

InHRQuarterly

INFORM | INNOVATE | INSPIRE



Jennifer Ackerman
Deputy Chief Human
Capital Officer

Message from the Director

As we enter into this season of gratefulness and giving, I'm deeply appreciative of the wonderful people I've had the opportunity to work within my first six months on the job.

I'm incredibly impressed and proud of the work we've accomplished in the Office of Human Capital alongside DOI Bureaus and Offices. We've taken deliberate steps to modernize and streamline processes so DOI employees can better focus fulfilling the Department's mission and serving the public.

As we start Fiscal Year 2020 and look back on our accomplishments from 2019, I can honestly say we have done a great deal with your input from the HR Assessment recommendations to transform HR operations, DOI Talent and Paperless Performance Plans, and My DOI Career—just to name a few.

2020 promises to be a banner year as we prepare to implement the HR Assessment recommendations, one of the Secretary's priorities. These include Personnel Security Centers of Excellence—streamlining policy, processing, and adjudication within the personnel security ecosystem; migrating all Human Resource professionals from Monster Staffing systems to USA Staffing across the Department; and standardizing the time-to-hire reporting metrics.

Finally, we have already kicked off the HR Policy Review Board, reducing over 10% of redundant policies across the Department. Keep an eye out for much more from our office in FY 2020!

On behalf of the Office of Human Capital, we wish you and your family a wonderful holiday season!

In this issue:

DOI Values
2019 CFC
New TSP Changes
Charting a New Course
74th Honor Awards Convocation
Pepper Trail
Afghanistan Changed Our Lives
Paperless Performance Plans
Breast Cancer Survivor
Federal Benefits Open Season
Afghanistan Changed Our Lives
MD-715 & Barrier Analysis
My DOI Career

DOI Values: Respect, Teamwork, Fairness, & Honesty

By: Tammy Duchesne, DOI

From April 24 to May 6, 2019, Assistant Secretary Susan Combs invited all employees to participate in an anonymous, four-question values survey to learn about the workplace culture DOI employees envisioned. You were asked to share the words you'd use to describe the current DOI culture, your ideal DOI work environment, and suggestions for improvement. An impressive 10,094 employees responded – your high response rate sends a clear message that you want to be heard and want to help shape the DOI Workplace Culture. Thank you for your passion and interest!

- Your top responses to describe the Department's **present culture** were: **committed, respectful, overworked, and anxious.**
- When asked to describe your **ideal culture**, almost 90%

of all respondents mentioned at least one of these four values: **respect, teamwork, honesty, and fairness.** Other values you wanted to see in the workplace were **acknowledgment, inclusion, support, and caring.**

- You indicated you wanted to see more: transparency; accountability; opportunities for career development; trust, honesty and integrity; collaboration, and diversity, and equality and fairness. You wanted less red-tape.

You spoke and we are listening. Because almost 90% of employees chose **respect, teamwork, honesty, and fairness** as words to describe their ideal workplace, these are now the DOI Values. Thank you! We value the time you took to provide feedback and we are committed to transforming the workplace culture and improving the employee experience.

Continued on page 2

A quarterly publication from the U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Human Capital. Visit the [Human Capital Crossroads](#) website for more resources and information for managers, employees, and HR professionals.

Editorial Team:

[Jennifer Ackerman](#)
Editor-in-Chief

[Martin Pursley](#)
Deputy Editor

[Kelly Sewell](#)
Content Director

Contributors:

Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement

DOI Veterans

National Park Service

Office of Policy, Management and Budget

Office of Civil Rights

Office of Human Capital

DOI University

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

U.S. Geological Survey

Deadlines:

The submission deadline for the February issue is **January 15**.

Want to submit an article or Ask the Specialist a question?

Visit the [Crossroads website](#) for guidelines or email [Kelly Sewell](#).

InHR Quarterly is solely for informational purposes and does not authorize official action. Views and opinions expressed are not explicitly those of the Department of the Interior.

DOI Values (continued from page 1)

To help shape the workplace into the one YOU told us you want, we will :

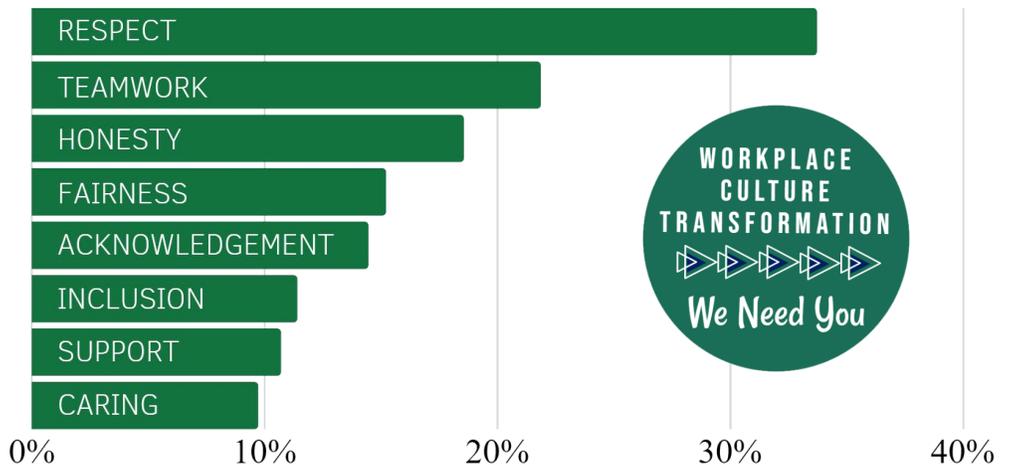
- Launch [My DOI Career site](#) to enhance your career opportunities.
- Deliver 72 sessions of [Bystander Intervention and Intergenerational Sensitivity Training](#) in strategic locations.
- Develop and offer [online trainings](#) to prevent harassment and to cultivate understanding, respect, and civility in all DOI workplaces.
- Create an orientation training so all employees understand from day one the [DOI mission](#), the DOI values, and expectations related to workplace conduct and that everyone has a role in preventing and standing up to harassing conduct.
- Invite employees to share ideas and successes at transformdoi@doi.gov.

