

Letter of Conscience and Concern
Cynthia Bower

This material is part of a collection that documents the harassment, discrimination, and retaliation perpetrated against Alaska's women research scientists by their supervisor, with full knowledge (and arguably, "tacit approval") of their federal employer, the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Dr. Molly Kretsch
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May 4, 2008

Dr. Kretsch,

I have studied the ARS Policies and Procedures Manuals, but I found no guidance for communicating with Area personnel about a matter of conscience. Through this Letter of Conscience and Concern, I wish to alert you to a potentially disastrous situation that is being contemplated by the Research Leader here in the ARS Subarctic Agricultural Research Unit (SARU) in Fairbanks, Alaska.

An email notification of candidates interviewing for a horticulturist/curator position here in SARU was just provided to scientists in our unit on Thursday (1 May 2008). I've attached the announcement to this email. Both of the interviewees are women. Perhaps it has escaped your notice, but 100% of the female research scientists in SARU have filed grievances concerning the abusive, career-damaging, and discriminatory leadership style that our current RL, Alberto Pantoja has demonstrated towards women.

I would like to protect the ARS from future lawsuits by requesting that the Pacific West Area honestly consider the future of whichever of these female candidates is hired into the curator position, (i.e. what makes Area administrators believe that the new curator will somehow be immune to Dr. Pantoja's discriminatory treatment, when the three current women scientists were not).

I strongly believe it is unconscionable to bring another woman into a work environment that is demonstrably hostile to women, and I would hope that the ARS would at least provide the selected candidate with the following information before her employment begins:

- Every female research scientist in the unit has filed more than one grievance detailing the abusive, discriminatory situation at SARU
- EEO has been contacted by every female research scientist in the unit, and lawsuits are certainly being seriously considered
- The RL blatantly demonstrates inequitable treatment when dealing with women, (e.g., no woman has ever been appointed Acting-RL in Alaska, whereas every male SY in Fairbanks has been given that career-building opportunity, including GS 12 level scientists and those still on probation)

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However, perhaps these problems can be attenuated. Is it possible to assign the new curator a mentor from another ARS unit for at least three years? That would ensure oversight and continuity, in the (likely) event that she finds herself the only female scientist in SARU and thereby loses access to the knowledge base she'll need concerning the grievance process, EEO, and other administrative information.

I am truly sorry to be bringing this situation to your attention. However, another capable female scientist is about to have her life and professional career irreparably damaged by accepting employment into SARU, and this issue is weighing heavily on me. I will forever regret that the ARS administrators did not warn me of the hostile work environment for women before I accepted my current position. Thank you for whatever help you can extend to SARU's future curator.

Sincerely,

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Attachment: Curator/Horticulturist Candidates