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# Forest Service Special Agent in Charge Report: Nationwide Study

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## **Abstract**

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This study is the second in a series of studies to evaluate perceptions of USDA Forest Service law enforcement personnel of the roles, responsibilities, and issues entailed in their jobs. An e-mail survey was administered to the nine Forest Service special agents in charge (SACs) across the United States. All nine completed and returned the survey. Communication with others in the Forest Service was important to the SACs, as evidenced by their efforts to communicate at group meetings, their use of the phone and e-mail, talking face-to-face with others, and being available to communicate. A major concern for the SACs was the shortage of law enforcement officers and forest protection officers. Forest Service SACs ranked their highest job priorities as protecting National Forest System employees and forest users, followed by protecting forest resources and public property. Nationally, a successful program was characterized as one with sufficient resources that is understood by those engaged in or affected by the program, staffed by highly qualified individuals, and under good leadership.

Keywords: Crime and violence, law enforcement, forest visitors, successful management.

## Executive Summary

This study is the second in a series of studies evaluating the perceptions of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) law enforcement personnel regarding their profession. The ultimate goals of the work are threefold. First, the Law Enforcement and Investigations (LEI) studies serve as a followup to a previous qualitative study to learn more about crime and violence on national forests and grasslands and about the impacts on recreation visitation and management of those national forests. Second, the LEI studies serve as a followup to a previous qualitative study testing the key characteristics of success in law enforcement, measuring opinions about recreation visitor and public safety, and evaluating impacts to natural resources. Third, the LEI studies serve to provide Credibility Through Accountability (CTA)/Performance Accountability System (PAS) data for LEI.

Specific research objectives were to:

- Develop, pretest, and administer a quantitative survey to gather information from special agents in charge (SACs) about crime and violence at USFS sites nationwide.
- Confirm what crimes and acts of violence are occurring, the extent of crimes, and the impacts they have on public land management and public safety.
- Ascertain whether SACs perceive that acts of crime and violence are changing, and if so, why.
- Determine SACs' perceptions of the impacts of crime and violence to recreation visitors and other forest users.
- Establish measures of law enforcement success.
- Identify successful LEI programs nationally, regionally, and locally.
- Test the key characteristics of law enforcement success.
- Identify additional successful strategies used by SACs to deal with crime in forest settings.

To obtain this information, an e-mail survey along with an endorsement letter from the Deputy Director of LEI was sent to SACs in the USFS. Of the nine surveys sent out, nine were completed and returned.

The SACs were male, predominantly white, and still young enough to be several years away from retirement. They had been at their duty station long enough to speak with an informed institutional memory about their experiences.

The SACs were responsible for a primary patrol area that averages 24,065,819 acres; the law enforcement officers (LEOs) in their region usually accessed 12,832,542 acres for patrol purposes. While on patrol, the most common task was

public relations/education/information, followed by issuing violations/warnings or performing investigations.

Issues of importance to SACs included communication with others in the USFS, which was evidenced by their efforts to communicate at group meetings, via the phone and e-mail, and face-to-face with others, and by being available.

A major concern for the SACs was the shortage of LEOs and Forest Protection Officers. All the SACs reported having cooperative law enforcement agreements with other law enforcement agencies. Reimbursed services were provided by county sheriff's offices, state police, as well as city/town/community forces and were considered mostly adequate. Services provided by city/local/community were not considered adequate in responding to or preventing crime. Not all the SACs reported nonreimbursed services. Nonreimbursed services were provided by county sheriff's offices and state police, as well as city/town/community forces. The SACs who had nonreimbursed services felt that these were mostly adequate.

Opinions were mixed about whether their authority and jurisdiction were adequate for what they believed was expected or demanded of them with two-thirds being of the opinion that they were not adequate.

The USFS SACs ranked their highest job priority as protecting National Forest System (NFS) employees and forest users, followed by protecting forest resources and public property. They believed that the NFS line officers they most commonly interacted with had a different set of priorities. Most SACs believed that LEI's relationship with the rest of the Forest Service should be one of collaboration and teamwork. Many SACs felt like outsiders to the agency. Others said LEI should be an equal partner and well-integrated within the agency. All SACs felt supported by local NFS employees, and most felt supported by LEI line officers.

Several types of crime were on the increase, according to most SACs. Criminal damage, methamphetamine (meth) chemical dumping, indiscriminate shooting, and threats against personnel topped the list, followed by marijuana cultivation, theft of public property, theft of visitor personal property, dumping of household waste, arson, and body dumping. Only armed defense of forest products (such as mushrooms), arson, drive-by shootings, personnel threats, meth labs, and natural fire hazards were thought to have decreased by some SACs. Suicides, rape, and accidental fire activity were thought to have remained unchanged from FY 2003 to FY 2004.

Lack of adequate funding, management issues (e.g., quality leadership), and natural resource protection topped the list of priorities facing the law enforcement professionals, according to the SACs. Most SACs believed that the NFS line officer with whom they most commonly interacted was in general agreement with their list of priorities.

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**Issues of importance to SACs included communication with others in the USFS, which was evidenced by their efforts to communicate at group meetings, via the phone and e-mail, and face-to-face with others, and by being available.**

The SACs described forest users and NFS employees as their primary customers. They believed that their customers wanted safety/protection while on the forest, and they wanted conservation of the resources and action taken by law enforcement. Most of the SACs felt that recreation visitors were mostly safe from other visitors and mostly physically safe from site features.

For their area of responsibility, most SACs reported that during the time they worked there the quality of the natural resources had remained the same; however, the maintenance of USFS facilities and developed areas had declined. Most of the SACs believed that the media portrayal of law enforcement handling of crimes against resources was mostly positive, as was the media portrayal of handling of fire crimes.

Nationally, a successful LEI program was characterized as one with sufficient resources that is understood by those engaged in or affected by the program, staffed by highly qualified individuals, and under good leadership. Similarly, a successful program regionally was characterized as one that is understood by those engaged in or affected by the program, has sufficient resources, and has support/trust. Locally, success depended on understanding and good working relationships by those engaged in or affected by the program, support/trust, and having sufficient resources.

Common concerns of law enforcement personnel included good relationships both within and outside the agency, adequate resources in terms of funding and personnel, natural resource protection, and safety of USFS employees and forest users.

The results of this study can be used in a variety of ways. The identification of issues, particularly issues that are consistent across regions, could be used to prioritize law enforcement efforts. Some of the successes that have occurred, in combination with a focus on the characteristics identified as integral to a successful LEI program, could be identified as a priority focus area for officers and leaders. This has some serious implications for budgeting and staffing. Some consideration might be made of the current allocation of resources and whether it is congruent with the issues identified by the SACs.

On the face of the comments, it appears that a successful LEI program is all about what is best for LEI. Further examination of the many comments indicates a great desire to work for the public good, keep visitors safe, and protect the land base.

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## Introduction

Crime and acts of violence are a part of the national forest setting making the work of national forest and grassland managers more hazardous and jeopardizing the safety of forest users. To understand and respond appropriately to current and future Forest Service law enforcement needs, it is important to hear from the professionals most closely associated with these issues—special agents in charge (SACs) of the USDA Forest Service (USFS).

Another incentive for conducting this study was to respond to the federal initiative for performance-based measures. As a consequence of budget cuts and competing demands for federal dollars, the USFS must demonstrate its accountability to Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the Government Accountability Office, and the general public for its level of performance. Under the aegis of the Credibility Through Accountability/Performance Accountability System (CTA/PAS), USFS Law Enforcement and Investigations (LEI) was tasked with developing and implementing performance outcome measures. Law Enforcement and Investigations also wanted recognition for the benefits that accrue to visitors, employees, and cooperators beyond what is addressed in the performance measures. They wanted an opportunity to “tell their story.” They believe that “locking up bad guys and writing tickets” does not adequately describe the benefits they provide. This report includes CTA/PAS performance measures for USFS law enforcement as well as many of the stories, opinions, and institutional memories of dedicated USFS SACs.

This is the second in a series of studies addressing the CTA/PAS component. Previously, we collected data from law enforcement officers (LEOs), and following this study, we will complete the patrol commanders and patrol captains study, the special agents study, and finally, the study that includes forest supervisors and district rangers. Results from those studies will appear in other reports.

## Background

Research on national forest crime is limited. Historically, research efforts focused on vandalism (Christensen and Clark 1978), especially graffiti and target shooting. More recently, Munson (1995) noted problems such as the dumping of garbage and toxic chemicals, vandalism, marijuana cultivation, and timber thefts. Marosi (1999) found that national forests were being used as a dumping ground for murders committed elsewhere, especially in urban-proximate forests (those within an hour’s drive of a million or more people). Pendleton (1996) found a 100-percent increase in national forest crime from 1989 to 1992. More recently, Chavez and Tynon (2000) found that clandestine methamphetamine (“meth”) manufacture and meth lab

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chemical dumps, once thought to be the bane of urban environments, indiscriminately endanger both those who visit and those who work on national forests. Meth has become a dangerous and environmentally damaging drug problem.

