

Opinion: USFS faces century-old call for equality

By James G. Lewis, High Country News

The third applicant was “no gentleman,” the U.S. Forest Service ranger wrote to his boss, but would still make a first-class fire lookout on the remote Klamath National Forest. He thought little of the first applicant’s abilities, and the second had poor eyesight, though that didn’t prevent him from frequently violating the local game laws. Yet the third candidate was so unusual, ranger M.H. McCarthy cautioned, “I hope your heart is strong enough to stand the shock.”

For the shocking third applicant was a woman, Hallie Morse Daggett, though McCarthy added that she “is absolutely devoid of the timidity which is ordinarily associated with her sex.”

McCarthy told his supervisor not to worry about being overrun by female applicants in the future “since we can hardly expect these positions to ever become very popular with the Fair Sex.” What is telling in light of recent news about the systemic problem of discrimination throughout the Forest Service is that this was written 105 years ago.

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