- Communicate and collaborate across all bureaus and levels to discuss challenges, find solutions, share best practices, and celebrate success through the [Workplace Culture Transformation Advisory Council](#).

Department and Bureau leadership is committed to improving the employee experience everywhere and at all levels. We look forward to transforming the workplace to one that embodies the DOI values of **respect, teamwork, honesty, and fairness**.

Please visit the [Workplace Culture Transformation website](#) so you can learn more about our efforts and track our progress! You are a valued member of the DOI team and we look forward to hearing your suggestions, learning about your great successes, and working to serve you, the Department's greatest resource!

Ideal DOI Values



TRANSFORMING THE DOI WORKPLACE

Great workplaces are made up of great people who are positive, hardworking, committed and loyal, believe in what the organization does, and participate in making the workplace great. We want DOI to be one of those places. DOI University (DOIU) is now offering a new [Intergenerational Sensitivity and Bystander Intervention](#) course that is free to all permanent, GS, full-time DOI employees.

We currently offer 72 four-hour sessions scheduled in Washington, DC; Reston, VA; Denver, CO; and Albuquerque, NM between November 2019 and June 2020. Enroll today in DOI Talent!



2019 Combined Federal Campaign

The 2019 CFC runs September 9, 2019 to January 12, 2020!

By: Kelly Odom, BSEE

It's [Combined Federal Campaign](#) (CFC) time again! Since 1951, Federal employees have participated in the world's largest Federal giving campaign and donated to thousands of charities through the CFC. The 2019 campaign marks the 58th anniversary of the CFC's founding with the theme of "Show Some Love." DOI Key Workers are hard at work to inform their colleagues about the CFC and host events so DOI employees understand how their dollars can make an impact. Secretary David Bernhardt is serving as the DOI CFC Honorary Chairperson.

Last year, DOI employees across the country pledged an impressive \$333,865 to support local, national, and international charities through the CFC. With your support, DOI hopes to exceed our 2019 goal of \$400,000!

Join your fellow colleagues in the CFC and Show Some Love!

Four ways to participate in the CFC:

1. Make a pledge to a charity of your choice through the centralized giving platform at www.cfcgiving.opm.gov/welcome by January 12, 2020. Payroll deductions make it easy to give and your CFC contributions are fully tax-deductible.
2. Visit one of several charity fairs organized by DOI CFC coordinators. Connect with your bureau/office's [CFC coordinators](#) to learn more.
3. Search for approved 2019 CFC charities at <https://cfcgiving.opm.gov/offerings>
4. Want to do more? Donate your time as a volunteer for one of the CFC charities!



Secretary David Bernhardt (top), Kathryn Jonell, and Carmen Carter (bottom) show their support for the 2019 CFC!

New TSP Changes

By: Joy Buhler, DOI

On September 15, 2019, the withdrawal option changes referenced in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Modernization Act went into effect. Now employees have more options for how and when they can access money from their TSP accounts.

Highlights of the TSP Changes

- After an employee separates from service, they can now take multiple post-separation partial withdrawals.
- If an employee is 59½ or older and still working in federal civilian or uniformed service, they can take up to four in-service withdrawals each year.
- Employees will now be able to choose whether their withdrawal should come from their Roth balance, traditional balance, or a proportional mix of both.

- Employees will no longer need to make a full withdrawal election after they turn 70½ and are separated from federal service. (Employees will still need to receive IRS required minimum distributions (RMDs).)
- If an employee is a separated participant, they will be able to take monthly, quarterly, or annual payments.
- Employees will be able to stop, start, or make changes to their installment payments at any time.
- Employees will have enhanced online tools to help make withdrawals in the My Account section of tsp.gov. These enhanced online tools will make the withdrawal process even more efficient as employees will be able to complete at least part of the withdrawal transaction online.

More information about changes to TSP withdrawal options can be found on TSP.gov. Any questions regarding TSP should be directed to your servicing human resources office or the [TSP office](#).

Charting a New Course in Hiring

By: Landon Mock, DOI

The Department of the Interior has technical experts in a wide variety of fields. Recently the National Park Service (NPS) partnered with the U.S. Digital Service (USDS) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to leverage that expertise to improve how they make hires. What followed is just another example of the improvements that can be realized for hiring outcomes when hiring managers, HR professionals, and subject matter experts work together collaboratively.

In the spring, NPS piloted the hiring process used by USDS in order to make hires for multiple IT systems administrator positions. Subject matter experts (SMEs) from NPS and other DOI bureaus attended a two-day job analysis workshop to identify the most important or common tasks for the

position, write the technical competencies needed to perform those tasks, and draft resume review benchmarks and structured interview questions and rating criteria.

The increased involvement of subject matter experts early in the hiring process led to an improved quality of candidates eligible for hire and resulted in more than a 50% selection (e.g., employment offer) rate from a single certificate.

The pilot also received praise from OPM in a [recent memo on improving the assessment process](#) during hiring. The hiring process from the pilot, in particular, has been recommended for filling GS-12+ positions involving highly technical work.

As DOI looks to continue improving how we assess and hire new employees, leveraging the exceptional technical expertise of current employees will be key.

NPS piloted a new hiring process that engages subject matter experts.



USFWS Wildlife Biologists Lena Chang (left) and Danielle Fagre (right) attended a Federal Career Day hosted by Cal Poly Pomona University and the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC). Approximately 1,500 students and 30 agencies were in attendance. Photos by: UWFWS.



74th Honor Awards Convocation

By: Joy Buhler, DOI

The 74th Department of the Interior (DOI) Honor Awards Convocation was held on September 12, 2019, at the Stewart Lee Udall Main Interior Building in Washington, DC. More than 30 DOI employees and private citizens were recognized by the Secretary at the Convocation ceremony this year. Here's just a fraction of the achievements and heroic acts accomplished by this year's Convocation award recipients:



Peter Aucella

When the general public thinks of the National Park Service, urban National Historic Parks don't generally receive the attention the larger parks do. However, Peter Aucella spent 32 years of his career to make Lowell National Historical Park (Park) and Preservation District in Lowell, Massachusetts a model of conservation and restoration for an urban national park. Mr. Aucella's work included managing development of the Park's historic boardinghouse, canal walkways, trolley system, public art program, and television studios, as well as administering an extensive cultural grants and events program. Mr. Aucella advocated, negotiated, provided technical review, and advised on financing and historic tax credits with the City, banks, and developers, resulting in the adaptive reuse of nearly 98 percent of the 5.3 million square feet of abandoned historic mills in the Park and District. Mr. Aucella also consulted on the authorizing legislation for Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park (NHP), Keweenaw NHP, and Pullman National Monument. Mr. Aucella provided technical assistance to countless other national park sites and hosted tours for local governments and organizations from 8 states and 15 countries.