Chavez and Tynon (2000) reported on crime in a study conducted at eight USFS sites in four USFS regions. The kinds of crime taking place at these sites were sorted into the following crime categories: urban-associated crime (e.g., arson, body dumping, domestic violence, drive-by shooting, gang activity, murder, rape and sexual assault, suicide); assault (e.g., personal assault, criminal property damage, threats against property); drug activity (e.g., marijuana cultivation, meth labs, meth chemical dumps, armed defense of crops); and takeover or violence perpetrated by members of extremist and nontraditional groups (e.g., satanic cults, EarthFirst!, survivalists, and militia/supremacy groups). Later research at other USFS sites lent support to those findings (Chavez et al. 2004, Tynon and Chavez 2006).

These crime categories are familiar to readers of the “USDA Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations Weekly Report” (LEI Summary), where nonrandomly selected topics are reported each week. An analysis of 5 years of data (from October 1997 through the end of September 2002) revealed that the percentages in the LEI Summary report mimic estimates from managers’ perceptions of time spent in city law enforcement (such as domestic violence or murder) vs. natural resources law enforcement (such as timber theft).<sup>1</sup> The analysis of the LEI Summary reports indicated that about 17 percent of USFS law enforcement time was spent conducting natural resources law enforcement, and that they spent 48 percent of their time investigating urban crime (the remainder of topics and time were for assault, drug activities, and extremist groups). These groupings are based on the work by Chavez and Tynon (2000).

### **Crime mitigation efforts—**

In addition to knowing what kinds of crime are occurring, it is important to understand how to mitigate crime. Case-study research conducted at two USFS sites uncovered strategies that resulted in areas being safer for visitors, natural resource managers, and staff. Chavez et al. (2004) conducted face-to-face interviews with LEOs, district rangers, recreation officers, public affairs officers, resource specialists, and recreation planners, as well as interviews with those outside the agency (e.g., county sheriff’s deputies, a resort owner, public relations employees, and community representatives). The benefit of conducting indepth interviews is in its flexibility. Respondents can “elaborate, question, go off on (informative) tangents, and often provide answers to questions that the interviewer did not foresee being asked” (Lersch 2004: 25).

<sup>1</sup> Tynon, J.F.; Chavez, D.J. 2002. Crimes and violence on lands post-9/11. Keynote address presented at the leisure research symposium, National Recreation and Park Association, October 16–19, Tampa, FL.

The interviews revealed problems common at both sites. These included assaults, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and problems created by gang activity or members of extremist groups. Isolation or distance from assistance was also a familiar theme. There were watershed events that led to action (a riot at one site and a murder at the other). Some of the specific actions taken to manage crime and violent acts and events were (1) development of sites, (2) addition of physical barriers (categorized as prohibition and harm reduction actions), (3) control of parking and motor vehicles, (4) increased law enforcement, (5) temporary and permanent closures, and (6) traffic checkpoints.

Evaluation of the case studies resulted in the identification of key characteristics of success in law enforcement. The key characteristics were force of personalities (i.e., attention to an area depended upon individuals, not on policies), resources (i.e., money and people), persistence (i.e., planning, consistency, and visibility), collaboration (i.e. within the Forest Service, with other law enforcement agencies, with community and volunteer groups, and with recreation visitors and recreation clubs), and communication (e.g., follow a communication plan, get the word out to the public, be reliable, and be consistent).

The replication of site-specific actions might prove useful in other areas. But the take-home message was that successful crime mitigation characteristics (e.g., force of personalities, resources, persistence, collaboration, and communication) are not “business as usual” for law enforcement—they go beyond the cooperative agreements that already exist.

#### **Data collection issues on national forests—**

Obtaining statistical data to substantiate how much crime is occurring in USFS settings has been difficult because of the way crime is reported and recorded. Agreements between the USFS and other law enforcement entities can result in several agencies tracking crime. Local sheriffs track incidents by using categories based on the Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) guide. Part I of the UCR includes categories such as criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Part II includes other assaults, drug violations, stolen property (receiving, buying, possessing), vandalism, weapons-related offenses, driving under the influence, liquor law violations, drunkenness, and disorderly conduct (Lersch 2004). Part III of the UCR is about assists to USFS LEOs and assists to the public, where state or local law enforcement personnel contribute to USFS enforcement efforts. Although this information can be made available, local law enforcement officers/sheriffs, in general, do not specifically tie data to incidents on USFS lands—it is all combined with their other work.

Forest Service LEI has its own database to track crime incidents, also using categories from the UCR guide. In addition, it has categories specific to forest or land management (e.g., campfire where prohibited, camping where prohibited, violating curfew). It tracks observations of problems, verbal warnings, and written warnings (together these are the total violations). It also tracks tickets given. Total violations and tickets written equal the total incidents or occurrences.

A significant problem was getting the data into the database. Originally, LEI entered crime data into a USFS system database called Law Enforcement Management Attainment Reporting System (LEMARS). Then, the USFS transported all their data into a new database program called Law Enforcement and Investigations Management Attainment Reporting System (LEIMARS). Unlike LEMARS, LEIMARS contains not only investigative information but also the latitude and longitude coordinates of crime incidents, allowing it to serve as a geographic information system database. Unfortunately, data at some sites were permanently lost during the transfer process. Problems with the new system (i.e., some data were either not recorded or disappeared after being entered into the program) have been corrected.

## Study Objectives

The best, and only, available source of crime statistics for the entire 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands in the USFS system is LEIMARS, but it does not capture all the crime that is occurring. Crime data collected by non-Forest Service law enforcement are not specifically earmarked to USFS lands, are not included in the USFS crime database, and are not available for analysis. Therefore, we decided to survey law enforcement personnel directly to obtain their perceptions rather than analyzing incomplete records of actual crime/incidents. Previous research suggested that SACs with several years of on-the-job experience might best know about crime and how crime incidents have changed over time.

Specific research objectives were to:

- Develop, pretest, and administer a quantitative survey instrument to gather information from SACs about crime and violence at USFS sites nationwide.
- Confirm what crimes and acts of violence are occurring, the extent of crimes, and the impacts they have on public land management and public safety.
- Ascertain whether SACs perceive that acts of crime and violence are changing, and, if so, why.
- Determine SACs' perceptions of the impacts of crime and violence on recreation visitors and other forest users.

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**Previous research suggested that SACs with several years of on-the-job experience might best know about crime and how crime incidents have changed over time.**

- Establish measures of law enforcement success.
- Identify successful LEI programs nationally, regionally, and locally.
- Test the key characteristics of law enforcement success.
- Identify additional successful strategies used by SACs to deal with crime in forest settings.

## **Methods**

Several individuals reviewed the first draft of the survey, including staff at LEI in the Washington office, leaders in the Alaska Region working on the CTA program, and fellow social scientists. We enlisted the cooperation and participation of all SACs across the USFS by including an endorsement letter from the LEI Deputy Director. We administered the questionnaire via e-mail between May and June 2006.

There were 48 questions, both closed- and open-ended, on the survey eliciting information about crime and violence that had occurred within the past year on each respective administrative unit. Four questions measured experience levels of respondents. Specifically, we asked SACs about their years in law enforcement, years with USFS, years worked as a SAC with the USFS, and years at their current duty station. Questions that focused on respondents' areas of responsibility asked about the number of acres respondents normally patrol as well as the number they're responsible for, the patrol setting (e.g., urban, semirural, remote), and the number of incidents they were personally involved in. We also asked them to characterize their most common public contacts and to describe how they communicate with others in the USFS.

We asked a series of questions related to enforcement levels on an average day. This included questions about cooperation with other agencies/groups, and perceptions about the adequacy of that coverage. Questions also addressed perceptions about authority and jurisdiction as well as resources necessary to do the job.

Questions that focused on their roles in the USFS asked how their job fits into the USFS, what they perceived as their highest work priority, what they believe the relationship of LEI with the rest of the USFS should be, and where LEI fits within the organization and programs. We also asked if the line officer they most commonly interact with knows and understands what SACs do, and if they feel supported.

To get at the issues SACs believe are important, we asked them if 28 different types of crime, law enforcement violations, and other patrol activities had increased, decreased, or remained about the same from fiscal year (FY) FY 2003

to FY 2004. We asked SACs to identify activities they found more common during the week, during daytime hours, or when areas were more crowded. We also asked SACs if they had ever been threatened or attacked because of their job.

We asked two open-ended questions about priorities. In the first, we asked about priority issues facing the law enforcement profession in the USFS today. In the second, we asked how the priorities of the line officer they most commonly interact with compares with LEI priorities.

Several questions focused on USFS customers. Using open-ended questions, we asked SACs to identify their customers and what they think customers want. We also asked them to characterize recreation visitor safety and any special problems they have protecting forest users in general. We also asked about the media portrayal of crimes against forest users.

