

Jury rules in favor of former district ranger in gender discrimination case

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Contributed by Dan Gebhardt

Ruth Esperance and Dan Gebhardt

A South Dakota jury has ruled in favor of a former Black Hills District Ranger who said she was the victim of gender discrimination.

The jury awarded Ruth Esperance \$400,000 in damages.

The verdict from the 9-member jury came around noon on Saturday following a five-day trial.

The case began almost five years ago in 2018, when Esperance was reassigned from her position as Mystic District ranger to what her lawyers described as a position with decreased authority and duties. Some former human resources officials with the forest service called the reassignment “unheard of.”

Esperance’s lawyers argue then-Forest Supervisor Mark Van Every routinely dismissed the concerns and ideas of Esperance and female colleagues, while being receptive to Esperance’s male co-workers’ ideas.

Dan Gebhardt is with Solomon Law Firm out of Washington D.C. He represents Esperance. He said he hopes the ruling helps the forest service move forward in a better way and that women who work there can be heard.

“To the extent that the forest service is still male-dominated, it can do a much better job on its treatment of women,” Gebhardt said. “It has to take note of a decision like this and put policies and procedures in place such that it does do a much better job in the future in trying to curtail the trend of gender discrimination that has been happening in region two of the forest service.”

The jury did not weigh in on whether Esperance should be reinstated as the Mystic District Ranger. She works as the public affairs officer for the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

The US government argued Esperance’s reassignment was due to a contentious relationship with upper management and unwillingness to implement certain projects.

Officials with the US Attorney’s Office declined to comment.



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