



Office of the  
Assistant Secretary  
for Administration

April 19, 2017

Office of  
Human Resources  
Management

TO: Thomas Tidwell, Chief  
U.S. Forest Service (FS)

1400 Independence  
Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC  
20250-9600

FROM: Daniel M. Kline *Daniel M. Kline*  
Chief, Labor Relations Branch  
Employee and Labor Relations Division  
Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM)

SUBJECT: Review of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the  
USDA Forest Service, Fire and Aviation Management, and the National  
Federation of Federal Employees, Forest Service Council, Regarding  
Implementation of the RAM-Air Parachute System

On behalf of the Secretary of Agriculture and in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 7114(c), the Department has conducted an Agency Head Review of the subject MOU executed on April 12, 2017. After review of the negotiated provisions, the Department finds them to be consistent with applicable laws, rules and regulations and therefore, the MOU submitted by the parties for Agency Head Review is approved. The MOU shall have the effective date of this memorandum.

Enclosure

cc: Roberta Jeanquart, OHRM  
Marsha Wiggins, OHRM  
Bryan Knowles, OHRM  
Lenise Lago, FS  
Arthur Hinaman, FS  
Mary Beth Lepore, FS  
Gene Blankenbaker, FS  
Janet Crowley, FS  
Craig Vanderpool, FS  
Joe Duran, NFFE



**Memorandum of Understanding**  
**Regarding Implementation of Ram-Air Parachute System**  
**Between**  
**US Forest Service**  
**and**  
**NFFE, Forest Service Council**



This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), made by and between the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), Forest Service Council (Union) and the US Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management (Management) collectively "the Parties," pertains to the joint development, implementation and transition of the Ram-Air parachute system for use over a 10- year period ending September 30, 2026.

This MOU must be read in conjunction with the most current Ram-Air Parachute System Transition Operations Plan (Transition Operations Plan).

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 7106, Management will exercise its right to transition to a Ram-Air parachute system in the United States Forest Service (USFS) Smokejumper Program. A "square" Ram-Air parachute system will replace the "round" FS-14 parachute system currently in use over a 10-year period.

Employees who do not wish to transition from the FS-14 parachute to the Ram-Air parachute or are unable to transition can continue to use the FS-14 parachute system through the transition period.

After the transition period ending on September 30<sup>th</sup> of 2026, employees unable to transition to the Ram-Air parachute will be given priority placement into a position they are qualified to hold. Employees who continue to use the FS-14 parachute system will have continued support throughout the transition period.

Management will provide comprehensive Ram-Air parachute training as described in the Ram-Air Training Guide (RATG). The RATG is a guide for trainers who will be teaching Forest Service Smokejumpers the proper use of the Ram-Air parachute system. The RATG provides reference for course work, terminology, equipment, procedures, and historical background. Upon completion of the Ram-Air training program, students must perform satisfactorily in all area of Ram-Air Smokejumper Training. FS-14 smokejumpers who do not perform successfully in the Ram-Air training will be given a choice to remain on the FS-14 or retake the Ram-Air training the following year.

Safety is of paramount importance to both the Management and Union. The Parties agree that during implementation of the Ram-Air parachute system that management will monitor and collect injury statistics. If there are indicating trends or spikes in injury rates management will evaluate and take appropriate action(s).



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To ensure safety and transparency, Management will communicate with employees regarding Ram-Air parachute system implementation. Management will include the Union if formal discussions occur on this issue.

As further implementation occurs, Management and the Union agree that the Union has and will continue to have a Pre-Decisional Involvement role in the development of documents such as the change management implementation plan, Transition Operations Plan, through forums such as Ram-Air Implementation Steering Committee (RAISC), and Ram-Air Parachute System Change Management Action Team (RACMAT) annual meeting(s) and through email or phone conference when appropriate.

The Parties have met on this issue pre-decisionally, and will continue to work together, including discussion on some items that would otherwise not be mandatory subjects of bargaining. It is recognized that the Parties will continue to engage in this way, without requiring continued bargaining on items that are not defined as mandatory subjects of bargaining. If any changes occur as a result of this implementation that have an impact to working conditions of bargaining unit employees, the Parties will comply with Article 11 of the Master Agreement.

This MOU becomes effective on the date of final approval by the Agency Head or that date on which the thirty (30) day time limit for agency head review expires, whichever is earlier. Either Party may request to extend, modify or cancel the agreement utilizing the procedures in Article 11 of the Master Agreement. Otherwise, this Agreement will expire at the conclusion of full implementation of the ram-air parachute systems.

Agreed to on April 12, 2017 by:

**ARTHUR HINAMAN** Digitally signed by ARTHUR HINAMAN  
Date: 2017.04.12 15:10:12 -04'00'

Arthur W. Hinaman  
Assistant Director, Aviation  
Forest Service

**JOE DURAN** Digitally signed by JOE DURAN  
Date: 2017.04.13 08:27:40 -07'00'

Joe Duran  
Fire Committee Chairperson  
NFFE, Forest Service Council