We asked SACs if the quality of the natural resources had degraded, improved, or remained about the same. We asked if maintenance of facilities and developed areas had changed. We also asked about media portrayals of fire crimes and crimes against resources.

We used several open-ended questions to identify measures of law enforcement success, including what SACs believed worked well and what they tried that didn't work. We asked SACs to characterize a successful LEI program nationally, regionally, and locally.

The survey closed with a number of sociodemographic questions. There was also an opportunity for SACs to add final thoughts. A copy of the questionnaire used is included in the appendix.

The e-mail survey was administered according to Dillman's Total Design Method (Dillman 2000). To begin, the SACs received an e-mail message from the Deputy Director of LEI. Next, they received the first mailing from us. This consisted of a questionnaire and a personalized letter. The next e-mail was a "postcard" reminder sent one week later. In subsequent e-mail contacts the respondent received another copy of the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were returned in several ways: via e-mail, FAX, FedEx, or through the U.S. postal system.

## Data Analysis

The data were entered into an SPSS v. 12 software program.<sup>2</sup> We ran frequencies on all variables to confirm data integrity. SPSS was used to analyze all variables. Either percentages or averages (and standard deviations) are provided, as appropriate.

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<sup>2</sup> The use of trade or firm names in this publication is for reader information and does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of any products or services.

## Results

Of the nine questionnaires sent via e-mail, nine were completed and returned, for a response rate of 100 percent. Results are reported for all respondents unless noted otherwise.

### Demographics

Sociodemographic questions used to describe the respondent population addressed gender, age, race/ethnicity, and education level.

All of the SACs were male (100 percent). They averaged 50.2 years of age ( $n = 9$ ;  $SD = 4.29$ ).

The majority of SACs were White (89 percent), and one was Hispanic (11 percent). Years of school completed averaged 15.6 years ( $n = 7$ ;  $SD = 1.27$ ), with 44 percent holding an academic degree related to their work in law enforcement.

Four questions measured experience. The SACs had been in law enforcement an average of 24.2 years ( $n = 9$ ;  $SD = 5.04$ ) and with the Forest Service an average of 26.8 years ( $n = 9$ ;  $SD = 6.70$ ). Number of years as a LEO for the Forest Service ranged from 2 to 15 with an average of 6.7 years ( $n = 7$ ;  $SD = 4.15$ ). Number of years as a SAC for the Forest Service ranged from 13 to 24 with an average of 15.2 years ( $n = 9$ ;  $SD = 3.46$ ). The SACs had been at their duty station an average of 5.5 years ( $n = 8$ ;  $SD = 4.11$ ).

### Background on Area of Responsibility

The SACs were responsible for providing law enforcement coverage for an average of 24,065,819 acres in their primary area of responsibility ( $n = 8$ ;  $SD = 3,681,698$ ), and further noted that the LEOs in their area of responsibility normally accessed an average of 12,832,542 acres for patrol purposes ( $n = 8$ ;  $SD = 8,272,877$ ). The SACs reported an average 46.3 LEOs ( $n = 9$ ;  $SD = 30.63$ ) and 3.2 Reserve LEOs ( $n = 9$ ;  $SD = 2.99$ ) employed in their region.

The setting of the patrol area of responsibility differed. Most SACs reported their area of responsibility as primarily urban/urban-interface (44 percent) or primarily semirural (44 percent). Fewer reported the setting to be primarily extremely remote (11 percent).

Average total incidents (warning notices, violation notices, incident reports, and state violations) reported in LEIMARS for FY04 in their region was 17,175 ( $n = 9$ ;  $SD = 11,574$ ). Average total number of offenses (warning offenses, incident offences, violation offenses, and state offenses) reported for FY04 in their region was 19,514 ( $n = 9$ ;  $SD = 11,379$ ). Only three SACs reported how their region captures and

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reports other incidents not reported in LEIMARS. They provided three methods: law enforcement performance, partners/cooperators, and officer's daily logs.

The SACs were asked to rate 1 to 5 their most common activity during public contacts (1 is most common). Public relations/education/information was rated "1" by 56 percent, violation notices/warnings/investigations was rated "1" by 33 percent, and search/rescue/medical response was rated "1" by 11 percent.

The SACs communicated with others in the Forest Service through various means. Note that this question had no responses provided to respondents (called open-ended<sup>3</sup>). We coded all responses (n = 18) into response categories after reading all responses. More than one-third said they communicated at group functions (44 percent). Other communications means included:

- 33 percent said they talked by phone
- 33 percent said they talked face-to-face
- 22 percent made themselves available to communicate
- 11 percent sent e-mail messages
- 11 percent provided weekly reports
- 44 percent had other comments:
  - Communication is critical to our survival
  - Leadership team meetings
  - Unspecified contact

## Enforcement Level and Cooperation

Several questions were asked to address enforcement levels that occur on an average day, cooperation with other agencies/groups, and perceptions about adequacy of that coverage. This section also addresses perceptions about authority and jurisdiction as well as resources necessary to do the job.

On an average day, there was an average of 39 LEOs responsible for law enforcement patrols or regulatory compliance in the LEO patrol area of responsibility (n = 9; SD = 32). Also, on an average day, a median of 95 forest protection officers (FPOs) were responsible for law enforcement patrols or regulatory compliance in the patrol area of responsibility (range 5 to 502; n = 8).

More than 8 in 10 (89 percent) SACs reported there were too few LEOs in their patrol area of responsibility, and more than half (56 percent) reported too few FPOs in their patrol area of responsibility. Eleven percent reported the amount of LEOs in their patrol area of responsibility was about right, and 22 percent reported the amount of FPOs in their patrol area of responsibility was about right.

<sup>3</sup> Questions with no response categories provided to respondents are called open-ended. Responses are coded into response categories after reading all responses. Many respondents comments have been paraphrased to help ensure confidentiality.

All SACs (100 percent) reported having cooperative agreements with other law enforcement agencies. Most reported agreements with county sheriff's offices (89 percent), with state police (89 percent), or with city/town/community law enforcement (67 percent). Fewer (33 percent) had similar agreements with others.

We asked on an average day how many sworn personnel from other law enforcement agencies provide Forest Service **reimbursed** law enforcement services on or affecting the National Forest System (NFS) in the patrol area of responsibility. City/town/community law enforcement ranged from none to 10 ( $n = 7$ ), with a median 4 sworn personnel. County sheriff's office law enforcement ranged from none to 100 ( $n = 7$ ) with a median 20 sworn personnel. State police law enforcement ranged from none to 5 ( $n = 7$ ), with a median 2 sworn personnel.

We also asked whether these **reimbursed** patrols offer adequate services in responding to or preventing crime. Perceptions about services from city/town/community law enforcement differed with about one-third saying they were inadequate (33 percent) and another 1 in 10 (11 percent) saying they were adequate (11 percent did not know). Perceptions about services from county sheriff's law enforcement were almost evenly split between those saying they were adequate (44 percent) and those saying they were inadequate (33 percent). Perceptions about services from state police law enforcement differed greatly with about half saying they were adequate (56 percent) and another fourth (22 percent) saying they were inadequate (11 percent did not know).

We asked on an average day how many sworn personnel from other law enforcement agencies provided **nonreimbursed** law enforcement services on or affecting the NFS in the patrol area of responsibility. Four SACs reported city/town/community law enforcement that ranged from 5 to 35, with a median 20 sworn personnel. Three SACs reported county sheriff's office law enforcement that ranged from none to 100 with a median 45 sworn personnel. Four SACs reported state police law enforcement that ranged from 2 to 50, with a median 4.5 sworn personnel. One SAC reported 2 "other" law enforcement sworn personnel.

We also asked whether these **nonreimbursed** patrols offer adequate services in responding to or preventing crime. Perceptions about services from city/town/community law enforcement for those who had them were entirely positive. Perceptions about services from county sheriff's law enforcement for those who had them were mostly positive with most saying they were adequate and one saying they were inadequate. Perceptions about services from state police for those who had them were entirely positive (100 percent).

Note that the second part of the question had no responses provided to respondents. We coded all responses ( $n = 9$ ) received into response categories after reading all responses.

Only one-third of SACs indicated their authority and jurisdiction is adequate for what they feel is expected or demanded of them internally and externally (33 percent said yes, 67 percent said no). A total of nine comments addressed concerns. These were grouped into three categories of responses: having to depend on others, the need to deputize LEOs, and having out-of-date regulations to deal with. Some examples follow:

- 44 percent had to depend on others:
  - “Detain” a person until the proper authority arrives
- 33 percent felt that LEOs should be deputized:
  - Need state peace officer authority
  - Need concurrent maritime and territorial jurisdiction
- 22 percent had out-of-date regulations to deal with:
  - Need a few CFR revisions...stuff we have been working on for years

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**Nearly all SACs (89 percent) reported not having adequate resources to do their job.**

Nearly all SACs (89 percent) reported not having adequate resources to do their job. We asked what additional resources they might need. We received 14 responses that we grouped into three categories: personnel issues, fiscal constraints, and equipment. Some examples of each category follow:

- 50 percent said personnel:
  - Immediate regional office staff, staff at the patrol captain level, additional officers and agents.
  - Vacant positions, additional administrative personnel, new LEO positions, a new special agent position.
  - Additional LEOs, special agents, and administrative support.
  - We should have at least one patrol officer per ranger district and at least one special agent per forest.
  - Our personnel numbers have been decreasing at an almost exponential rate in the last several years.
- 29 percent said fiscal:
  - Additional funding for cooperative agreements.
  - LEI is, for the most part, surviving within a set/static budget, while crimes and those individuals who perpetrate them are on the constant rise.
  - Travel and support costs in some areas far exceed those in the lower areas, but in the national budgeting equation those factors do not appear to be taken into consideration.
- 21 percent said equipment:
  - Need additional equipment.

