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USDA FOREST SERVICE

Briefing Paper

For CAT's Direct Conversion

Executive Summary:

Forest Service leadership has determined that, rather than continue with a full study of the Content Analysis Team's (CAT's) program of work under the A-76 policy, CAT will contract out the content analysis part of their program. The reasons for this determination are many, including the recognition that, because of its unique status as a detached unit and an enterprise team composed of mostly term employees, there would remain several significant unresolved problems, whether CAT won or lost the competition. Additionally, because CAT had been operating as an enterprise team under the auspice of full cost recovery, it had already demonstrated a commercial viability with potential opportunities for private companies to take over the work.

For the next few months, a formal decision memo has been deferred while finishing the Civil Rights Impact Statement and Fair and Reasonable Cost evaluation, both of which are dependent on tasks associated with reorganization and downsizing of its full time staff. CAT will continue to work on existing content analysis projects, as well as accept new projects. CAT will continue to provide the highest quality products, and will strive to ensure undisrupted continuity of services to current and future clients. During the transition process, new projects will have various elements of the work contracted to private companies, and those contracts will be arranged and overseen by CAT specialists. CAT's resources and databases of information will remain intact, and clients may continue to contact CAT for researching content analysis information on past projects.

The Forest Service and CAT managers will also work with employees to answer questions and to help them adjust to the changes in staffing. As much as possible, CAT will assist employees in finding and applying for new jobs, either within the agency, within another Federal or State agency, or in the private sector.

Background and History

OF A-76: The Federal Government policy regarding the performance of commercial activities by government agencies is based on the idea that the Federal Government should not be in competition with the private sector. The government supports private sector competition, and supports the idea that competition enhances quality, economy, and productivity. The policy aimed at restricting the government from performing work that might be done by the private sector originated through Bureau of the Budget Bulletins issued in 1955, 1957, and 1960. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-76 put the policy permanently into place in 1966; the circular was subsequently revised in 1967, 1979, 1983, and 1999. The government recognizes that certain activities are inherently governmental, and that others may be more

appropriately performed by the private sector. The current process of evaluating the Federal workforce to identify those tasks that might be more appropriately performed by the private sector is aimed at reviewing the work of a set percentage of the workforce each year that have been identified as commercial activities.

In the USDA Forest Service, the programs evaluated for Fiscal Year 2003 include IT infrastructure, maintenance, Help Desk, Job Corps, and CAT. Those wishing more information on the Forest Service's competitive sourcing plans, may view the agency's online information at: <http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/pma/main/CS.shtml>.

OF CAT: The Content Analysis Enterprise Team (CAET) was chartered in 1997 as a "pilot" activity within the USDA Forest Service, as part of the Ecosystem Management Coordination Staff (the organization later dropped the 'Enterprise' part of its name, although it remained a hybrid enterprise model). Since that time, CAT has grown and developed and currently employs nearly 60 full-time staff and often will be performing several different content analysis projects at a time. Although CAT proved to be a successful program, as far as customer satisfaction was concerned, Forest Service leadership never quite agreed on how the organization should be established, funded, or staffed. When the A-76/Fair Act evaluations began, it seemed to be the perfect opportunity to finally decide the appropriate place for CAT.

CAT MEETS A-76: Initially it was decided that a full study of CAT was needed for competitive sourcing. However, the term appointments of many of CAT's employees would end before that study was completed. It then appeared that doing a streamlined study would suffice, but it didn't take long to recognize that there were too many variables in CAT's program for it to lend itself to a streamlined study. So the agency returned to the idea of a full study and potentially extending the terms of those employees whose terms would expire. Shortly into the study the agency realized that, even if CAT should win the competition, it would still not solve the myriad other questions regarding CAT, and it would require that the agency establish approximately 50 new permanent positions during a time of possible workforce reductions. Furthermore, it was widely recognized that the mere fact that CAT had already succeeded as an enterprise team clearly demonstrated that there was potential for commercial contracting. Therefore the decision was made to convert CAT directly to contract.

KEY MESSAGES:

CAT is not going away: There will be a new realigned CAT that will be given the tasks of maintaining a national database for content analysis, along with the assignment of installing, updating and training this module for any or all units in need of doing their own content analysis. The goal is to provide a national standardized program that can help ensure consistent quality data. CAT has also been asked to increase field assistance which would include coaching, project management and consulting. There will also be employees available for extended details to assist in writing and editing NEPA documents, Forest Plan Revisions and amendments, regulation and directive writing, etc.

The work will not stop: For the next few months, while CAT undergoes reorganization and downsizing of its full time staff, CAT will continue to work on existing content analysis projects, as well as accept new projects. CAT will continue to provide the highest quality products, and will strive to ensure undisrupted continuity of services to current and future clients. CAT will continue to be responsive to current and past clients, and will make every effort to maintain continuity and quality service during the transition. CAT managers will maintain a list of employees, clients, and external organizations who would be affected by the changes, and will keep these groups informed as relevant new information becomes available.

Contractors will compete and be selected to carry on the work: Another primary task for CAT is to find and compete private companies to take over the work CAT has scheduled and will schedule in the future. There will be a cadre of service providers under an Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity contract that will give CAT the flexibility to subcontract out the content analysis. CAT will provide all administrative duties associated with contracting, including design and development of statement of works and task orders, quality assurance surveillance plans, money transfers, inspection and monitoring. The goal is to provide as seamless a transition as possible. Clients will enjoy the same level quality and timeliness they have received in the past, under the careful monitoring and management of the process. The CAT employees will be the intermediary between the contractor and the client.