Jack J. Hoeflich, Jeffrey A. Pirog, Eric Small, Aaron E. Smith, and Helicopter Pilot Timothy Lyons

On October 3, 2014, National Park Service employees Jack J. Hoeflich, Jeffrey A. Pirog, Eric Small, Aaron E. Smith, and helicopter pilot Timothy Lyons were active participants of a complex and dangerous rescue operation in Yosemite National Park. A climber was reported to have fallen 20 feet, hitting a rock head first, and had been upside down and unconscious for approximately 10 minutes. The helicopter, piloted by Mr. Lyons, lifted from El Capitan Meadow with Ranger Hoeflich suspended by a short-haul line. Mr. Lyons positioned Ranger Hoeflich near Camp IV, approximately 10 feet above and 20 feet out from the top ledge. While suspended from the helicopter, Ranger Hoeflich threw a coil of rope to the victim's partner, who caught it and held on, allowing him to pull himself to the wall, secure himself, and then disconnect from the short-haul line. Moments later, Mr. Smith was short hauled to the same position using the same technique. The team rapidly set anchors, descended to the injured climber, and placed him in the rescue litter. Through precision pilot work and critical communication between the spotters, pilot, and rescuers, Mr. Lyons positioned the empty ring of the short-haul line at a straight angle to the rescuers. Using a collapsible pole, the rescuers were able to hook the short-haul line and pull in the ring. Once Mr. Lyons was ready, the short haul ring was connected to the litter and to Mr. Smith. The Incident Command Team then worked together to cut the line—

releasing the climber and Mr. Smith from the wall to swing under the helicopter. The helicopter returned to El Capitan Meadow, where the injured climber was transferred to a waiting medical helicopter and flown to a trauma center.



The Multi-Bureau Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Response Team

When Mount Kilauea erupted on the island of Hawaii, a team of 37 DOI employees from the Bureau of Land Management, Office of Aviation Services (Office of the Secretary), and U.S. Geological Survey was deployed to collect data to effectively monitor lava flows moving through and threatening residential areas and critical infrastructure. The team flew over 1,200 flights totaling more than 300 hours to collect data which considerably reduced the safety and health risks to personnel on the island.

[View all 2019 Honor Award Convocation Recipients online.](#) If you would like to nominate your co-workers with an honor award, please contact your servicing human resources office (SHRO).

Pepper Trail, forensic ornithologist

By: Susan Sawyer, FWS

Pepper Trail's name is as unique as his job with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Clark R. Bavin National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon. As a forensic ornithologist for the last 20 years, Trail has been successful at solving hundreds of crimes involving birds from around the world, often one feather, beak, bone or talon at a time.

"I have a strange job - I identify the victims of wildlife crime when the victim is a bird," said Trail. "I'm one of only two people in the world who do this."

Trail's interest in birds began while growing up in New York. His dad was a professional photographer and introduced Trail to the outdoors. By the age of 10, Trail had started his birdwatching life list. His childhood interests led to an education in the sciences culminating with a Ph.D. in ornithology from Cornell University. Trail jokes that he's a legitimate Dr. Pepper.

For his doctoral research, Trail lived in Suriname, South America studying the mating habits of the Guianan Cock-of-the-Rock, a brilliant orange bird the size of a large pigeon.

"It was a good choice for me but it wasn't without challenges," Trail said. "My research station was nothing more than a thatched roof hut, with a hammock to sleep in and kerosene for cooking and light."

After a two year research project in American Samoa, Trail was content to find work as a contract biologist and volunteer in Ashland after moving there for his wife Debra's medical career.

He was given a tour of the forensics lab, but never imagined he'd end up working there. However, in 1998 the forensic ornithologist position unexpectedly opened up, and Trail was in the right place at the right time.

"It was a steep learning curve; most of my working life had been in the field so it was a little intimidating when I walked into a lab with a huge backlog of court cases," Trail said. "I wasn't sure about the law enforcement aspect, or if there would be enough variety for me. I didn't

want an unchallenging desk job." He didn't need to worry.

One of Trail's first cases required him to identify thousands of feathers from different birds of prey.

He scoured reference specimens and studied the most minor physical differences for clues. Having an eye for detail helped too.

"I learned very quickly about eagles and hawks," Trail said. "The case allowed me to focus on the small variations between the species." Today he can tell one raptor feather from another with a glance.

Technically, Trail is a morphologist, meaning he identifies birds by studying the shape and anatomy of their remains, often in varying stages of decay. At his disposal are over 11,000 individual specimens from 1,600 species of birds preserved in the lab's extensive – and indispensable – reference collection.

As is the case with all forensic evidence, Trail's conclusions need to hold up in court. He has to be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that his identifications are solid. Since that first raptor case, Trail has assisted with hundreds of law enforcement investigations for state and federal agencies, and international governments.

Songbirds and raptors make up more than half his case load. Trail figures he has identified over 800 bird species in evidence submitted to the lab. His casework includes the possession and sale of feathers of protected species, bird trapping, shooting, poisoning and even the smuggling of live birds.

And just when he thinks he's seen it all, something new comes across the exam table.

One of the strangest was in a takeout food container from New England. Inside was a small piece of cooked, seasoned meat with garnish on toast. Trail's first thought was "how kind, someone sent me dinner."

Instead it was evidence in a suspected crime. Federal agents received a tip about an east coast restaurant serving



Pepper Trail—a real family name enjoyed learning from nature beginning, especially birds, at an early age. At age 3, he feeds an orphaned crow the family raised and released. Photo courtesy of Pepper Trail, FWS.

wild woodcock. These forest-dwelling sandpipers are legal to hunt, but the commercial sale of their meat is illegal. The agents ordered woodcock from the menu and asked for one to go, which they sent to Ashland. Based on Trail's identification of the breastbone, the restaurant was raided and dozens of frozen woodcock were confiscated and sent to the lab.