## Roles

The SACs reported their highest priorities as protecting NFS employees and protecting forest users (table 1). They were also asked to rank 1 to 4 what they believed the NFS line officer they most commonly interacted with thought is the highest priority: protecting forest users, protecting resources, protecting NFS employees, or protecting public property. The SACs reported their perception that the NFS line officers' highest priorities were similar to their own.

The SACs were asked what they believed LEI's relationship with the rest of the Forest Service should be. We grouped their nine responses into three categories:

- 67 percent said collaboration and teamwork:
  - We should be as important as all the other departments.
  - Integrated, positive, strong.
  - Fully integrated, at full parity with grade structure level, and to be used as an overall management tool to assist with land management responsibilities.
  - Fully integrated with an agreed set of annual work objectives on a unit-by-unit basis for the enforcement side of the program.
  - LEI is a support unit to assist other functional areas within the agency.
- 22 percent said serve a protection role:
  - Provide for visitor and employee safety and resource/public facility protection.
  - Providers of service, as it relates to criminal activities.
- 11 percent had other comments:
  - Should be no different than what exists between Washington office and regional office staff positions.

**Table 1—Priorities of special agents in charge (SACs) and perceptions of National Forest System (NFS) line officers' priorities**

| Priority                   | Average <sup>a</sup> number<br>SACs' view | Average number<br>perception of<br>NFS line officers'<br>view |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Protecting NFS employees   | 1.44 (9)                                  | 1.67 (9)                                                      |
| Protecting forest users    | 1.44 (9)                                  | 2.00 (9)                                                      |
| Protecting resources       | 3.33 (9)                                  | 2.33 (9)                                                      |
| Protecting public property | 3.33 (9)                                  | 3.56 (9)                                                      |

<sup>a</sup> Priorities were 1 to 5 with 1 being highest.

We asked the SACs where LEI fits within the Forest Service organization and programs. The responses received were quite varied. We grouped responses into we're outsiders, we're equal partners, we serve a protection role, we're well-integrated, and other. Examples included these:

- 33 percent said we're outsiders:
  - The Washington office refuses to make the director an SES position therefore degrading the perceived role and credibility of that person in D.C.; likewise, LEI does not fit within the present deputy chief structure so we remain the "red-headed step-child."
  - Very low priority.
- 11 percent said equal partners:
  - Collaborative partners in reaching the primary objectives/goals of the agency.
- 11 percent said serve a protection role:
  - The "go to" people that will help curtail/stop crime on NFS lands.
- 11 percent said well-integrated:
  - Aligned with NFS.
- 11 percent had other comments:
  - We belong at the deputy chief level.

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**About half of the SACs reported that they had good relations and rapport with the NFS line officer:**

About half of the SACs reported that they had good relations and rapport with the NFS line officer:

- 55 percent said they had good relations/rapport:
  - For the most part.
  - In every general sense they know and understand.
  - I have strong support.
  - Absolutely.
- 9 percent said the SAC made frequent contacts:
  - We communicate often both on a professional level and a personal level.

Other relations were not as good:

- 9 percent said NFS line officers do not understand the complexity/hazards of the SAC job:
  - I'm not sure they always understand or appreciate our role. I think the more we interact and educate them, the better understanding they will have for our program.

- It's all about education and a common understanding of each other's responsibilities.
- 9 percent said the NFS line officer does not want information or details:
  - Really does not seem to be a desire to know.
- 9 percent said the NFS line officer needs training and ride-alongs:
  - They are causing me to work harder at educating them without offending them at the same time.

Note that the second part of the question had no responses provided to respondents. We coded all responses received into response categories after reading all responses.

The majority of SACs (89 percent) felt supported by LEI line officers.

- 11 percent said they do not feel supported by LEI line officers because of a lack of resources:
  - Washington office LEI continues to underfund the program even though the actual statistics and work level is well above all other regions.

The majority of SACs (78 percent) felt supported by NFS line officers. Those who did not feel supported by NFS line officers provided two responses:

- 50 percent mentioned resentment toward law enforcement:
  - Some of them feel we are a necessary evil
- 50 percent mentioned a lack of trust/understanding:
  - To some extent, NFS line officers are supportive to a point. Most of them believe we need a law enforcement program but are not real sure how big or small. I don't hear that they are pushing hard for more funding for law enforcement.

All SACs (100 percent) felt supported by local NFS employees.

## **Existing Issues**

The SACs were asked about 26 types of crime, law enforcement violations, and other patrol activities in their patrol area of responsibility. First they were asked if these had increased, decreased, or remained about the same in the last fiscal year (FY 2004) as compared to FY 2003, and then were asked to specify which ones were more common during the week, during daytime hours, or when the area was more crowded. We also asked if the SACs have ever been threatened or attacked because of their job.

At least 45 percent of the SACs said the following activities had **increased** from FY 2003 to FY 2004 (see table 2); in rank order:

- Criminal damage
- Meth chemical dump
- Shooting (indiscriminate)
- Personnel threats
- Marijuana cultivation
- Thefts of public property
- Thefts of visitor personal property
- Dumping of household waste
- Arson
- Body dumping

At least 40 percent of SACs said armed defense of forest products activities **decreased** from FY 2003 to FY 2004.

At least 45 percent of the SACs said the following activities had **remained the same** from FY 2003 to FY 2004; in rank order:

- Suicides
- Rape
- Accidental fire activity

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**Nearly half (44 percent) of the SACs said they had been threatened or attacked because of their job.**

Nearly half (44 percent) of the SACs said they had been threatened or attacked because of their job. We asked about incidents in the past 3 years. The SACs provided no descriptive comments.

## Priorities

The SACs provided comments on priority issues. The responses were grouped into these categories: fiscal, management, natural resource protection, professionalism, safety, cooperation, and other. Two-thirds had comments related to fiscal issues. Examples of priority issues facing the law enforcement profession in the Forest Service today were:

- 67 percent said fiscal:
  - Budget shortfalls.
  - The lack of funding for law enforcement personnel.
  - More funding.
  - Increasing budget to pay our way and maintain staffing levels and continuing to foster cooperative relationships.

**Table 2—Perceptions about different types of crime, law enforcement violations, and other patrol activities in their patrol area of responsibility**

| Activity                               | Increased | Decreased      | Remained<br>the same | Don't know |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|----------------------|------------|
|                                        |           |                |                      |            |
|                                        |           | <i>Percent</i> |                      |            |
| a. Arson                               | 56        | 33             | 11                   | 0          |
| b. Domestic violence                   | 33        | 11             | 44                   | 11         |
| c. Thefts of visitor personal property | 67        | 0              | 33                   | 0          |
| d. Thefts of public property           | 67        | 11             | 22                   | 0          |
| e. Gang activity                       | 44        | 11             | 44                   | 0          |
| f. Body dumping                        | 56        | 0              | 33                   | 11         |
| g. Shooting (indiscriminate)           | 78        | 0              | 22                   | 0          |
| h. Suicides                            | 22        | 0              | 67                   | 11         |
| i. Murder                              | 44        | 0              | 44                   | 11         |
| j. Rape/sexual assault                 | 33        | 0              | 56                   | 11         |
| k. Drive-by shooting                   | 22        | 22             | 44                   | 11         |
| l. Criminal damage                     | 100       | 0              | 0                    | 0          |
| m. Personnel threats                   | 78        | 22             | 0                    | 0          |
| n. Threats against property            | 44        | 11             | 22                   | 22         |
| o. Marijuana cultivation               | 67        | 11             | 22                   | 0          |
| p. Meth labs                           | 44        | 22             | 33                   | 0          |
| q. Meth chemical dump                  | 89        | 0              | 11                   | 0          |
| r. Armed defense of crops              | 33        | 11             | 33                   | 22         |
| s. Dumping of household waste          | 67        | 0              | 22                   | 11         |
| t. Dumping of landscape waste          | 22        | 0              | 44                   | 22         |
| u. Trespass of undocumented immigrants | 44        | 0              | 22                   | 22         |
| v. Armed defense of forest products    | 0         | 44             | 33                   | 22         |
| w. Natural fire hazards                | 44        | 22             | 11                   | 22         |
| x. Accidental fire activity            | 33        | 0              | 56                   | 11         |
| y. Weather hazards                     | 22        | 11             | 33                   | 33         |
| z. Wildlife hazards                    | 22        | 0              | 44                   | 33         |
| aa. Road hazards                       | 44        | 0              | 33                   | 22         |

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 owing to missing data. All percentages based on n = 9.