Transition from old to new: As mentioned, CAT will continue work on current content analysis projects, and will accept new projects, even while it is reorganizing. Many CAT employees will remain with CAT for the next several months, and CAT will solicit contractors to whom to gradually shift the various aspects of its work load. CAT will strive to ensure uninterrupted continuity of services to its clients. It is not known yet how many of CAT's current staff will continue with CAT following reorganization to oversee contracts and offer advice and assistance to various units. However, some of the current CAT employees will continue and will ensure the reliability and quality of work for which CAT has been known. CAT will also be consolidating both the Missoula and SLC office. After much deliberation by the Executive Committee, Salt Lake City was chosen as the new centralized location.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Why did the agency decide to go with a direct conversion rather than the long study as originally planned?

- A. The fact that CAT has operated for the past several years as an enterprise team demonstrates that it is already a viable work opportunity for the private sector. Furthermore, CAT's rather unique status as a detached unit, as an enterprise team, and having mostly term employees meant that, even should CAT win the competition, the agency would still have several unresolved issues:
- 1) If CAT were to be established as a permanent, inherently governmental program, approximately 50 term employees would have to be converted to permanent status; this during a time of possible agency work force reductions.
 - 2) The agency has been considering new policies with respect to detached units, which put an additional layer of complication on CAT's status.
 - 3) Because of the fluctuating content analysis work load, it is difficult to maintain a permanent staff which is able to handle the peak demand times and still remain constructive during slow periods.

2. When will CAT begin contracting out the work?

A. Managers at CAT and in the Washington Office are already working on all the elements necessary for the conversion to occur. Contractors should be in place by the beginning of Fiscal Year, 2004.

3. What will happen to current CAT employees?

A. There will be 18 permanent employees in the final contracting oversight organization realizing a loss of 41 FTE. However, some current CAT employees will be eligible to apply to the new organization. Many CAT employees have terms that will expire prior to the final conversion date, and those terms will be allowed to expire. The rest of the CAT employees will undergo a Reduction In Force (RIF) process. These employees may be eligible to apply for any new positions that may come up advertised under DEMO authority, or if permanent, may apply to any new positions in the new service center of other Forest Service Units.

4. Who should potential clients contact if they need content analysis work done?

A. Clients should continue to contact the Salt Lake City CAT office at 801-517-1023 when they need content analysis assistance or advice. CAT will continue to accept new projects, and is in the process of drawing up a PWS for soliciting contractors who will be qualified to do the various elements of a content analysis project.

5. Who will past clients contact if they have questions or need information about past content analysis projects now and in the future?

- A. Clients should continue to contact CAT offices with questions or requests for information regarding past projects. CAT will maintain its databases and records of past work. CAT will be contacting certain clients to arrange for the return of the hard copies of the original responses that CAT has been holding as part of the Administrative Record.

6. Where will the eventual CAT organization be located?

- A. On April 8, 2003, the Forest Service Executive Team decided that the consolidated core organization for the Content Analysis Team (CAT) will be located in Salt Lake City, Utah. Existing locations in Salt Lake and Missoula were evaluated, in addition to the option of an entirely new location. The final decision was based on the economy of air travel; the efficiency of using an existing office rather than moving to a new location; and a desire to cluster national service centers in easily accessible locations. Salt Lake City currently houses one of the two CAT offices, as well as the Geospatial Services and Technology Center and the Remote Sensing Applications Center.

7. What will happen to the Publishing Arts program area that has been operating as a unit of CAT?

- A. The Publishing Arts program will continue to operate as it has. That program area was not included as a part of the A-76 analysis and is not subject to the outsourcing directions of the rest of CAT.

File Code: 1300

Date: June 26, 2003

Route To:

Subject: CAT Reorganization

To: Content Analysis Team Employees
through Jody Sutton, Coordinator

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere appreciation for the service and dedication you have provided over the time you have spent with the Forest Service. I know the decision to outsource the work you have been doing over the last five years is difficult to accept, and I know that many of you are personally impacted. I do not, however, wish you to believe that the time you have spent developing and improving the content analysis process for the Forest Service has gone unrecognized.

I speak for the agency in saying that we recognize the value of the foundation you have been instrumental in building. We hope you continue to be proud of what you have accomplished. Unfortunately, as times change and new policies are implemented, decisions are made that can not always take each individual into account. Federal agencies have been directed to find more efficient ways to do business, resulting in organizational re-evaluation and hard choices.

There will be many future challenges for the Forest Service. Your situation and reorganization are but the beginning. I know that your management team has tried to communicate the steps in the process when available, but information has changed so often that many of you have become understandably frustrated. I believe everyone has tried their best to make the paths as obstacle-free as possible, but realize there are not many options the Forest Service can provide for the majority of you. I also believe, however, that you are strong, intelligent employees that can add value to any future employer.

Last week the Chief and I were able to meet with a number of you in Missoula as we listened to your concerns, your frustrations, your disappointments, and your perspectives. We both sincerely appreciate this respectful interaction. We certainly understand the tremendously difficult position in which this workforce decision places many of you, but as an agency we must proceed with this and other efforts to increase our efficiency.

Over the next month or two, you will each receive a package from the Human Resource Management (HRM) staff that will formally notify you of the next steps in the process, including the termination date for employees subject to reduction in force (RIF). HRM will also provide information that may assist you in seeking alternative employment. Your local management team will apprise you of each step, as they are notified by HRM. I wish all of you the best of luck in your endeavors.

/s/ Tom L. Thompson
TOM L. THOMPSON
Deputy Chief for National Forest System