"Our de-fleshing dermestid beetle colony feasted on those, cleaning the bones," said Trail. "It was probably a nice change of pace from their usual diet of rotting roadkill."

One would assume that after a career handling dead animals there would be a certain amount of despair about the state of wildlife. Trail said it happens.

"There are times when my colleagues and I wonder how is anything even alive out there?" said Trail. "So I take every opportunity to observe living birds, either locally or as the expert naturalist for birding tours. I try to do one or two trips a year to keep my sanity."

Also keeping him sane and productive is the Feather Atlas, which Trail calls one of his personal accomplishments. He



Dr. Pepper Trail discusses feather morphology with Ariel Gaffney, the newest ornithologist at the Services' wildlife forensics laboratory. Photo by: Susan Sawyer, FWS.

created the online searchable database to help Federal agents quickly identify feathers to support their law enforcement actions.

Today, the atlas has grown to 400 species represented by nearly 1,800 scanned images of flight feathers from North American birds. The site has been discovered by birders and artists as well as scientists and law enforcement, and is now attracting over 1.5 million visits a year (Visit the Feather Atlas at <https://www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/>).

Then there are those items which Trail handles that tug at his gentle soul. Many birds are illegally killed for decorations, talismans, accessories and traditional medicines to be sold on the black market in the U.S. and abroad. One such item arrived in 2013.

A box containing dozens of small red paper tubes wrapped in satin tassels was sent to the lab. Inside each tube was a dead, dried hummingbird and a Spanish-language prayer. They were Mexican love charms, or chuparas, believed to help one find true love.

The illegal trade of chuparas and the

number of hummingbirds killed each year to produce them is significant. To date, Trail has processed over 800 confiscated charms and identified at least 18 species of hummingbirds used in their production, many of which occur in the U.S.

"I worry the chuparosa market is growing, becoming more commercialized, since many have 'made in Mexico' stickers on them," Trail said. "The chuparosa is one of those illegal trade issues that may not be resolved before I retire."

Retire is exactly what Trail hopes to do in the coming year. While leaving the lab will be bittersweet, he has no shortage of interests to keep him busy. He is an accomplished poet and published author, and has been known to channel his inner explorer by performing in the persona of Charles Darwin for local clubs and events.

While Trail's absence will leave a void in the lab, he has taken Ariel Gaffney, the lab's newest ornithologist, under his metaphorical wing since 2017 to mentor and pass on his years of avian wisdom

and experience.

"I have so much respect for Pepper's knowledge and skill, and feel privileged that he shares that with me," said Gaffney. "The more I work with him, the more he has become the most influential biologist in my life. I am profoundly grateful Pepper is my mentor." Morphology department supervisor Barry Baker said that Trail's uncompromising ethics, passion for wilderness and dedication to excellence in science will continue to be a great influence on others.

"Pepper sets the example by his actions, how he lives his life and approaches his work," said Baker. "For me, Pepper's work constantly reminds me that anyone can 'do the right thing', and lives up to the belief that we are often most effective by thinking globally and acting locally."

This article was originally published on the [USFWS Pacific Southwest Region website](#).

Afghanistan Changed Our Lives



Left: Colonel Tom Allen, Dr. Ingrid Verstraeten, and a US Army Corps of Engineers colleague. Right: Dr. Verstraeten works with UN and Afghan colleagues. Photos courtesy of Dr. Ingrid Verstraeten, USGS.

By Dr. Ingrid Maria Verstraeten, USGS
Dr. Ingrid Maria Verstraeten is currently the Senior Science Advisor of U.S. Geological Survey's Programs for Europe, Russia, Central Asia, and Circum Arctic, Office of the Director, International Programs. She was previously engaged in implementing programs in Pakistan and Afghanistan as a senior hydrogeologist and geochemist. She started her career with the USGS in 1991 as a hydrologist and physical scientist and has been engaged in leading international endeavors for more than 15 years.

Thomas (Tom) Allen, a retired Army Colonel, was a Sergeant for the California Highway Patrol in the North Sacramento Office. Additionally, he was the Battalion Commander for the western division of the US Army Reserve Command and General Staff College. In early 2004, he volunteered to mobilize for assignment to Afghanistan. He was assigned to the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Afghanistan District and further assigned to the US Agency for International Development (USAID). His responsibilities included oversight of Security, De-mining and Air-operations for the Office of Infrastructure, Engineering and Energy. In March 2005, a request was made to provide security for a Team of USGS scientists. That request changed his life.

In 2004, Dr. Ingrid Verstraeten traveled to Pakistan to implement science and technology exchange focused on water resources with the Pakistan Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) and other Pakistani organizations including Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources. At the same time, she engaged in science and technology exchange on water resources in Afghanistan. The emphasis of the assistance of the USGS in Afghanistan was to aid the government to create a self-sufficient water resources sector that monitors and assesses its own water resources using sound, proven techniques and modern equipment. In 2005 and 2006, the multi-disciplinary USGS Water Resources Assessment Team made strides to equip and train a core group of Afghan engineers and technicians.

While the security in Pakistan was still acceptable at that time, the security in war-stricken Afghanistan was extreme. When Dr. Verstraeten set foot in Afghanistan for the first time, she was surprised to meet the US military with M-4s escorting her and her colleague Dr. Robert (Bob) Broshears to the US Embassy compound in an armored SUV. At the US Embassy, she was housed in a shared container. What an experience! The following day, her colleague requested to visit Ghazni, a town stricken by arsenic contamination

in its drinking water, as part of a UN convoy. Then Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Thomas Allen was providing security oversight for USAID and allowed Dr. Broshears to participate in the convoy. LTC Allen denied Dr. Verstraeten's request to join the convoy to Ghazni and she remained at the US Embassy for that particular trip.