- Funding is the highest priority. As use continues to increase on the national forests, USFS budgets continue to decrease. The LEI employees tend to be the primary presence that the public sees and our funding is on a downward trend.
- 33 percent said management:
  - The Chief's office needs to make a decision about where to place LEI in the national organization, i.e., Chief's office, NFS.
  - Lack of quality leadership throughout the organization, too many vacant positions at the top—people in acting positions do not have the same commitment nor do they hold people accountable as much as they should/could; lack of a position within the traditional USFS structure; providing the necessary leadership to adjust and adapt to future changes and to develop future leaders.
- 33 percent said natural resource protection:
  - New employees—ensuring they have a cultural understanding of the Forest Service and know natural resources and the impacts illegal uses have on those.
- 11 percent said occupational ideals:
  - Believing that we are becoming so integrated with NFS line officers that we no longer have a reason to maintain our LEI independence.
- 11 percent said safety:
  - The ever-increasing public and employee safety issues.
- 11 percent said cooperation:
  - Full integration into the homeland security function.
- 33 percent had other comments:
  - Ecoterrorism, domestic terrorism.
  - Morale—Without leadership, vision, or direction, our workforce is simply going through the motions of doing their job, but my sense is that there is not a great deal of excitement associated with it.

We asked how priorities of the NFS line officer who most commonly interacted with the SACs compared with LEI priorities. Most of the comments were that there was general agreement between the NFS line officer and LEI priorities. Other said there were conflicting priorities. Some examples follow:

- 78 percent said general agreement:
  - Our priorities really do not differ. They are concerned about

being good stewards of the land, and we are concerned with protecting those resources for their stewardship. We all agree in the protection of the public, our employees, and the resources. Many of them struggle being able to make a connection between smuggling (for example) and how committing LEI resources to that, protects the public, our employees, or the resources.

- They are very well aligned. Of course the things he worries about every day are different than what I worry about but all-in-all he leaves the “law enforcement” to me and trusts that I will perform in a manner he will support while keeping him informed of the things that will bite him and not bothering him with the little stuff.
- We all want more LEOs and special agents.
- In most instances they are the same. It is imperative that we include them and they include us in setting priorities and then continually communicating about the results, changes, or other issues that arise.
- 11 percent said conflicting priorities:
  - Often they believe that LEI’s job is to perform full-time security, regulatory enforcement, or other civil compliance duties, when in fact we have criminal law that we must enforce.

## Customers

All the SACs described their customers as “forest users” and “Forest Service employees”; several also noted customers were local agencies.

- 100 percent said forest users:
  - Forest users
  - Society/forest visitors/taxpayers
  - The public
  - Interest groups
  - Permittees, contractors
- 100 percent said Forest Service employees:
  - Forest Service employees (my boss)
  - Forest Service line and staff officers
  - Forest Service; program managers
- 44 percent said local agencies:
  - Cooperating agencies

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**We also asked the SACs what they think these customers want from LEI on NFS lands. Most comments were related to safety/protection.**

- Other law enforcement agencies (local/state/federal), U.S. Attorney's Office, USDAs Office of the General Counsel, other land management agencies

We also asked the SACs what they think these customers want from LEI on NFS lands. Most comments were related to safety/protection. Other comments were grouped into conservation, action, prevention, regulations that are clear and concise, and other. Some examples of what SACs said customers want follow:

- 89 percent said safety/protection:
  - Priority on patrols to provide for a personal sense of security of one's person and belongings.
  - They want to know that it is safe to use NFS lands and facilities.
  - Everyone who uses the national forests, for whatever purpose, wants to feel safe.
  - To protect those who visit the national forest.
  - Public safety services.
  - They want to feel safe while doing their job on our national lands.
  - A safe enjoyable experience where they can use the land for recreation mostly, and then special uses secondly.
- 56 percent said conservation:
  - A fair amount of the public believes we are there to stop logging, because logging is a bad thing; they do not fully understand that logging is an integral part of the Forest Service and that our efforts are focused on keeping the playing field level and fair, keeping the pirate/rogue operators away.
  - They want resources protected from destruction and theft.
  - To protect the resources that exist there.
  - Natural resource protection services
  - They also want a clean environment for water ecosystems and a good strong plan for ecosystem protection.
- 44 percent said action:
  - Customers want to see LEOs patrolling the national forest and responding to problems.
  - Scum and dirtbags removed from NFS.
  - They want law enforcement to deal with all the law enforcement issues and resolve their problems in the crime area.

- They want us to always be there to solve their problems.
- 22 percent said prevention:
  - Be more visible to forest users, visibility can be a deterrent to crime.
  - They want us to be there to solve their problems.
- 11 percent said regulations that are clear and concise:
  - They want us to be consistent in our approach.
- 22 percent had other comments:
  - They want us to be accountable, friendly.
  - They want us to communicate with them, they want to know what we do, and they appreciate hearing about our accomplishments.
  - Special interest groups want more effort to stop illegal motorized use.

#### **Recreation visitors—**

We asked the SACs to think about recreation visitor safety in their primary patrol area of responsibility related to personal safety from other visitors and for physical safety from site features (e.g., hazard trees, wild animals, road hazards, etc.). We also asked them to compare these to the average recreation visitors' neighborhood.

Most SACs said that recreation visitors are mostly safe (78 percent) from other visitors or that it differs within the patrol area (22 percent).

Most SACs said that recreation visitors are mostly physically safe (67 percent) from site features or that it differs within the patrol area (22 percent). Eleven percent said that recreation visitors were very safe from site features.

The SACs said that when compared to the average recreation visitors' neighborhood that recreation visitors are very or mostly safe (89 percent) onsite from other visitors and are very or mostly safe (89 percent) from site features.

The SACs were asked the types of crime or law enforcement violations most commonly thought to affect recreation visitors. Their comments differed widely. We grouped responses into these categories: urban-associated crime, drug activity, motor vehicle violations, natural resource issues, dumping household/landscape waste/littering, vandalism, other violations, and other. Many noted urban-associated crime, drug activity, and "other violations" (e.g., fire restriction violations) as ones most commonly affecting recreation visitors. Some examples follow:

- 67 percent said urban-associated crime:
  - Murders, rapes, sexual solicitation, domestic violence, thefts of personal property, indiscriminate shooting that becomes a safety issue for the public, car clouting, destruction of property, personal disorderly conduct.
- 56 percent said drug activity:

- Illegal drug use, illegal alien/drug traffickers, drug production.
- 33 percent said motor vehicle violations:
  - DUI, illegal parking, using prohibited vehicles on roads and trails, using a motor vehicle that causes damage to resources, operating vehicle without valid license.
- 33 percent said natural resource issues:
  - Resource damage, cutting or damaging trees illegally.
- 33 percent said dumping household/landscape waste/littering:
  - Littering and depositing of household refuse in developed recreation areas.
- 22 percent said vandalism:
  - Vandalism of public property, which makes property unusable.
- 56 percent said other violations:
  - Trailhead break-ins, off-highway vehicle violations, fire restriction violation, violations of forest roads and trails closures, illegal construction of improvements, camping over stay limit.
- 44 percent had other comments:
  - Large person-caused fires, which would prevent the public from using portions of the national forest, annoyance issues—loud noise, alcohol, large groups in developed sites, occupancy and use, wilderness intrusion, leaving fires without extinguishing).

#### **Forest users—**

We asked what special problems SACs have protecting forest users in their patrol area of responsibility. We grouped their comments into the following categories: lack basic patrol equipment/officers/coop agreements, remote/too large area to cover, drug activity, increasing uses, and other. Responses varied but most mentioned they lack the basic patrol equipment/officers/ coop agreements. Some examples follow:

- 67 percent said they lack basic patrol equipment/officers/coop agreements:
  - Lack of staffing for acreage.
  - Limited number of officers.
  - Not enough LEOs to ensure public/employee safety, to protect valuable resources and public facilities.
  - High urban-interface concentrated use with very few LEOs to cover areas.
  - Lack of patrol officers.

- 22 percent said remote/too large area to cover:
  - Just not enough officers to cover the area and the geographic complexity of getting officers to where they need to be.
  - Lot of hard-to-access backcountry areas, lot of remote areas.
- 22 percent said drug activity:
  - Drug smuggling, growing marijuana by undocumented immigrants and/or international drug trafficking organizations.
  - Mexican cartel marijuana growers guarding drug garden sites.
- 22 percent said increasing uses:
  - Use continues to increase on the national forests; with the use comes problems.
- 33 percent had other comments:
  - Human smuggling.
  - Difficult for officers to discern jurisdiction.
  - Lack of funding.

