

Viewpoint

a newsletter for wpea members at the department of natural resources

Message from WPEA President Kent Stanford

I wanted to share WPEA's experiences with the new administration at the Department of Natural Resources. Following the election, Commissioner Hilary Franz reached out to WPEA members and staff to discuss priorities and expectations. Franz also invited WPEA to participate in the hiring process for the new department supervisor and provide input for the transition process.

WPEA members have also asked for better communications from the Commissioner's office. So far, Commissioner Franz has delivered with consistent updates since her first day in office.

WPEA has several issues that still need to be addressed with the DNR executive management including vehicles assignments; pay inequity amongst the same classification; the contracting out of WPEA members work; salary increases; and the future of firefighting.

We look forward to including DNR members when we meet with management. It is your involvement that will guide the decisions we make. Please find the time to voice your opinion and to get involved in this effort.

Solidarity,

President Kent Stanford

New DNR administration focuses on morale

In December, a group of WPEA members met with newly-elected Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz to discuss morale, working conditions, and next steps for the department. After attending the transition meeting with Franz, one member said, "I don't normally get giddy, but that's how I feel now."

DNR employees said that the transition meeting was important not just to improve morale and working conditions, but to help fulfill the agency's mission. "We're not just here for ourselves. We're here to make the agency better. That's why we're coming to the table," said Phil Wolff, a recreation forester in the South Puget Sound region. "Some of the things that have been brought up aren't about improving the employee situation,

it's about helping our customers."

The meeting, which was also attended by DNR employees represented by WFSE, is part of an ongoing effort to include agency employees in department decisions and improve morale. Since that meeting, WPEA members also served on the interview panel for the new department supervisor and have weighed in on hiring decisions across DNR leadership. WPEA President Kent Stanford, a career forester, plans to have regular, ongoing meetings with incoming Department Supervisor Eric Schroff.

Franz was endorsed in the general election by WPEA, and won the election with about 53% of the vote. During the campaign, she repeatedly identified improving morale at DNR as a high priority.

Happy retirement to Becky Escobar!

Becky has faithfully served DNR members for more than 30 years as a shop steward. During that time she has represented many members on numerous issues and participated in union events.

Becky worked as the lead dispatcher for the wildland fire program, dispatching WPEA firefighters to countless wildfires across the United States and Canada.

Outside of work, Becky volunteers at Lewis County Work Opportunities helping autistic adults. She also makes quilts for veterans at the VA hospital in Lakewood.

She will be sorely missed by all the members she has worked with. Thank you for your commitment to your union and its members!!!



WPEA reps for DNR

Amanda Hacker

Amanda works on Department of Natural Resources member issues statewide and represents DNR members working in Olympic, South Puget Sound, Northwest, and Northeast regions and in the NRB. [360-943-1121 x102](tel:360-943-1121) or amanda@wpea.org

Heather Kafton

Heather represents DNR members in the Pacific Cascades region. [360-972-0149](tel:360-972-0149) or heather@wpea.org

John Littel

John represents DNR members in the Southeast region. [509-480-2590](tel:509-480-2590) or john@wpea.org

Below are the WPEA-certified shop stewards:

Chief Shop Steward

Bob Smith – Statewide

Shop Stewards

Mark Bohnet – Southeast Region

Ryan Cloud – Southeast Region

Anthony Dias – Olympic Region

Stephanie Falcon – Northwest Region

Ben Goble – Pacific Cascade Region

Judy Harmon – NRB Olympia

Maryam Majidian – Southeast Region

Steve Martin – Olympic Region

Paul Nelson – Northeast Region

Eric Newhouse – Tumwater compound

Andrew Reed – South Sound Region

Mary Robertson – Pacific Cascade Region

Suzanne Thome – Northeast Region

WPEA’s training initiatives

- The Union has been meeting regularly with the Department to discuss training opportunities.
- Some of the programs include the fellowship and leadership classes, job shadowing, and internships. This summer, DNR plans to hire a number of summer interns in the SE and NE regions to support foresters and recreation staff, and recruiting will occur at eastside high schools this spring for new graduates. WPEA is also interested in expanding firefighter training. If you have any ideas for new training please contact Kent Stanford or John Littel.

WPEA resolves ULP against DNR

WPEA recently settled an Unfair Labor Practice filed against the Department of Natural Resources. The complaint brought by WPEA was for skimming of union work.

During the 2015 fire season, DNR contracted with an audit company to do fire billing work. Because this work has historically been done by union members, that equated to DNR contracting out bargaining unit work.

WPEA considers contracting out to be a mandatory subject of bargaining. This means that prior to management contracting out any work done by members, they must first notify the union of their intent to contract that work out, and fulfill their collective bargaining obligation. In this case, DNR failed to follow through on this obligation so WPEA filed an Unfair Labor Practice against them.

WPEA and DNR settled this case for \$27,000, which went to the affected employees. WPEA distributed back-pay to our members who were not offered overtime that they were qualified to do as a result of the employer contracting out their work to an outside firm.

One of those members was Maile Gray, a fiscal analyst 3 in the Northeast Region. “I can definitely tell you it was a positive experience for me and my staff to see the union being successful in their stand against the unfairness that played out against the employees,” said Maile.

“I feel that this will help blaze the trail and set a precedent for future situations like this and I hope it encourages other members to step forward and look to the union for assistance when they see their rights and work being taken out of their control. Balance needs to be restored in the treatment of the members vs. management in the agency.”

Shop steward Suzanne Thome and staff representative Amanda Hacker worked tirelessly for months to get this settlement.

This case illustrates that it is important to let the union know as soon as you hear anything about the employer contracting out work that has been previously done by union members.