the data collection process, he has had the opportunity to meet with data analysts to see how our data is reported to the public, and, as we move forward, he will transition into completing projects where he will be using FIA data to produce reports of his own.

What are your favorite stories or experiences?

I have enjoyed learning about Keith's culture and home country, the Bahamas. It is interesting to hear about the projects he has worked on and the environment that he lived in on the islands.

In an effort to reach out to everyone in the building, Keith, along with some friends from the Bahamas, put together a presentation about life and the environment on the islands. It was an excellent learning experience for all who attended and it ended with a homemade Bahamian meal so we could all enjoy the flavors and the hospitality of the Bahamian culture.

J-1 EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM NOTES

A Social Security Number (SSN) is a US government identity number used mainly for the purpose of tracking contributions to the US Social Security System and for income tax collection. Having a SSN as an identification number--though not always required--may also help make other processes easier, such as opening a bank account, purchasing a mobile phone plan, and getting a driver's license.

Because J-1 visa holders are not US citizens and do not contribute to the US Social Security System, they are not eligible for Social Security benefits; however, they are eligible to obtain SSNs for purposes of identification and to facilitate these other processes.

The Social Security Administration recommends waiting at least 10 days after your arrival in the United States before applying. You should visit the nearest Social Security office and apply in person for your Social Security Number. To find an office near you, please visit: www.ssa.gov/locator. You will need the following documents with you when you go to apply:

1. DS-2019 Form
2. Passport & J-1 Visa
3. I-94 Card
4. Completed Social Security card application form (Form SS-5)

It is recommended that you call the Social Security office prior to your visit to ensure that you do not need any other documents because requirements can vary between offices. After applying for a Social Security Number the Social Security Office should provide you with a receipt. This is an important document and you should hold on to this receipt in case you need to check on the status of your application. Your card will arrive in the mail at the address you provided on your application. A successful application, with no delays, should be processed within four to six weeks.

Please contact an International Visitor Program Specialist if you have any questions about the process of applying for a SSN.

WHAT'S NEW:**MEETING OF MINDS: US FOREST SERVICE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR SERIES**

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”

- John Muir

Natural resource managers around the world face dynamic, complex challenges that span a vast array of political, economic, social, geographic, and scientific concerns. Creating an active global network of natural resource managers who regularly engage in dialogue on common challenges and solutions is one of the primary goals of the US Forest Service International Programs Office (USFS-IP).

Through the USFS –IP International Seminar Series, International Programs and its partners host annual 3-4-week seminars to stimulate debate, discussion, information exchanges and collaborative problem solving among participants coming from all over the world. Participants in each program bring diverse experience, expertise, perspectives and approaches.

The *International Seminars on Watershed Management, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management*, and *Protected Area Management* are long-standing anchor programs designed to draw upon the experience of each participant and the unique traits of the field locations that they visit. Each Seminar combines field based experiences with variety of training methods

including presentations, group work, and action planning to promote active, collaborative learning. Each program also serves as a model to demonstrate the power of partnerships among all levels of government, local organizations, universities, research centers and the private sector.

The **International Seminar on Watershed Management**, held each spring in Arizona, allows participants an opportunity to explore the challenges of the multiple-use mandate of the US Forest Service and how land management affects water supply and watersheds in the American Southwest. Participants visit wilderness headwaters in National Forests, grazing allotments, cotton farms, copper mines, water treatment plants, and recreation areas to explore issues of increasing demand, legal conflict and competing uses, and practices that place tremendous pressure on scarce water supplies.

The **International Seminar on Climate Change and Natural Resources Management**, introduced in 2010, allows participants to explore the interaction between land management practices and climate change, drawing on examples from the State of California. California’s diverse ecosystems face pressure from rapid population growth, water scarcity, agricultural land use, and climate change. Participants work with experts from the University of California at Davis to learn about challenges and opportunities associated with climate change from the ground up, at watershed, ecosystem, and national levels. Participants visit wilderness areas, the Lake Tahoe basin and other field sites to discuss practical management strategies to cope with the impact of climate change.