The media portrayal of crimes against forest users in the patrol area of responsibility was described as either mostly positive (78 percent), or nonexistent (11 percent).

## Natural Resources

The SACs were asked about the quality of the natural resources during the time they have worked there and about the maintenance of Forest Service facilities and developed areas. They were also asked about media portrayals of crime against resources and fire crimes.

Most of the SACs reported the quality of the natural resources in their patrol area of responsibility had remained the same (56 percent) during the time they worked there. Others said it had declined (33 percent). The remaining 11 percent said it had improved.

Most of the SACs said the maintenance of Forest Service facilities and developed areas in their patrol area of responsibility had declined (78 percent) during the time they worked there. The remainder said the maintenance had remained the same (22 percent).

The media portrayal of law enforcement handling of crimes against resources in the patrol area of responsibility was mostly positive (78 percent) or nonexistent (11 percent). The media portrayal of law enforcement handling of fire crimes in the patrol area of responsibility was mostly positive (89 percent) or unknown (11 percent).

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**Most of the SACs reported the quality of the natural resources in their patrol area of responsibility had remained the same (56 percent) during the time they worked there.**

## Success Stories

A few SACs had success stories to share (22 percent). They provided two comments about successes. The comments the SACs provided were grouped into the categories good cooperation and other:

- 50 percent said good cooperation:
  - Cooperation with [a] fish and wildlife commission establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for off-reservation treaty natural resource gathering rights.
- 50 percent had other comments:
  - Strong productive relationships within LEI and between LEI and others.

Few SACs described special policing programs that have worked well (33 percent). The SACs provided six comments about those programs. One-third were categorized as patrol/visibility comments. Other categories of comments were cooperation with other agencies, public education, community involvement, and other. Some examples of comments follow:

- 33 percent said patrol/visibility:
  - Co-op law patrol agreements, K-9 program.
- 17 percent said cooperation with other agencies:
  - Interagency cooperation with other federal, state, local agencies including deputization, cross-designation, co-op law patrol agreements.
- 17 percent said public education:
  - College student intern ride alongs, a magazine created to help teachers and community-based youth organizations explore opportunities.
- 17 percent said community involvement:
  - Interactive sessions within our urban communities with our officers with K-9s with youth days.
- 17 percent had other comments:
  - Arson task force, forest products (mushrooms) emphasis, management of timber sale protest activity.

We asked how SACs measure the success of the policing programs. Most of the responses were related to positive perceptions and reductions in violations:

- 50 percent said public/employee/cooperator perceptions are positive:
  - Relationships.
  - Public and employee support and recognition.

- Public feedback from questionnaires, incident and violation contacts.
- Customer satisfaction.
- 38 percent said reduction in violations:
  - Decrease in crime stats targeted.
  - Number of crimes solved compared to number of crimes reported.
  - Less crime.
- 13 percent had other comments:
  - Number of active patrols to reduce crime.

We asked what policing programs they have tried (if any) that were not successful. We received two comments:

- 100 percent other:
  - 1-800-Crime-Line

The SACs also were asked why they thought these were unsuccessful. There was one comment:

- 100 percent said not being popular with users:
  - Had it (the program) advertised in papers, posters, on back of business cards, etc., but generated less than two calls per year.

## Successful LEI Program

We asked SACs to describe a successful national program. Responses differed widely and were grouped into these categories: resources, understanding/interaction, personnel, leadership, support/trust, professionalism, good communication, and other. Some examples of SAC comments follow:

- 20 percent said resources:
  - The agency has never resolved LEI's \$20 million funding shortfall.
  - Integrate LEI funding back into the main NFS system instead of a separate budget line item, fund the program adequately to pay full share of cost pools.
  - Provide the program with resources—management, law enforcement personnel, administrative personnel, equipment, training, and operational funding—to be functional.
  - More money.
- 20 percent said understanding/interaction:
  - Respected for capabilities, good relationships externally and internally.

- Accepted and used like other staff areas are.
- The Chief and Associate Chief speak about LEI with respect, credibility, and without embarrassment.
- Agency must recognize the importance and need of the LEI program
- 15 percent said personnel:
  - Maintain a minimum of two or more LEOs per forest nationwide.
  - More personnel on the ground—at the field level.
  - Need more staff to execute and provide direction to field.
- 10 percent said leadership:
  - Bring the director of LEI up to full status just like the rest of the deputy chiefs.
  - Many of the deputy chiefs and directors could care less about law enforcement.
  - There are those individuals in the Washington office that still have issues with LEI being straight-lined.
- 10 percent said support/trust:
  - Invited to the table as an “equal.”
  - Accepted and trusted.
- 5 percent said occupational ideals:
  - Independent from President’s Council on Integrity and Efficiency (PCIE) standards.
- 5 percent said good communication:
  - It is an effort for them to include us in discussions that may involve our participation.

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**The SACs were asked to describe a successful regional program. Responses differed widely and were grouped into these categories: understanding/interaction, resources, support/trust, personnel, leadership, professionalism, consistent policies/regulations, good communication, and other.**

The SACs were asked to describe a successful **regional** program. Responses differed widely and were grouped into these categories: understanding/interaction, resources, support/trust, personnel, leadership, professionalism, consistent policies/regulations, good communication, and other. Some examples of SAC comments follow:

- 32 percent said understanding/interaction:
  - Accepted and used like other staff areas are.
  - The Chief and Associate Chief speak about LEI with respect, credibility, and without embarrassment.
  - Develop an element of trust and understanding between USFS management and LEI.
  - Respected for capabilities, good relationships externally and internally.

- 14 percent said resources:
  - Provide the program with resources—management, law enforcement personnel, administrative personnel, equipment, training, and operational funding—to be functional.
  - More money.
- 14 percent said support/trust:
  - Invited to the table as an “equal.”
  - Accepted and trusted.
- 5 percent said personnel:
  - More personnel on the ground, NFS line officers feel that LEI’s presence is adequate.
- 5 percent said leadership:
  - Bring full parity grade and structure for SACs as for all other directors in the regional office, fully integrate LEI into the leadership team and use the expertise of LEI.
- 5 percent said occupational ideals:
  - Independent from PCIE standards.
- 5 percent said consistent policies/regulations:
  - More consistency between regions would help solidify our collective success.
- 5 percent said good communication:
  - It is important that I hear the Regional Leadership Team’s concerns and to discuss regional priorities as it may relate to law enforcement.
- 18 percent had other comments:
  - Deter a lot of crime and get excellent results in prosecuting offenders.

The SACs were asked to describe a successful **local** program. Responses differed widely and were grouped into these categories: understanding/interaction, support/trust, resources, personnel, leadership, and other. Some examples of SAC comments follow:

- 33 percent said understanding/interaction:
  - Accepted and used like other staff areas are.
  - The LEOs must be responsive to local districts and forest needs.
  - Have LEI personnel become a full team member of a forest or district.
  - Respected for capabilities, good relationships externally and internally.
- 22 percent said support/trust:

- Invited to the table as an “equal.”
- Accepted and trusted.
- The LEI employees are valued for what they know and can bring to the table—when they are considered a full partner in reaching the Chief’s objectives.
- 11 percent said resources:
  - Provide the program with resources—management, law enforcement personnel, administrative personnel, equipment, training, and operational funding—to be functional.
  - More money.
- 6 percent said personnel.
- 6 percent said leadership:
  - The LEOs must be involved with the district leadership staff, important that the local district ranger/staff and LEO develop a law enforcement plan that establishes goals and sets priorities.
- 11 percent had other comments.

## Other Comments

We asked the SACs if there was anything else they would like to tell us. Two comments were provided:

- This agency has got to “get over itself” on the position it takes with law enforcement and their grief over the straight line organization which occurred 11 years ago. They need to make it an equal partner and stop burning out those that are trying to make it better but are simply running into a brick wall at every turn. Truly advancing and supporting the law enforcement function requires relentless support and advocacy from the Chief. If that does not occur, this agency is going to begin to see a noticeable decline in the number and quality of people that want to work for it in law enforcement. It is, at present, the agency of choice in natural resource law enforcement, but that pendulum is starting to swing much as it did for the National Park Service 10+/- years ago.
- Time to retire.

## Discussion

This study was the second in a series of studies evaluating perceptions of law enforcement personnel in the USFS. The ultimate goals of the work are threefold. First, the LEI studies serve as a followup to a previous qualitative study to learn more about crime and violence on national forests and grasslands, and the impacts on recreation visitation and management of those national forests (Chavez and Tynon 2000, Tynon and Chavez 2002, Tynon et al. 2001). Second, the LEI studies serve as a followup to a previous qualitative study testing the key characteristics of success in law enforcement, measuring opinions about recreation visitor and public safety, and evaluating impacts to natural resources (Chavez et al. 2004, Tynon and Chavez 2006). Third, the LEI studies serve to provide CTA/PAS data for LEI.