Dr. Verstraeten continued her work in close cooperation with USAID, USACE, and Afghan colleagues to implement the water program of USGS. She worked closely with the Afghan Geological Survey, Ministry of Energy and Water, as well as the Ministry of Health. She had the opportunity to travel to Ghazni by armored car to check on the arsenic contamination, the Barokab refugee camp in the Kabul Valley to evaluate the sustainability of the water supply, Kandahar with a small plane sponsored by USAID to augment its water supply, and Baghram in a military helicopter with door gunners to evaluate the sustainability of its water supply. She organized and implemented numerous workshops of which one was attended by the Minister of Energy and Water, the famous Warlord, Ismail Khan.

After two more visits to Afghanistan and an encounter in US, Ingrid and Tom became close friends and time allowed their friendship to develop into a loving relationship. They were married in 2007 and continue their lives in public service.

They're Here: Paperless Performance Plans!

By: Tina Walton, DOI

On October 18, 2019, the Department launched its highly anticipated automated performance plan initiative, which brings better clarity, transparency, and organization to the documentation requirements of the performance management program. With this launch, most DOI employees will use DOI Talent to conduct performance appraisals and complete the DI-3100 and DI-3100S employee and supervisor appraisal forms.

This makes DOI Talent the Department's first enterprise-wide talent management system. Once appraisals are completed and released within DOI Talent, ratings will automatically flow from DOI Talent into FPPS—no more manual entry or file upload of ratings! FedEx packages with stacks of paper Employee Performance Appraisal Plans (EPAPs) will be a thing of the past, as will manually scanning EPAPs into eOPF every year. DOI Talent will send the completed, signed EPAPs directly to eOPF.

Why is the performance appraisal process automating?

The vast majority of DOI's employees annual employee performance appraisals are completed on paper, forcing managers and employees to engage in an antiquated, time intensive process that does not yield any value beyond documentation of the employee's annual performance. Having an automated system will ultimately mean less time spent on the process and more time spent on communicating performance, providing feedback, ensuring that employees understand supervisor expectations and how the work they do helps the Department achieve its goals.

What are the key takeaways of the new system?

- Generates time savings and increases accuracy by eliminating manual keying of employee data, printing/signing/tracking of hard copy documents, and manual entry/scanning of ratings and appraisals
- The ability to upload accomplishments for a supervisor's review
- The process is entirely online, automated, and paperless
- Provides data-driven insights for management into mission alignment and goal attainment, thereby enhancing accountability, and tracks compliance
- Supports and fosters transparent communication between supervisors and employees
- Helps to strengthen performance culture and employee engagement throughout DOI
- An integrated talent management system (performance + learning) increases efficiency by providing a one-stop platform for continual manager/employee engagement and dialogue on performance successes, areas for improvement, and learning resources to address performance gaps.

What's been going on behind-the-scenes? What's coming next?

Preparation: Over the past year and a half, bureau implementation team members (comprised of performance policy and HRIT subject-matter experts) have worked with the Interior Business Center to develop the system requirements and map workflows and business processes.

Awareness: The HR community participated in an Early Adopter pilot for their bureaus/offices in preparation for go-live in FY 2020. The Early Adopter experience was a critical element in informing the Department-wide rollout strategy and campaign.

Training - Job aids: The DOI Talent Project Team has created job aids for your use. The job aids are role-based and address each step involved in initiating a performance plan and establishing an employee's performance standards in DOI Talent.

Training – Webinars: We have been hosting a series of webinars to help employees become familiar with paperless performance plans in DOI Talent.

GO! Supervisors will log in to DOI Talent to start the paperless performance appraisal process.

Where can I find more information?

Visit the [Paperless Performance Resources forum in DOI Talent](#) for downloadable job aids or the [DOI Talent SharePoint FAQs](#) page for answers to questions about the system.

If you have issues or concerns, contact the CSC Help Desk at 1-888-367-1622 (option 3, then 6) or HRMS_Helpdesk@ios.doi.gov. The CSC support personnel are equipped to handle your technical questions and can assist if you run into a system error. If your question involves a HR policy concern, you will be referred to the appropriate persons within your bureau.



Breast Cancer Survivor, Botanist Beats the Odds

By: Ashley McConnell, USFWS

“Field season is coming,” said Dr. Anuja Parikh. “You can’t just sit around during field season.” She put on her gel prosthesis underneath her field gear, and headed to the day’s survey site: the slopes of Grapevine Mesa in southern California. Her husband, Dr. Nathan Gale, hiked just ahead of her, bushwhacking through some of the heavier brush to protect his wife from the thorny branches.

“The prosthesis was filled with gel, and I didn’t want it to get poked by a shrub and have that stuff oozing out everywhere!” she said. It was the spring of 2000.

Parikh is a botanist, wife, sister, daughter and breast cancer survivor. She played an instrumental role in collecting key data to support land managers’ and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s work to recover the San Fernando Valley spineflower, a tiny buckwheat plant once believed to be extinct in Southern California.

She was diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in late 1999, and underwent a complete mastectomy of the left breast soon after an annual mammogram detected abnormalities.

“It was all over the breast... so widespread. The doctor wanted the whole thing out,” she said.

The youngest of four sisters, Parikh came to the United States from India in 1983 at the age of 24 to pursue her doctorate studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

“There were no woods to explore where I grew up in the city of Bombay, but I always was interested in hiking outdoors and exploring the natural world whenever possible,” she said.

During her second year at UC Santa Barbara, a large wildfire swept through the Los Padres National Forest, prompting her to narrow her focus to forest ecology, and eventually, the study of plants.

Later on, Parikh went on to pursue a career in botany with her husband, whom she met at UC Santa Barbara.

“I love what I do,” she said. “Spending



Dr. Anuja Parikh is a botanist, wife, sister, daughter and breast cancer survivor. Photo courtesy of Dr. Nathan Gale.

time outside and looking on the ground for little flowers... it’s a chance to be a kid all over again.”

Parikh and Gale have been surveying and studying plants across Santa Barbara, Ventura, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, Kern, and Riverside counties in California for more than 30 years.

During her first field season following the mastectomy in 2000, the husband and wife team were among a team of botanists that rediscovered the San Fernando Valley spineflower on Grapevine Mesa of Newhall Ranch in Los Angeles County. Using her expertise in plant taxonomy, Parikh was the first to positively identify the species from Newhall Ranch. Later, she and others found more occurrences of the plant in other areas of the ranch.

