

The very uniqueness that Pinchot (*Gifford Pinchot, the agency's first chief*) identified, however, raises questions about why and how subsequent generations of Forest Service employees have remained so attached to the most immediately identifiable symbol of the agency—the pine-tree badge—and the persistent cohesiveness that it seems to embody. Some answers come from anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural critics who have probed the social meaning of uniforms and related regalia. *Bonami et al. (2000), Fussell (2002), and Lurie (2000)* make the case that uniforms signal an individual's acceptance of a particular social reality established by and for this group. Because a uniform and its trappings signify agreement with certain “codes of behavior,” wearing them helps “transform behavior into conduct.” When people who are similarly dressed conduct themselves in similar ways it builds “mutual trust attributed by one individual to another regarding the very possibility of collective coexistence,” which in turn reinforces and becomes “concrete evidence of a mutually-declared social morality” (*Bonami et al. 2000, p. 145*). The uniform is an identifier, marking off common beliefs and shared values; in the process, it helps to build an internal esprit. This is precisely what Pinchot and the Forest Service leadership had in mind when they drew up plans for the new agency's regulation uniform and badge (*Kaufman 1960, Joseph 1986, Bonami et al. 2000, Fussell 2002*).

Yet if clothing such as the Forest Service's functions as a sign system (*Lurie 2000*), a language understood by those who wear this apparel, it also can be interpreted by those outside the system (*Joseph 1986, Craik 2005*). In fact, it must be, for the exterior in part defines the interior. “The whole purpose of uniforms and badges is to identify members of organizations,” argues Kaufman and “to differentiate the wearers from everyone else and to link them with each other. The livery and insignia show at a glance who is ‘in’ an agency and who is not” (*Kaufman 1960, p. 184*), a critical set of distinctions between the included and excluded. *Lurie (2000)* stresses that this uniformity of clothing is a reflection of a singularity of mind and purpose: “to put on such livery is give up one's right to act as an individual—in terms of speech, to be partially or wholly censored” (*p. 17–18*). *Fussell* counters that uniforms do not enslave, but rather can communicate “a great deal that you don't have to say yourself” (*Fussell 2002, p. 198*), a flexibility in communication that Kaufman also notices in his classic study of the Forest Service. Allowing that the agency's official apparel “fosters a group spirit and

unity, a 'we' feeling, a common bond," he observes that Forest Service personnel demonstrated a healthy variation in response to wearing it: "some men prefer to wear work clothes most of the time—particularly when dealing with loggers and grazers, before whom they prefer to appear as individuals doing business than authoritative agents of a government bureau—and are regularly admonished by their superiors to get into their 'greens'" (*Kaufman 1960, p. 184*). Intriguingly, these variances may further aid the coalescing process. Although their reactions to regulation attire "are mixed, and the observation of the rules somewhat spotty, it is significant that a majority of officers in the Forest Service expressed a preference for retaining the uniform" (*Kaufman 1960, p. 184*).

Such formal clothing, like the ubiquitous pine-tree shield that is replicated on all agency vehicles, site signage, and formal letterhead, inculcates the "will and capacity to conform." These symbols, "even when they are not enthusiastically supported, keep the members aware of their membership, and encourage them to think in terms of the agency" (*Kaufman 1960, p. 185*). What Kaufman does not say, but which is true as well, is that the maintenance of these signifiers over the past century has engaged each new employee cohort with this most visible of the agency's norms. Even as these standards—behavioral, cultural, and social—have evolved in response to critical changes in the broader society, and despite a sense among some older employees that their younger counterparts do not always adopt the same set of perceptions about the agency's "cultural DNA," the badge and uniform continue to demarcate common ground (*Miller 2012, p. 151*).

Backfire

It was in defense of this shared space and collective history that led Forest Service retirees to raise a ruckus in February 2013 after learning that the USDA was in the process of deleting the pine-tree badge as the agency's official symbol. It was to be replaced with the USDA's generic logo, the announced purpose of which was to "give consistent identity to the Department, increase public recognition of the value and wide range of USDA's products and services, and bring economy of scale to the production of visual information materials" (USDA 2013). In their rebuttals, retirees challenged the department's quest for lock-step uniformity and its willingness to casually erase the Forest Service's past. Argued Jim Golden, chair of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees: "People are in disbelief that

anyone would suggest discarding one of the best known logos in the American West” (Lewiston Tribune 2013). They also took umbrage with what they perceived to be the expunging of their years of service to the agency, the national forests and grasslands, and the nation (Miller 2013c). Their protests, which involved a letter-writing campaign, and the use of print, electronic, and social media to convey their dismay, had a significant impact; in early April the USDA announced that the Forest Service's symbol was exempted from the secretary's order (The Lookout 2013). By their successful activism, these men and women affirmed that even though they no longer wore the pine-tree shield, it retains a profound hold on their affections and remains an indelible mark of their public service, a life-long badge of honor.