

# USDA Forest Service Advances Sustainability Goals by Overhauling 20 Janitorial Contracts to Feature Biobased Products

Few federal agencies boast as diverse a set of properties as the USDA Forest Service. For example, the Fenn Ranger Station located in Kooskia, Idaho, north of Riggins, was built in 1937. It still has the original single pane divided windows and wood flooring. Compare that to the brand-new Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Supervisor's Office in Kamiah Idaho, which features luxury vinyl tile and the latest in mass timber building technologies. It is the first USDA building constructed with cross-laminated timber, which meets the BioPreferred Program's standard for federal purchasing preference.

One challenge for the Forest Service, however, involves its janitorial service contracts, which require vendors to be experts at caring for and cleaning such a wide range of building types—from residential bunk houses and historic cabins to modern, gleaming visitors' centers. On top of that, according to Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), janitorial contracts must maximize the purchase and use of biobased products in the delivery of services.

Two years ago, Christina Graves, a Contract Specialist with the Forest Service, set out to advance the agency's federal sustainability objectives by overhauling 20 of its janitorial contracts. That goal required her to become more knowledgeable about biobased-related solicitation and reporting requirements.

"At first, I didn't fully understand them. But I took the time to read the FAR and the BioPreferred® Program website, to educate myself as much as I could," she explained. "My supervisor was very supportive and helpful in interpreting the regulations."

Once she became well-versed in the requirements, Ms. Graves worked with the contractors to ensure they understood them, especially the reporting requirements.

"It's taken some time and effort, but they've been very responsive. They appreciate me taking the time. It's a collaborative process with the contracting community and internal clients. It's important though, because it means we end up with better contractors and everyone is doing their part," she said.

Part of her process involves conducting research using the BioPreferred Program Catalog.

"If I'm evaluating for custodial services, I'll go to the Catalog and hover my mouse over that category. I can select glass cleaner or disinfectant or furniture cleaners. Often, when looking at evaluating quotations, I will go to that category product listing and search for it. I've had to tell some contractors not to just copy and paste a list of biobased products from 5 years ago. They need to reference the current products and categories in the Catalog because they are constantly changing."

Ms. Graves also relies on the Contracting Officer training resources posted on the BioPreferred Program website.

It's a really good place to find sample contracting language and to see how the Program recommends you write your evaluations and what's required," she said.

"If you have really old buildings with high iron content in the

water, over decades there can be calcium or porcelain deposits that discolor the toilets and sinks. Working closely with contractors as they test one product out over another, I know they're taking every measure possible to maximize their use of biobased products."

The BioPreferred Program took note of Ms. Graves' outstanding commitment to sustainable acquisition, recognizing her as a 2022 Excellence in Procurement Award winner.