Some of these locations were on land slated for a large master-planned development - thousands of homes and businesses – threatening the continued existence of the spineflower. A multi-year phased effort ensued to find a balance among landowners, conservationists, natural resource agencies, scientists and the local community, with the goal to preserve, understand and recover the enigmatic species.

Following their rediscovery of the San Fernando Valley spineflower, Gale and Parikh were hired on as consultants by the landowner, Newhall Land and

Farming Company, to conduct an inventory of flora across the ranch. Fondly called the ‘spineflower whisperers,’ they collected data integral to the long-term conservation of the tiny-flowered plant in the buckwheat family. Their surveys contributed to the development of a 2010 Spineflower Conservation Plan and a 2017 agreement between landowners and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish plants in new and existing sites and manage the species long-term.

In good rainfall years, Parikh and Gale would conduct daily field surveys for four to five months straight.

“After 10 to 12 hours slogging it out in 100 degree heat, she’d spend hours in the evening looking through a microscope to ID a plant,” Gale said. “She is incredibly thorough, incredibly persistent.”

In February 2018, Parikh was diagnosed with ductal carcinoma again, this time in her right breast. Following a partial mastectomy, she underwent 33 radiation treatments, five days a week through late spring.

A little more than a year following her second mastectomy and radiation therapy, Parikh and Gale walked the hillsides of Newhall Ranch in the Santa Clarita Valley, San Fernando Valley spineflower plants flourishing around them.

Breast Cancer Survivor (continued from page 10)

"It was astonishing," she said. "It's been a good year with a lot of rainfall and germination. Hopefully next year we'll get good rain again."

Since her initial diagnosis in 1999, Parikh has undergone eight surgeries, including reconstructive surgeries, and a hysterectomy due to a high risk of ovarian and cervical cancers.

"She will not give up. When other people give up, she keeps going," Gale said.

Parikh was by Gale's side when pre-cancerous polyps were detected in his colon. "In the middle of what she was going through, she also saved my life. It was her persistence with getting screenings... that's why we're both still here." He had part of his colon removed in 2004.

Both continue to undergo annual screenings.

Parikh currently is in remission, and continues to enjoy worldwide travels and botanical explorations, while making plans for another year of field work ahead. "It's such a privilege to be here doing what I love to do," she said. And it certainly helps to have Nathan at the ready to help clear any thorns along the way.

For more information on early detection, visit <https://www.cancer.gov/> or <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/nih-almanac/national-cancer-institute-nci>.

This article was [originally published](#) by the USFWS Pacific Southwest Region on October 9, 2019.



Dr. Anuja Parikh and Dr. Nathan Gale, fondly called the "spineflower whisperers," were among the botany team who rediscovered a once-believed to be extinct plant called the San Fernando Valley spineflower in 2000. Photo by: Ashley McConnell, USFWS

Federal Benefits OPEN SEASON

Make changes or enroll by:

OPM.GOV/OPENSEASON



By: Joy Buhler, DOI

The 2019 Federal Benefits Open Season runs from **Monday, November 11, 2019 through Monday, December 9, 2019**.

Open Season is an opportunity for eligible employees to enroll, make changes, and/or cancel coverage for the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program, Federal Employees Dental & Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP), and the Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS) for 2020. Take a few moments during Open Season to review your options and make elections now for the coming year

as you cannot enroll, change your enrollment, or cancel your coverage in these benefit programs outside of Open Season unless you experience a qualifying life event.

Rates and Benefits May Have Changed for 2020!

If you haven't already, spend a few minutes during Open Season to review your current plans for health, dental, and/or vision to ensure that your needs are being met for the coming year. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has many resources available to assist you in evaluating your benefits coverage

options for 2020 such as the [health insurance brochures](#) and the [Comparison Tool](#). More information regarding plan changes for FSAFEDS, FEDVIP, and FEHB Program may be found at OPM's [Open Season website](#).

Helpful Tips

Before you hit enroll, think about the healthcare you may need in 2020. New baby? Surgery? Losing that 20/20 vision? Higher deductible? Lower premium? Make a list of factors that can help you choose the best plan for you and family.

Are you taking advantage of the tax savings the [Federal Flexible Spending Account Program](#) (FSAFEDS) provides? FSAFEDS allows you to set aside pretax money for medical, dental, vision, and other expenses you'll pay for anyway for yourself and/or eligible family members.

Utilize the various resources on the [OPM website](#) to make great decisions for you and your family during this year's Open Season.

Workers' Compensation Filing Process Changes

By: Debbie Pfaff, DOI

On October 1, 2019, the Department of the Interior (DOI) transitioned to a new system for filing workers' compensation claims—the Department of Labor's Employees' Compensation Operations and Management Portal (ECOMP) system. This transition was made because of upcoming changes to the way that workers' compensation claims information is transferred between Interior's Safety Management Information System (SMIS) and the Department of Labor's ECOMP system. Although employees will continue to enter the SMIS system to initiate the process, they will be directed to ECOMP for processing all claims for workers' compensation benefits.

The transition to ECOMP affects workers' compensation filing only; it does not affect other Occupational Safety and Health components and processes of the SMIS system such as accident, injury and illness reporting, analysis and recordkeeping. Injured employees will continue to initiate the process for all safety-related events, including claims for compensation, through [SMIS](#). SMIS will then walk employees through the process, notify their supervisor and safety personnel, and then the employee will be directed to ECOMP to enter their injury claim. Following the steps below will ensure that employees and supervisors accurately file a workers' compensation claim. Questions about the process should be directed to your workers' compensation coordinator or your bureau's [Workers' Compensation Program Manager](#).

I've been injured in the workplace—what do I do?

Employees should:

1. Log in to the online [SMIS application](#).
2. Enter minimal injury or illness case details
3. Once the initial injury or illness details are entered, the employee is asked if he/she wants to file a claim for worker's compensation benefits.
4. If the employee wants to file a claim, he/she will be directed to ECOMP via a hyperlink.

Supervisor should:

1. Read the SMIS email notification with instructions indicating that an incident report is waiting their review in SMIS.
2. Log into SMIS to complete the employee's injury or illness case validation component and initiate a full accident report.
3. Review an additional ECOMP notification directing them to the ECOMP system to validate the employee's claim for benefits.