The research met several study goals. We gathered information from SACs about crime and violence at USFS sites nationwide; confirmed what crimes and acts of violence are occurring, the extent of crimes, and the impacts they have on public land management and public safety; determined SACs' perceptions of the impacts of crime and violence to recreation visitors and other forest users; established measures of law enforcement success; identified successful LEI programs nationally, regionally, and locally; compared the key characteristics of law enforcement success from previous studies; and identified additional successful strategies used by SACs to deal with crime in forest settings. Summaries of specific subject findings are found within the report. The purpose of this section is to discuss some overall findings.

The SACs bring years of experience that lend credence to their perceptions about their job and their place in the USFS. The SACs are dealing with a very large variety of crimes and acts of violence. Many of these incidents were thought to either remain at the same rate in FY 2004 compared to FY 2003 or were thought to be on the increase. At the same time, their LEOs are patrolling large numbers of acres with what the SACs perceived to be too few officers (LEOs and FPOs) and sometimes inadequate external support.

In examining the data for common responses across questions, we found that one concern for USFS SACs is relationships. They are especially concerned about the perceptions that others have of them, including those within and outside the agency. Good relationships, working together, and collaboration are ways they would measure success within the LEI program. Most problematic to having good relationships are the lack of understanding, resentment toward law enforcement, and support/trust.

Another common concern for USFS SACs is resources. This was often expressed in terms of funding and personnel. Fiscal concerns were raised often and

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**The SACs are dealing with a very large variety of crimes and acts of violence. Many of these incidents were thought to either remain at the same rate in FY 2004 compared to FY 2003 or were thought to be on the increase.**

seen as detrimental to getting the job done. In part, this relates to the shortage of personnel; there are not enough funds to hire new law enforcement personnel. In fact, the SACs listed fiscal concerns as priority one for LEI.

Natural resource protection was seen as important, too. Many SACs reported increasing problems with forest users dumping household waste on national forest lands. Protection of the natural resources was seen as a component of a successful LEI program and was one of the top priorities listed for LEI.

Safety of Forest Service employees and forest users was another concern. Urban-associated activities, drug activity, and motor vehicle violations were problematic and seen as on the rise. These are some of the same activities described in the earlier qualitative studies.

Current successes in law enforcement were described as successes in cooperation and productive relationships. The descriptions matched some of the key characteristics of success we identified in earlier studies. These characteristics included resources, collaboration, and communication. These also tie into the characteristics identified as integral to a successful law enforcement program including resources and understanding.

Finally, we think there are several ways to use the results of this study of SACs in the USFS. The identification of issues, particularly issues that are consistent across regions, could be used to prioritize law enforcement efforts. Some of the successes that have occurred, in combination with a focus on the characteristics identified as integral to a successful LEI program could be identified as a priority focus area for officers and leaders. This has some serious implications for budgeting and staffing. Some consideration might be made of the current allocation of resources and whether it is congruent with the issues identified by the SACs.

On the face of the comments, it appears that a successful LEI program is all about what is best for LEI. Further examination of the many comments indicates a great desire to work for the public good, keep visitors safe, and protect the land base.

Additional studies for LEI measure opinions of other employees within the enforcement branch as well as the investigative branch. They will be asked similar questions to the ones asked of the SACs. In addition, we will be surveying customers of LEI including district rangers and forest supervisors.

## Acknowledgments

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This study would not be possible without the support of LEI in the Washington office, and officers and supervisors nationwide.

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## **Appendix: SAC Survey Questionnaire**

Dear Special Agent in Charge,

You recently received a letter from then Deputy Director Ferrell about the SAC survey being conducted by myself (Dr. Debbie Chavez, PSW) and Dr. Jo Tynon (Oregon State University). We thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to respond to this survey.

In the last few years, law enforcement in the USFS has faced some tough challenges. In order to understand and respond appropriately to current and future needs, it is important to hear from you. This study is part of a larger effort to capture law enforcement successes so that others can benefit from what already works. We are also partnering with those who seek to develop meaningful performance measures for what you do. This study is one way for you to tell your story.

Completing the questionnaire will take about 45 minutes of your time. Your answers will be coded for computer analysis, combined with those from other SACs, and used for statistical summaries only. At no time will your name be released or associated with your responses. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question. Your participation is vital to the study, and to future planning for LE&I. Responses are due June 30.

The answers you provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Special precautions have been established to protect the confidentiality of your responses. The identification number associated with your questionnaire will be removed once your questionnaire has been returned. We use the number to contact those who have not returned their questionnaire, so we do not burden those who have responded. Your completed questionnaire will be destroyed once your responses have been tallied. There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant in this project, nor are there any direct benefits. However, your participation is extremely valued.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Debbie Chavez at (951) 680-1558 (e-mail [dchavez@fs.fed.us](mailto:dchavez@fs.fed.us)) or Jo Tynon at (541) 737-1499 (e-mail [Jo.Tynon@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Jo.Tynon@oregonstate.edu)). If we are not available when you call, please leave a message and one of us will call you back. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-3437 (e-mail [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu)).

Responses can be sent in several ways: You can send the completed survey via e-mail to [dchavez@fs.fed.us](mailto:dchavez@fs.fed.us) you can fax it to Debbie Chavez at (951) 680-

1501, or you can mail it to Debbie Chavez at PSW, 4955 Canyon Crest Drive, Riverside, CA 92507.

Thank you for your help. We appreciate your cooperation.

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## SAC Survey Questionnaire

1. Approximately how many acres are you responsible for providing LE coverage in your region?

\_\_\_\_\_ acres

\_\_\_\_\_ don't know

→ 1a Of that total, what is the approximate acres of that area that LEOs normally access for patrol purposes? \_\_\_\_\_ acres or \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know

→ 1b. Today, how many GS-5 through GS-10 LEOs do you have employed?

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of LEOs      \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Reserve LEOs

2. Is your Region primarily on an urban or urban-interface, in a semirural setting, or in an extremely remote setting? Provide approximate percentages based upon acreage (select one).

\_\_\_\_\_ urban or urban-interface

\_\_\_\_\_ semirural

\_\_\_\_\_ extremely remote

3. How many total incidents were reported in your LEIMARS (warning notices, violations notices, incident reports, and state violations) in your Region in FY04? How many total number of offenses were reported in FY04 (warning offenses, incident offenses, violations offenses, and state offenses). Note there may be more than one offense per incident report.

\_\_\_\_\_ number of incidents in FY04 reported to LEIMARS

\_\_\_\_\_ number of all offenses in FY04 reported to LEIMARS

\_\_\_\_\_ don't know

How does your region capture and report these other incidents not reported in LEIMARS?

4. Rate 1 – 5 your officers' most common activity during public contacts (1 is most common):

\_\_\_\_\_ violation notices/warnings/investigations

\_\_\_\_\_ public relations/education/information

\_\_\_\_\_ non-violator public assistance

\_\_\_\_\_ search/rescue/medical response

\_\_\_\_\_ other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. On an average day, how many USFS people are responsible for law enforcement patrols or regulatory compliance in your Region (i.e., how many LEOS and FPOs are annually certified)?

\_\_\_\_\_ LEOs

\_\_\_\_\_ FPOs

\_\_\_\_\_ others (please explain: \_\_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_\_ don't know

6. Do you think there are too few, too many, or about the right amount of USFS law enforcement officers or FPOs in your Region?

LEOs (select 1):

\_\_\_\_\_ too few

\_\_\_\_\_ too many

\_\_\_\_\_ about right

\_\_\_\_\_ don't know

FPOs (select 1):

\_\_\_\_\_ too few

\_\_\_\_\_ too many

\_\_\_\_\_ about right

\_\_\_\_\_ don't know

Based on your organizational chart, approved by line officers in your region, how many LEOs and FPOs do you need to add? \_\_\_\_\_ LEOs to add  
\_\_\_\_\_ FPOs to add

7. Do you have cooperative law agreements with other law enforcement agencies?

\_\_\_\_\_ no

\_\_\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_\_\_ City/town/community law enforcement

\_\_\_\_\_ County Sheriff's office

\_\_\_\_\_ State Police

\_\_\_\_\_ other (please explain: \_\_\_\_\_)

8. On an average day, how many sworn personnel from other law enforcement agencies provide FS reimbursed law enforcement services on or affecting the NFS in your Region?

\_\_\_\_\_ # City/town/community law enforcement

\_\_\_\_\_ # County Sheriff's office

\_\_\_\_\_ # State Police

\_\_\_\_\_ # other (please explain: \_\_\_\_\_)

9. Do you think the reimbursed patrols/enforcement work by cooperating law enforcement officers in your patrol area offer adequate services or inadequate services in responding to or preventing crime?

| City/town/community | County Sheriff's: | State Police:    |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| _____ adequate      | _____ adequate    | _____ adequate   |
| _____ inadequate    | _____ inadequate  | _____ inadequate |
| _____ don't know    | _____ don't know  | _____ don't know |

10. On an average day, roughly how many sworn personnel from other law enforcement agencies provide law enforcement services on or affecting the NFS that are NOT reimbursed by the FS in your patrol area of responsibility?

