

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday December 6, 2016**

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### **Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination are Prevalent in Wildland Fire Management**

#### **A ‘Culture of Complacency’ in Agency Leadership Inhibits Victims from Reporting Incidents**

Eugene, OR – The Association for Fire Ecology (AFE) released a research report on Tuesday December 6, 2016 that reveals widespread sexual harassment and gender discrimination in wildland fire management. The report, *Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination in Wildland Fire Management Must Be Addressed*, is the result of an international survey and literature review completed by an international group of experts convened by AFE. The report was submitted as part of written testimony by AFE at a December 1<sup>st</sup> hearing in the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee that addressed harassment and discrimination in the Department of Agriculture and U.S. Forest Service.

AFE’s report revealed that 32% of the 324 survey respondents had observed incidents of sexual harassment while 24% had directly experienced it. Additionally, 54% had observed gender discrimination while 44% had personally experienced it. Instances of gender discrimination and sexual harassment were widely varied, ranging from comments (such as, “The engine captain had me ride alone with him and spoke in great detail about my breasts”), to lack of inclusion of women in discussions regarding strategy and tactics, to sexual assault. The women who experienced harassment and discrimination reported a number of negative effects on their lives, ranging from having to change jobs, to avoiding situations where they felt at risk, to mental breakdown. However, fear of job reprisals or retaliation resulted in over 60% of victims not reporting incidents of harassment or discrimination to superiors. A culture of complacency among leadership of wildland fire agencies inhibits victims from reporting harassment and discrimination, the report stated.

“It is apparent that reporting of cases of sexual harassment and gender discrimination needs to be increased, as the majority of those who experienced it did not report it,” said Dr. Leda Kobziar, Board President of the Association for Fire Ecology and a Certified Prescribed Burn Manager, in her statement to the House Committee. “Risk-free reporting and appropriate responses to sexual harassment and gender discrimination are critical to changing the wildland fire culture from one where criminal treatment of women is allowed to take place, to one where all members are treated with respect and afforded a safe workplace.”

AFE suggested utilizing a model for external reporting and review that was developed by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The CAF created a “Sexual Misconduct Reporting Center” that removed initial reporting of sexual harassment and discrimination from the chain of command. This successfully reduced job retaliation for those who reported incidents, resulted in severe penalties for offenders, and offered ongoing support for survivors, helping to break the cycle of non-reporting. AFE suggested that a similar “arm’s length” reporting system, as well as proactive educational programs to prevent incidents in the first place, would be successful in wildland fire management.

“Workplace leadership needs to address significant failures in creating a harassment- and discrimination-free workplace in which those responsible for harassment or discrimination are held accountable for their actions by those in supervisory or leadership positions. We cannot and will not condone sexual harassment or gender discrimination in any form, from any source, in any setting,” said Dr. Kobziar.

AFE’s release of its report coincides with Canada’s National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, held annually since 1991 to raise awareness of gender-based violence around the world.

AFE’s full report, *Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination in Wildland Fire Management Must Be Addressed*, is available here: <http://fireecology.org/page-1807009>

Dr. Leda Kobziar’s written testimony for the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee is available here: <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Statement-of-Assoc.-of-Fire-Ecology-Report.pdf>

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