

Reassigned Mystic District Ranger accuses Forest Service of harassment

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Forest Service

Mystic District Headquarters in the Black Hills National Forest

A forest service employee is accusing a former Black Hills Forest supervisor of harassment.

The employee said she was relocated to a different job in 2018 as a result of gender discrimination.

Ruth Esperance was the Mystic District Ranger from 2012 to 2018. It's a job she held until 2018 when then-forest Supervisor Mark Van Every reassigned her to a different position.

At the time, Van Every described the move as a "[personnel matter](#)." Van Every retired from the forest service about a year later, in late 2019.

Esperance's lawyers argue the reassignment came with decreased authority and duties. They describe it as a constructive demotion.

Testifiers include former human resources officials with the forest service who described Esperance's reassignment as "unusual" for someone with her rank.

One HR official testified to a trend of discrimination against females within Region 2 of the Forest Service. That region includes Colorado, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska and Kansas.

The US government said the employee was disrespectful and brought tension to the workplace.

Lawyers said the former Mystic District ranger opposed the decision by Van Every to sign the Black Hills Resilient Landscape plan, which seeks to return the forest into a desired landscape following the pine beetle epidemic and large wildfires.

They said Esperance made it difficult for Van Every to do his job.

The civil case is scheduled to go into Thursday.



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