Note: The ECOMP notification is different from the SMIS notification – but BOTH must be completed by the supervisor.

Where can I find more information about these changes?

Additional information is available at <https://www.doi.gov/workerscompensation/>.

NPS at Atlanta Pride 2019

By: Andrea Catroppa, NPS

This year marks not only the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York but the first appearance of the National Park Service in the biggest Pride Parade in the Southeast. Atlanta, home of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the world's most well-known champion for Civil Rights and equality, has held an annual celebration since 1970. With 10 National Park sites in Georgia and 74 within the Southeast, it is only fitting that the National Park Service be represented in a crowd of more than 250,000 observers. There were 27 participants representing the NPS in the Oct 13 parade. The weather may have been dreary but was quickly overcome with the energy and exuberance of the participants. Spectators saw the familiar arrowhead and cheered as the procession passed. Many came up to walkers exclaiming their love of the National Parks while one spectator donned his Yosemite shirt and cheered his support.

The National Park Service's participation shared their message of Inclusion and Diversity for all people. The support by both the Regional Director and the ARD of Equal Opportunity Diversity Programs gave way to walkers thinking about what could be done next year to elevate our presence in the community. The agency was well-received which only goes to show the love the community has for the National Park System.

For next year's Atlanta Pride, NPS hopes to expand to increase engagement with participants and secure a booth to provide visitors with the opportunity to Find Their Park.



My DOI Career: Follow our Journey—More Coming Soon!



Your Career Journey Just Got Brighter

By: Robyn Rees, DOI

On October 2, 2019, the Department communicated the launch of My DOI Career on doi.gov/careers, to give employees the opportunity to more easily explore the varied, rich, and fulfilling occupations across DOI's 2400 locations. "We are thrilled to take this first step in helping current and prospective Department employees understand career progression opportunities, and what skills are needed in order to advance," said Robyn Rees, Senior Advisor and Project Manager for the effort. "It's important that employees understand that this is just the beginning. DOI employs people in more than 300 occupations, so we have a lot of work left to do."

The initial My DOI Career offering highlights 25 occupations employed at the Department and represents more than 30,000 current employees. This initiative is one of many efforts aimed at promoting a positive and productive work culture, responding directly to the values DOI employees believe should exemplify the culture at the Department – respect, teamwork, honesty, and fairness.

"I am so thrilled to see this amazing project launched," said Tammy Duchesne, the Department's Workplace Culture Transformation Advisor. "Employees have made it clear they want more opportunities for career growth and career change and this is the perfect tool. This is a marquee example of actions the Department is taking to transform the workplace culture."

My DOI Career puts the employee in the driver's seat, allowing each person to explore careers based on their unique strengths and preferences. When asked about the quiz and the results displayed on the site, Rees said, "It's not scientific, but it's a start. I don't believe in waiting for the perfect product to deploy something new. We have to get started and then continue to focus on improving." The project team is already gathering feedback and planning enhancements to make the tool more useful.

Occupations planned for roll out in Fiscal Year 2020 include subsets of the following job families and occupational series: Appraising (1171 series), Accounting and Budgeting (0500 series), Education (1700 series),

Engineering and Architecture (0800 series), Engineering Equipment Operations (5716 series), Facility Operations (1640 series), General Attorney (0905 series), General Business (1101 series), Guide (0090 series), Natural Resources Management and Biological Sciences (0400 series), Physical Sciences (1300 series), Public Affairs (1035 series), Social Sciences (0100 series), Realty (1170 series) and more.

"The bulk of this work is about creating a high level yet accurate description of the role across DOI's Bureaus and Offices, and we need the help of employees working in these fields to make the information useful," said Rees.

Want to support My DOI Career?

- Send us feedback about the site at transformdoi@doi.gov
- Share your story! We're looking for "virtual mentors" to share advice with current and potential employees who may be interested in your occupation field. Email us if interested!
- Explore careers at doi.gov/careers

MD-715 and Barrier Analysis

By: Acquanetta Newson, DOI

The Department of the Interior (DOI) is committed to recruiting, developing, and retaining a fully engaged, diverse, agile and highly skilled workforce with the competencies needed to meet current and future mission requirements. Leaders are held accountable for creating and maintaining a work culture where everyone has the freedom to work in an environment that is free from all forms of harassment and unlawful discrimination, are valued based on their contributions and are provided access to opportunities that gives employees the freedom to fairly compete and reach their full potential within the DOI workforce.

On September 30 – October 4, 2019, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Affirmative Employment Program (AEP) Division hosted a training on Management Directive 715 (MD-715) and Barrier Analysis that brought EEO, OHR and Diversity and Inclusion Practitioners across the Department together. The training was designed to explain the reporting requirements of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) MD-715, share best practices, and to assist practitioners in reaching the goal of MD-715 compliance: to develop a model agency EEO program.

What is Management Directive 715?

The MD-715 was issued by the EEOC on October 1, 2003. The MD-715 contains policy guidelines and standards for establishing and maintaining effective

affirmative employment programs. It requires agencies to take appropriate steps to ensure that policies, practices, and procedures are conducted in a discrimination free manner for employees and applicants.

What is Barrier Analysis?

The goal of barrier analysis under EEOC MD-715 is to identify the root causes of disparities in equal employment opportunities, so that federal agencies can take action to rectify the policies, procedures, and practices that lead to such disparities. The MD-715 calls for periodic agency self-assessments and the identification and elimination of barriers that prevent equal employment opportunities in the workplace. The MD-715 also requires federal agencies to work toward the six essential elements of a model EEO program:

- Demonstrated Commitment from Agency Leadership
- Integration of EEO into the Agency's Strategic Mission
- Management and Program Accountability
- Proactive Prevention of Unlawful Discrimination
- Efficiency
- Responsiveness and Legal Compliance

The key presenter for the five-day training was Preston F. Ford, Jr. with the USGS Office of Diversity and Equal

Opportunity. Mr. Ford emphasized to the attendees, "MD-715 and barrier analysis is not just an EEO program. It is the entire organization's responsibility to be engaged."