The **International Seminar on Protected Area Management**, organized in cooperation with the University of Montana’s Department of Society and Conservation is now in its 14th year. Participants travel across Montana and throughout the Rocky Mountains to interact with respected experts in management of national parks, wildlife refuges, privately-held land conservancies, and multiple-use forests and grassland reserves. Highlights include exploring the Northern Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone National



Park, which—established as the first National Park in the USA in 1872 by Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant—is facing significant pressures due to public land use and recreation.

The longest running seminar, the **Curso Internacional de Manejo de Areas Protegidas**, or the **International Field Seminar on Protected Area Management**, is conducted entirely in Spanish and is coordinated by the University of Colorado. This seminar engages personnel primarily from Latin America who work for government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and in the private sector. Participants trek on foot and by horseback for two weeks to explore back-country wilderness management issues as well as social and environmental benefits of protected areas, managing natural resources and fostering effective management.

For more information on the USFS-IP International Seminars, go to: <http://www.fs.fed.us/globalis/welcome.htm>.

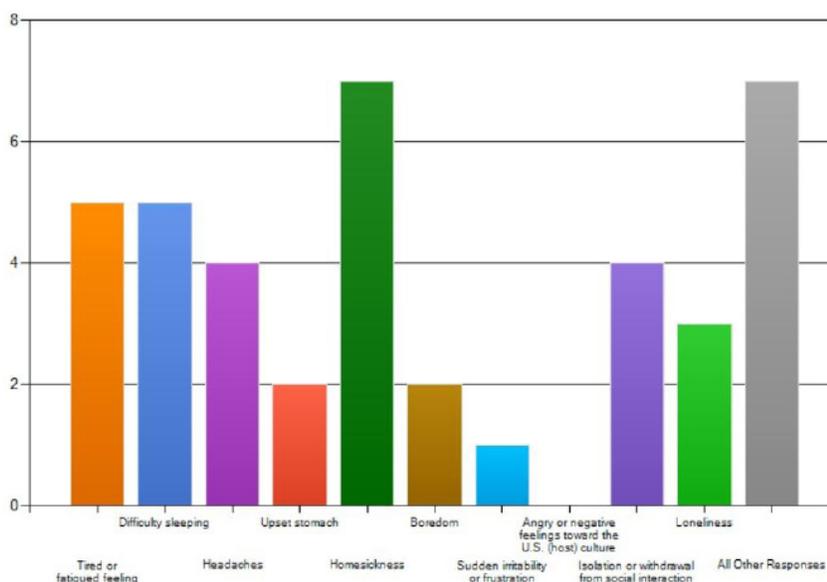
IN YOUR WORDS

From time to time, the International Visitor Program requests stories and feedback from our hosts and visitors. We enjoy hearing about your experiences, and your input assists us in improving our services. We recently surveyed current visitors and hosts, asking a variety of questions about the International Visitor Program experience. We'd like to share some of what we learned in the next few issues of *Branching Out*.

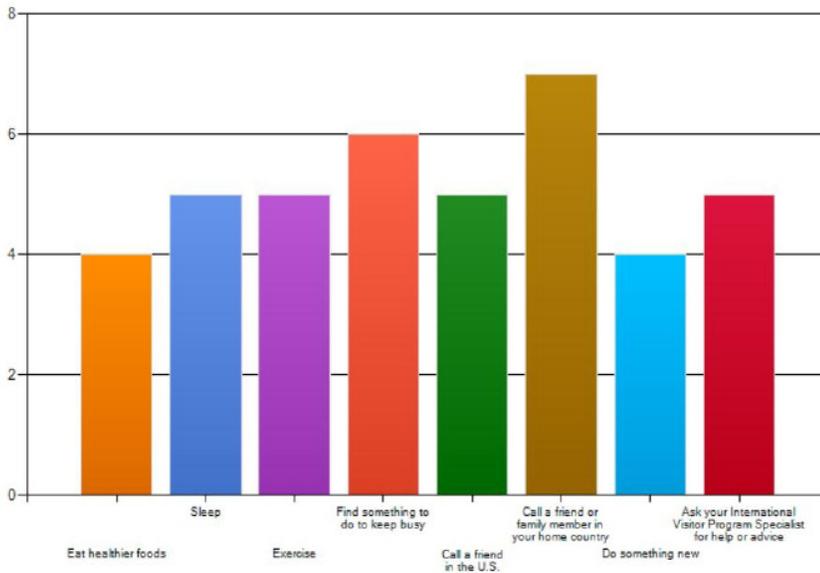
What is it Like Adjusting to the United States?