\_\_\_\_\_ # City/town/community law enforcement  
 \_\_\_\_\_ # County Sheriff's office  
 \_\_\_\_\_ # State Police  
 \_\_\_\_\_ # other (please explain: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

11. Do you think the level of non-reimbursed services by non-FS law enforcement officers in your Region is adequate or inadequate in preventing or responding to crime?

| City/town/community: | County Sheriff's: | State Police:    |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| _____ adequate       | _____ adequate    | _____ adequate   |
| _____ inadequate     | _____ inadequate  | _____ inadequate |
| _____ don't know     | _____ don't know  | _____ don't know |

12. When you think about recreation visitor safety in your Region, do you think it is very safe, mostly safe, not safe, very dangerous, or it varies within your region of responsibility? Please respond for personal safety from other visitors and for physical safety from site features (e.g., hazard trees, wild animals, road hazards, etc).

| Personal safety from other visitors (select 1): | Physical safety from site features (select 1): |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| _____ recreation visitors are very safe here    | _____ recreation visitors are very safe here   |
| _____ recreation visitors are mostly safe here  | _____ recreation visitors are mostly safe here |
| _____ recreation visitors are not safe here     | _____ recreation visitors are not safe here    |
| _____ it is very dangerous for visitors here    | _____ it is very dangerous for visitors here   |
| _____ it varies within the patrol area          | _____ it varies within the patrol area         |
| _____ don't know                                | _____ don't know                               |

13. When you think about recreation visitor safety in your Region, do you think it is very safe, mostly safe, not safe, or very dangerous in your region compared to places in the average recreation visitors' neighborhood?

Personal safety from other visitors (select 1):

\_\_\_\_\_ recreation visitors are very safe here  
 \_\_\_\_\_ recreation visitors are mostly safe here  
 \_\_\_\_\_ recreation visitors are not safe here  
 \_\_\_\_\_ it is very dangerous for visitors here  
 \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

Physical safety from site features (select 1):

\_\_\_\_\_ recreation visitors are very safe here  
 \_\_\_\_\_ recreation visitors are mostly safe here  
 \_\_\_\_\_ recreation visitors are not safe here  
 \_\_\_\_\_ it is very dangerous for visitors here  
 \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

14. What types of crimes or law enforcement violations most commonly affect recreation visitors to your Region?

15. Do you think the following crimes, law enforcement violations, and other patrol activities in your Region have increased, decreased, or remained about the same in the last fiscal year (FY 2004) as compared to FY 2003.

|                                        | Increased | Decreased | Remained the same | Don't know |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|------------|
| a. Arson                               | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| b. Domestic violence                   | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| c. Thefts of visitor personal property | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| d. Thefts of public property           | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| e. Gang activity                       | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| f. Body dumping                        | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| g. Shooting (indiscriminate)           | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| h. Suicides                            | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| i. Murder                              | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| j. Rape / sexual assault               | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| k. Drive-by shooting                   | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| l. Criminal damage                     | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| m. Personnel threats                   | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| n. Threats against property            | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| o. Marijuana cultivation               | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| p. Meth labs                           | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| q. Meth chemical dump                  | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| r. Armed defense of crops              | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |
| s. Dumping of household waste          | _____     | _____     | _____             | _____      |

- |                                        |       |       |       |       |
|----------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| t. Dumping of landscape waste          | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| u. Trespass of undocumented immigrants | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| v. Armed defense of forest products    | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| w. Natural fire hazards                | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| x. Accidental fire activity            | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| y. Weather hazards                     | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| z. Wildlife hazards                    | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| aa. Road hazards                       | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| bb. Other _____                        | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

15a Of the above, which ones are more common during the week (rather than the weekend; list the letter of the items, for example, b & d): \_\_\_\_\_

15b. Of the above, which are more common during the daytime hours (as opposed to nighttime):  
\_\_\_\_\_

15c. Of the above, which are more common when the area is crowded (as opposed to when not many visitors are in the area): \_\_\_\_\_

16. What special problems do you have protecting forest users in your Region?

17. During the time you have worked in your Region have you seen the quality of the natural resources in your region degrade, improve, or remain the same? How about the maintenance of FS facilities and developed areas?

Quality of the natural resources:

\_\_\_\_\_ degraded

\_\_\_\_\_ improved

\_\_\_\_\_ remained the same

\_\_\_\_\_ don't know

Maintenance of FS facilities and developed areas:

\_\_\_\_\_ degraded

\_\_\_\_\_ improved

\_\_\_\_\_ remained the same

\_\_\_\_\_ don't know

18. Rank 1 to 4 your highest priority (1 is highest priority). Is it protecting forest users, protecting resources, protecting NFS employees, or protecting public property? Rank 1 to 4 what you believe the NFS line officer you most commonly interact with thinks is your highest priority: protecting forest users; protecting resources; protecting NFS employees; or protecting public property? (1 is NFS line officers' view of your highest priority)

Your view:

\_\_\_\_\_ protecting forest users  
 \_\_\_\_\_ protecting resources  
 \_\_\_\_\_ protecting NFS employees  
 \_\_\_\_\_ protecting public property  
 \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

NFS line officers' view:

\_\_\_\_\_ protecting forest users  
 \_\_\_\_\_ protecting resources  
 \_\_\_\_\_ protecting NFS employees  
 \_\_\_\_\_ protecting public property  
 \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

19. Is FS LEI authority and jurisdiction adequate for what you feel is expected or demanded of you internally and externally?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes  
 \_\_\_\_\_ no

If no, please explain:

20. What has been the media portrayal of crimes against forest users, crimes against resources, and fire crimes in your Region?

Crimes against forest users:

\_\_\_\_\_ mostly positive  
 \_\_\_\_\_ mostly negative  
 \_\_\_\_\_ no coverage  
 \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

Crimes against resources:

\_\_\_\_\_ mostly positive  
 \_\_\_\_\_ mostly negative  
 \_\_\_\_\_ no coverage  
 \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

Fire crimes:

\_\_\_\_\_ mostly positive  
 \_\_\_\_\_ mostly negative  
 \_\_\_\_\_ no coverage  
 \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

21. Do you have adequate resources to do your job?

\_\_\_\_\_ no  
 \_\_\_\_\_ yes

If not, what additional resources do you need?

22. What do you believe LEI's relationship with the rest of the FS should be?
23. Where does LEI fit within the FS organization and programs?
24. Do you have any special policing programs that have worked well?  
\_\_\_\_\_ no  
\_\_\_\_\_ yes. What are they?
25. How do you measure the success of your policing programs?
26. What policing programs have you tried (if any) that were not successful?  
Briefly explain why they were not successful.
27. What do you believe are the priority issues facing the law enforcement profession in the FS today?
28. How do the priorities of the NFS line officer you most commonly interact with in your Region compare with LEI priorities?
29. Does the NFS line officer you most commonly interact with in your area know what you do? Further, do they understand what you do?

30. Whom do you believe your “customers” are?

31. What do you believe your customers want from LEI on NFS lands?

32. Do you feel supported by LEI line officers, NFS line officers, or local NFS employees?

LEI line officers:

\_\_\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_\_\_ no, please explain

NFS line officers:

\_\_\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_\_\_ no, please explain

Local NFS employees:

\_\_\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_\_\_ no, please explain

33. How well do you communicate with others in the Forest Service in your Region?

Please explain and add how you go about communicating.

34. How would you describe a successful LEI program nationally, regionally, and locally?

Nationally:

Regionally:

Locally:

35. Do you have a LE success story you’d like to share?

\_\_\_\_\_ no

\_\_\_\_\_ yes, please describe:

36. Have you ever been threatened or attacked because of your job?

\_\_\_\_\_ no

\_\_\_\_\_ yes. Please briefly describe incidents in the past 3 years.

Please tell us about yourself.

37. What is the Region where you work? \_\_\_\_\_

38. I am \_\_\_\_\_ male

\_\_\_\_\_ female

39. I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old

40. I consider myself:

\_\_\_\_\_ Black \_\_\_\_\_ White \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic

\_\_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Multiracial

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

41. I have been in law enforcement a total of \_\_\_\_\_ years.

42. I have been with the FS a total of \_\_\_\_\_ years

43. I have been an LEO for the FS a total of \_\_\_\_\_ years

44. I have been an Agent for the FS a total of \_\_\_\_\_ years

45. I have been an SAC at this duty station \_\_\_\_\_ years.

46. I have completed:

9 10 11 12      13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22+

High School      College through Graduate School

47. The highest academic degree I hold is:

\_\_\_\_\_

48. My academic degree is related to my work in law enforcement

\_\_\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_\_\_ no

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Thank you!!!

We do appreciate the time and effort it took to complete this questionnaire. The results will be summarized into a report for LE&I in the Washington Office and will later be included in published manuscripts. Your individual data will not be disclosed to anyone.

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