Also from the USGS Office of Diversity and Equal Employment, Dr. Ulysees L. Gilbert II also gave a presentation on the New IQ, also known as, "Inclusive Intelligence." This next generation concept of Diversity and Inclusion is about actively soliciting and then harnessing the power of diverse perspectives that may or may not be rooted in unconscious biases.

On the fourth day of the training, FWS EEO Officer Inez Uhl, FWS EEO Officer and Workforce Diversity Specialist Hector Zarate conducted a panel discussion on how to establish a Barrier Analysis Team (BAT) and the benefits of a BAT. Mr. Zarate said, "Employees at all levels have a role in creating an accountable, positive, and productive work culture. Let's involve them in the process of barrier identification and barrier elimination. Start by sharing information about challenges, progress, and expectations via email, blog posts, town hall meetings, and trainings. Meeting our diversity and inclusion challenges demand new approaches and inclusive thinking. You can also utilize more formal avenues such as creating a Barrier Analysis Team or working with Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)."



The Office of Civil Rights, Affirmative Employment Program Division hosted a training for EEO, OHR and Diversity and Inclusion Practitioners across the Department. Photo by: Acquanetta Newson, OCR.

Employee Spotlight: Erica D. White-Dunston



In September 2019, Erica D. White-Dunston joined the Department as the new Director of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). The Office of Civil Rights develops and enforces civil rights and equal opportunity for all DOI employees and Federally assisted programs of the Department. Learn more at doi.gov/pmb/eeo.

How would you describe your job to a child?

I not only make sure that the rules are fair to everyone, but that everyone has an opportunity to play. I also help people see that different does not mean bad.

What's the most rewarding part of your job?

There are many rewarding things about my job, but I would say it's between resolving issues before they become formal complaints and when, during the course of discussions, federal employees (managers and staff) recognize that supporting EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion) is not just the law, it is good for business.

Share a personal or professional accomplishment you're most proud of.

Prior to my arrival at DOI, my EEOC office was preparing a major report that the EEO Director presents to the Agency Chair. My former team was extremely nervous about finalizing and presenting this report without me. I continued to work with them during my last week, prepping and having them further divide the workload to insure that they were ready for the October 1 presentation as none had actually presented to the Agency Chair. I was extremely proud when the primary team called me the afternoon after presenting, excited not only about their accomplishment, but that they could connect the skills utilized to the EEO-related competencies I had developed for the organization. They are united as a team and were excited for new challenges for themselves and for their colleagues. It is this level of cohesiveness and technical expertise that I will continue to foster in the Office of Civil Rights here at DOI.

What's one thing that many people do not know about you?

I have almost a fanatic obsession with Broadway musicals, theater, operas and any other stage-related presentations.

How does your work challenge you personally/professionally?

This is a great interview question that I need to adopt! First, I think I'm constantly challenged to self-check for implicit and explicit biases to ensure I am providing objective and neutral determinations, which I think is a great thing. Second, I've learned to see beyond the prism of my own experiences/knowledge to find key grounds for compromise. Most importantly, I'm challenged to balance the needs of the organization, which are paramount, with the individual needs of staff members. Each of the challenges are important to my continued professional and personal development.

Is there anything surprising about your work/office?

Probably that like most other jobs, you have to learn about the subject matter areas you are supporting in order to determine likely and/or best areas for resolution. EEO requires a balance between understanding people and cultural nuances, the laws and procedures developed that impact people, and how those laws and procedures are processed.

If you were Secretary for a day, what would you do?

I think I would take on a less obvious role (i.e. Undercover Boss) to learn as much as possible about DOI.

Do you have a motto or personal mantra?

I have three I use regularly: "100% committed, 100% of the time"; "No rest for the best – stay ready so that you never need to get ready"; and "Success is determined by your people, your processes and your procedures."

What's the trick to maintaining a healthy work/life balance?

I'm still mastering this one so I'll say that for me it is: setting my priorities, tracking my time; recognizing that "multi-tasking" does not work – concentrate on and complete one thing at a time; asking for support; respecting my private time; and incorporating vacations into my plans.

Training Opportunities & Important Dates

11/1-30	Native American Heritage Month
11/5-7	Diversity Change Agents Refresher Course
11/7	DOI Veterans Day Ceremony
11/11	Veterans Day (holiday, fee-free day)
11/11	Federal Benefits Open Season begins
11/28	Thanksgiving Day (holiday)
12/9	Federal Benefits Open Season ends
12/12	SESCDP Graduation Ceremony, 3 pm ET
12/25	Christmas Day (holiday)
1/1	New Year's Day (holiday)
1/4	Last day to use "use or lose" annual leave.
1/12	Last day to pledge through the CFC!
1/20	Martin Luther King Jr. Day (holiday)
2/17	President's Day (holiday)

More online:

- [Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program](#) - View CAP training modules to learn how to hire employees with disabilities and provide reasonable accommodations.
- [DOI University Course Catalog](#) - DOI University delivers a wide range of courses available to all Federal employees and members of tribal governments.
- [DOI Talent](#) - Employees can find courses and transcripts in DOI Talent.
- [Center for Leadership Development \(CLD\)](#) - CLD curriculum establishes a single, standardized framework for federal HR practitioners.
- [OPM Federal Training and Development Wiki](#) - The OPM Wiki was created for Federal government training and development practitioners.

Shout-Out!

Want to recognize a DOI employee? Send your stories and photos to doi_office_of_human_resources@ios.doi.gov.



NPS Contract Specialist and DOI Vets President **Casey McCabe** was honored as a Finalist for the [2019 Sisters in Service Awards](#) in the Federal Government category on Nov 9.

Klamath Basin Sucker Recovery Team received the [2018 Pacific Southwest Region conservation award](#) in Sept 2019. Team members are: Mike Senn, Dan Blake, Evan Childress, Josh Rasmussen, Joel Ophoff, Laurie Sada, Kirk Groves, and Julie Day.



The **Interior Museum** staff celebrated Halloween as Godzilla, DC metro's Silver Line, Renaissance woman, and the DOI Bison!



Indian Affairs staff participate in Red Shawl Day on Nov 19 to honor and remember all missing and murdered American Indian and Alaska Native victims.