In our survey, we asked visitors to share their initial impressions and reactions to the USA. While only half of the respondents claimed to have experienced culture shock, those that did reported a variety of symptoms and methods to mitigate them.

We were interested to learn about which aspects of living in the USA were the most difficult to adjust to for our visitors. Nearly all respondents mentioned at least one of the following: food and meal times, transportation, and language. One visitor commented,



“At the beginning of my stay, the language was a little bit difficult because sometimes people speak very fast. However, people have been very friendly and they have been helping me to improve my knowledge about the pronunciation and the understanding of idioms.”



What is it Like to Host an Exchange Visitor?

We asked hosts to tell us about their experiences welcoming international visitors to their workplaces. The top two reasons for hosting, chosen by the respondents, were cross-cultural interaction and the satisfaction of being able to help others grow in their careers. Language, communication, and administrative hurdles were mentioned as occasional challenges.

Here’s a sample of the comments from IVP hosts.

“Our volunteer is what every supervisor would hope to find in an employee--hard working, positive attitude and great personality.”

“[A positive experience is] finding out that we are all the same inside.”

“I still publish with several former visitors.”

And one piece of advice from a host:

“Go for it, it’s very rewarding! But don’t underestimate the amount of time it may take to coordinate their visit, paperwork, etc.”

Be on the lookout for more quotes in future issues of Branching Out. If you have experiences, advice or memories to share, please email them to Emily at eebetzclose@fs.fed.us.

THE “SCOOP” ON SLANG

Slang words and expressions are sometimes difficult to get a handle on, but language learners usually dig learning about slang, idioms and jargon. Slang is a substitute for formal language that is used in informal settings as a way of identifying with certain social, cultural, or

regional groups. Individuals use slang terms to create familiarity, associations, and more precise understanding with others in groups. Slang allows us to get the *vibe* of what another is saying. Slang is different from jargon, which is a *cache* of shared technical vocabulary used in particular professions that can, at times, *throw curve balls* at those unfamiliar with the context or terms. Slang also differs from idioms, which are phrases or groups of words having meanings that cannot be deduced from the individual words in the idiomatic expression. Idioms might be a *dime a dozen*, but they aren’t always a *piece of cake* to learn. Using idiomatic expressions can *muddy the waters*, especially when used in conversations between native and non-native speakers of English. The roots or origins of slang, jargon and idioms are interesting to explore as they expose elements of culture and history. The IVP team is *over the moon* to have this opportunity to explore some interesting uses and facets of American English with you in *Branching Out*. We welcome your suggestions and ideas!

Test your knowledge of common American slang by completing this crossword puzzle.

