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Friday, September 30, 2011

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USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region, and Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation Partner in Employment Program

New effort reflects collaborative approach to hiring people with disabilities

MILWAUKEE – The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) joined the USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region, and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) today in signing a regional partnership agreement to provide training and federal government job opportunities for people with disabilities. The signing took place this morning at Milwaukee's Discovery World.

"We are pleased to be part of this partnership," said Charlene Dwyer, DVR Administrator. "The state vocational rehabilitation agencies represented at this signing have a common goal: obtaining, maintaining and improving employment opportunities for employees with disabilities. This collaboration is particularly exciting because it involves federal jobs."

The partnership links a national network of vocational rehabilitation agencies that support and train people with disabilities to an important federal agency that is working to better reflect the American citizens it serves. Today's agreement allows the Forest Service's Eastern Region to use a special federal hiring authority to increase the number of employees with disabilities in the federal workforce.

"This agreement is especially significant for the U.S. Forest Service, since it is the first formal partnership our agency has made with a national network that represents the interests of people with disabilities," said Chuck Myers, Regional Forester of the Forest Service's Eastern Region. "The agreement will improve recruitment, hiring, and retention of people with disabilities in our workforce, and the timing of this event is noteworthy because October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month."

Milwaukee was chosen as the location for the signing due to a successful working relationship that developed between the Eastern Region of the Forest Service and the Wisconsin DVR last fall. DVR Area Directors Patricia Johnson and Lea Collins-Worachek spoke to Eastern Region employees about Disability Employment Awareness Month last October.

The partnership progressed further when Forest Service Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist, Montez Ashley and Job Corps Liaison, Clara Johnson worked with the DVR to place a Job Corps student in the Forest Service, using the federal Schedule A hiring authority. This

worked so well that Ms. Johnson (DVR) and Ms. Ashley pursued providing similar opportunities throughout the Eastern Region by connecting with Kathleen West-Evans, National Team Lead for the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation – National Employment Team. This collaboration then led to the development of a Regional Memorandum of Understanding that was signed today by Regional Forester Chuck Myers and CSAVR-NET, CEO Stephen Wooderson.

The DWD Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is a federal/state program designed to obtain, maintain, and improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities by working with vocational rehabilitation consumers, employers, and other partners.

The U.S. Forest Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with a mission of sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The Forest Service's Eastern Region includes twenty states in the Midwest and East, stretching from Maine, to Maryland, to Missouri, to Minnesota. There are 17 national forests and one national tallgrass prairie in the Eastern Region.