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March 26, 2014

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

The Senior Executives Association (SEA), a non-profit, non-partisan professional association, represents the interests of career federal executives in government, including those in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and in equivalent Senior Professional (SP) positions, including Senior Level (SL) and Senior Scientific and Professional positions (ST). SEA engages in a variety of legislative and other activities aimed at improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity of the federal government.

Recently, SEA completed a survey of its members from across the government who are current career Senior Executive Service (SES), Senior Professional (SP) and other equivalent executives and professionals to obtain information and their views on FY 2013 performance management processes in their agencies, including suggestions for improvement. I am writing to provide you with feedback on the responses we received from career SES employees at the Department of the Interior, including how Interior executives' experience and views compare with those of SES from other federal agencies.

I am hopeful you and your management team will find this information helpful in evaluating your SES performance management system, including consideration of potential changes in processes and outcomes for FY 2014. This feedback may also be useful in assessing general management practices as they relate to achieving important Departmental and Administration goals.

By way of background, we conducted our survey in mid-February of this year and received responses from almost 400 SES and SP employees from across the government, including a sizable number of SES from Interior. Questions included in the survey ranged from basic queries on whether final performance ratings for FY 2013 had been received (and whether those who received ratings had been granted performance awards and/or pay increases) to more nuanced questions seeking employees' views regarding their degree of satisfaction with their agencies' performance appraisal process, whether the FY 2013 process was better or worse than FY 2012, whether improvements were needed in appraisal processes (and, if so, what) and overall morale among Senior Executives and Senior Professionals at their particular agency.

We have summarized Interior's survey findings in the "dashboard" below, including how Interior executives' results compare with averages for respondents from all other agencies. Looking at the data and written comments provided by Interior respondents, we note the following:

- Interior respondents reported, for the most part, that the Department had not yet finalized its FY 2013 performance appraisal process at the time the survey was conducted (in contrast to the majority of other federal agencies which had completed their processes). Several written comments noted frustration with the Department's political appointees and Review Boards regarding delays in finalizing

their ratings and assessments of employee performance. Blanks in Interior’s dashboard represent the incomplete process.

- Interior respondents reported less satisfaction with the agency’s overall FY 2013 performance appraisal process, on average, than did executives from other agencies – with a much larger percentage of employees opining that the FY 2013 process was worse than FY 2012. Again, delays in the rating and review processes were highlighted in the written comments.
- Although not summarized in the dashboard, when asked what, if any, improvements the agency could make to its performance appraisal processes and outcomes (respondents could choose from a menu of options and/or provide written suggestions) Interior executives overwhelmingly chose two things: (1) Improved timeliness in conducting or finalizing the appraisal process (including higher level reviews) and (2) enhanced transparency/timeliness in decision making on performance awards and/or pay increases.

SEA Performance Management Survey: Agency Summary and Comparison Table

Agency	Final Rating Completed		Rating Level Received		Perf. Award Received		Received Pay Boost		Satisfaction with Process		2013 vs 2012 Better/Worse		Overall SES Morale	
	Yes	No	O	EX	Yes	No	Yes	No	VS	NS	B	W	High	Low
Interior Respondents	14	86	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	36	0	36	7	57
Average of All Survey Respondents	76	24	48	41	43	34	42	25	20	34	10	25	13	51

Codes: O=Outstanding, EX=Exceeds, VS=Very Satisfied, NS=Not Satisfied, B=Better, W=Worse; all numbers used in the table represent percentages, e.g., 14 = 14%

I trust the information contained in this letter is helpful to you and your team at Interior in your ongoing efforts to improve human resources and general management processes. I would welcome the opportunity to further discuss our findings in further detail with you or your staff.

Sincerely,



CAROL A. BONOSARO
President

cc: The Honorable Katherine Archuleta, Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management