



News Advisory

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Supervisor's Office
1200 Franklin Way
Sparks, NV 89431

For Immediate Release on October 5, 2007 – Stop Date is December 31, 2007

Tom Stefani, a Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest employee who worked as a Rangeland Management Specialist in Northeast Nevada, died yesterday in Afghanistan while on a Foreign Agricultural Service assignment. ***The below statement is located on www.fas.usda.gov. **A more personal portrayal of Tom will appear on the Humboldt-Toiyabe website later today.** Tom was truly working to improve the lives of people in need, in the best traditions of the Forest Service; he loved his work in the Forest Service, and he loved his work in Afghanistan. The entire Forest Service mourns his passing along with his family.

- **USDA Press Office: 202-720-4623 (for content below)**
- **Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Media Contact:** Christie Kalkowski, 775-355-5311
- More information on **Foreign Agriculture Service programs** in Afghanistan may be found at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/icd/drd/afghanistan.asp>, <http://www.ifcbs.nato.int/htm/visitors/ns/2007/07/ns3.htm>, or <http://www.usda.gov>

STATEMENT BY ACTING SECRETARY CHUCK CONNER REGARDING THE LOSS OF A USDA EMPLOYEE IN AFGHANISTAN

"It is with much sadness that I confirm the death of Steven Thomas (Tom) Stefani, a USDA Forest Service employee on voluntary assignment with the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service in Afghanistan. He was serving on a Provincial Reconstruction Team as an agricultural advisor when he lost his life yesterday in an explosion that impacted his convoy near Ghazni.

"In Afghanistan, Tom was developing and implementing projects to help the people of the Ghazni Province. He worked directly with Ghazni's Director of Agriculture to create a reconstruction plan that included a poultry rearing facility and other agricultural advancements.



Tom Stefani, a representative for the USDA in Ghanzi (left,) shown with an unknown Afghan. Photo courtesy of Stefani family member.

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Last month, Tom proudly reported that construction had begun on a cold storage facility for farmers to store their commodities, which would enable them to preserve and sell the products. He had also worked on a project to improve grape production and management practices. Tom's contributions will have a real and lasting impact on the people and agricultural economy of Afghanistan.

"For USDA, Tom was a respected Rangeland Management Specialist on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in Nevada. As a rangeland management specialist he worked with permit applicants to balance livestock needs with those of rangelands. He developed grazing strategies to help achieve this balance. Tom was a problem-solver and a tremendous ambassador for the department and the U.S. government.

"The fact that Tom recently requested an extension of his service time in Afghanistan speaks to his courage and commitment to protecting our freedom and creating a better life for a deserving people. I extend my deepest condolences to Tom's parents, brothers and friends. They should be very proud of all that Tom accomplished both here at home and abroad.

"I call on all Americans to reflect on the great sacrifices being made by many brave men and women, including those in uniform and civilian volunteers, to protect our freedom."

BACKGROUND:

USDA Agricultural advisors volunteer to serve 6 to 9 month assignments in Afghanistan or Iraq. They help to enable the Afghan and Iraqi governments to support and provide reconstruction services to the agricultural sector.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are military units of 50-100 personnel with 2-3 civilian advisors. Since 2003, USDA has detailed 37 volunteer agricultural advisors from 9 USDA agencies on long-term PRT assignments. As of October 5, 2007, USDA has 8 agricultural advisors in Afghanistan and Iraq and 18 additional advisors scheduled to be detailed by November 2007.

Prior to deployment, these volunteer advisors participate in a rigorous 2 week military/civilian training program at Fort Bragg, NC. This training includes area studies, security awareness, and risk assessment.

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