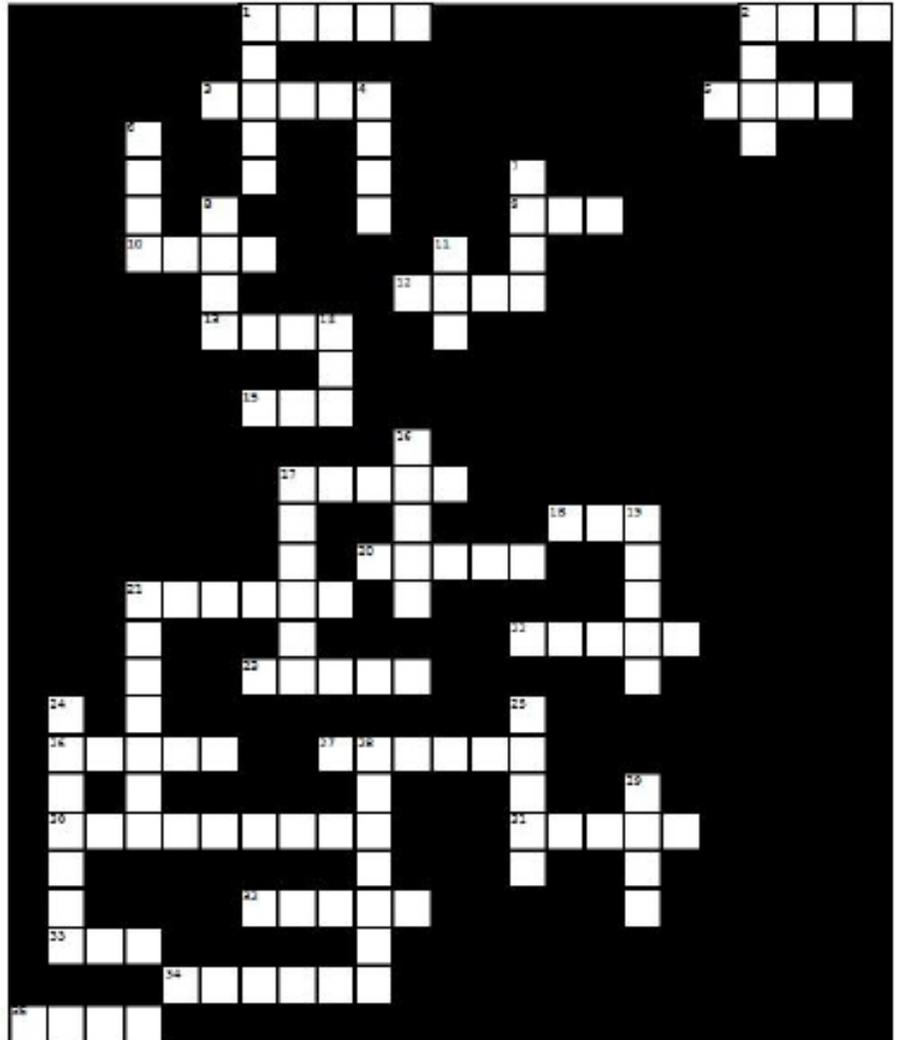
AMERICAN SLANG

Across

- 1. Clumsy person
- 2. Party
- 3. A person who fails
- 5. Sleep—"I am going to ___ off."
- 9. To manage
- 10. Food—"He grabbed some ___ at the diner."
- 12. Weak, cowardly person
- 13. A drink out of a bottle
- 15. Success—"The show was a ___!"
- 17. Weird or strange person
- 18. Physically attractive
- 20. Hyper, alert, or connected
- 21. Disappointed
- 22. Terrible
- 23. Excited about—"He was ___ about getting a new bike."
- 26. Hidden collection of something (money, drugs)
- 27. Person who is easily fooled or impressed by something
- 30. To take a look at
- 31. To leave/to share
- 32. Money
- 33. Like/enjoy
- 34. Positive
- 35. Toilet/bathroom

Down

- 1. To talk negatively about
- 2. To lose in a wasteful way
- 4. To be great—"You ___."
- 6. A disappointment—"What a ___!"
- 7. To finish—"That's a ___!"
- 8. Courage—"You have to have ___ to jump out of a plane."
- 11. Concert—"He played a ___ at the concert hall."
- 14. To understand



- 16. Accurate, correct (abbreviation)
- 17. Cheap, tacky
- 19. To destroy
- 21. Collection of painful memories/experiences
- 24. Excited—"He was ___ to go to the concert."
- 25. Sleep
- 28. Opposite of 'relaxed' or 'laid-back'
- 29. Feeling

(You can find the answer key on the last page of this newsletter.)

Please Share Your Stories!

We would like to invite everyone to share photos and stories about yourselves, your programs, and the exchange experiences you've had in the United States and abroad. Please submit your stories, pictures, ideas, and feedback to Emily Betz at eebetzclose@fs.fed.us.

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ON THE HORIZON

Upcoming US Holidays and Special Occasions

Monday, September 3	Labor Day
Sunday, September 9	Grandparents' Day
Tuesday, September 11	Patriot Day
Friday, September 28	Native American Day
Monday, October 8	Columbus Day
Tuesday, October 16	Boss's Day
Saturday, October 20	Sweetest Day
Wednesday, October 31	Halloween

If you are a visitor to the US, ask your American hosts, friends and colleagues how they celebrate these holidays. You can also find more information on the internet. Here are some suggested sites to explore:

- <http://www.usafederalholidays.com/>
- <http://www.calendar-365.com/holidays/2012.html>
- <http://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/>

Hosts, we encourage you to use this opportunity to share an aspect of American culture with your visitor(s)!

ANSWER KEY:

