



# The Lookout

Information, Observations and Comments from the  
National Association of Forest Service Retirees

*Sustaining the Heritage*

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**USFS Reunion, Missoula, MT Sept. 6-11, 2009**  
**Details: [ForestServiceReunion.net](http://ForestServiceReunion.net).**  
**NAFSR Annual Meeting, Sept. 7, 1-4 pm. Details to follow**

Volume 4 Issue 1

This is our first attempt at producing an Internet newsletter, so please bear with us as we work through the wonders of Microsoft Word and its magic buttons. Another change is a flexible publishing schedule. Our intent is to send a newsletter out when significant news about the national forests, the Forest Service or forest management occurs. This may be easier said than done, but we'll give it a try.

Currently the NAFSR issue basket is overflowing with items that NAFSR is paying attention to, including the transition to a new Administration, the continuing problem of fire suppression financing, the overall Forest Service budget, federal fire policy, national economic stimulus, forest fuels reduction and GAO's soon to be released study of the pros and cons of moving the Forest Service to the Department of Interior.

However, before touching on such issues, we would like to point you to a web site in Region 9 that is a pleasure to read and reaffirms that even with all of the challenges to the Forest Service, the tradition of working with people to improve forest management and people's well being is still a vital part of the Outfit.

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/ssrs/> with the simple name "Success Stories" chronicles the activities of Forest Service people in Region 9 working with their neighbors and people from urban areas to reinforce "Caring for the Land and Serving People." Take a look at the R-9 site, and know that similar activities and involvement take place in every region and unit of the Forest Service.

## **Transition:**

NAFSR members have worked hard to brief members of the Obama transition team about the major issues facing the national forests and Forest Service. This communications effort involved personal contacts, and briefings conducted with other organizations sharing NAFSR's beliefs and concerns. It is too early to know how successful contacts have been, but there are positive indicators the New Administration has heard at least some of the issues described in the various briefings. (See website [FSX.org/Letters](http://FSX.org/Letters) and Reports for "What We Believe----" NAFSR's basic briefing paper)

Recently Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack outlined his priorities for the Department, included the following about the Forest Service:

*" Restoring the mission of the Forest Service as a protector of clean air, clean water, and wildlife habitat; a provider of recreation opportunities; a key player in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration. Vilsack indicated that it is important that we appropriately budget for wildfires so that the Forest Service has the resources it needs for both wildfires and its other missions."*

We see this as an encouraging indicator he is aware of some of the Forest Service's major challenges.

Here are updates on other significant NAFSR activities.

## **Fire Suppression Funds:**

The problem of finding a better way to pay for fire suppression is still not resolved. However, as noted by the Secretary, top administrators are aware of the problem. Recently Chair George Leonard attended a meeting in Washington attended by representatives of over fifty organizations to discuss this serious budget problem, which also indicates the importance of finding resolution.

## **Forest Service Budget:**

The Congressional focus on an economic stimulus package has over shadowed the annual budget process, but not the importance of a long term adequate funding of Forest Service programs. George is spending considerable time making contacts with staff and Congressional members emphasizing the need for adequate and stable funding for Forest Service missions. (See [FSX website: Reports and Letters-- Proposed FY 2009 Forest Service Budget, April 2008](http://FSX.org/Reports)) He emphasizes the critical role these programs have in resolving national and international water shortages, carbon sequestration issues, air quality improvement, and production of alternative energy as well production and improvement of wildlife habitat, recreation, scenery, rural economic stability, and forest products. If you have the opportunity to talk to your members of Congress help NAFSR out by offering a word of support for the Forest Service.

## **Fire Policy:**

**For several years' retirees, local communities, elected officials, organizations and citizens have been expressing increasing concern about the growing number of mega fires and the damage they cause to natural resources, property and the threat the fires pose to human life and health. There is also uneasiness about federal wildland fire policy that provides for the use of wildfires to accomplish resource management objectives.**

**Most people accept the use of fire as a management tool, but a growing number, including many members of NAFSR, believe the uses of unplanned ignitions need more analysis, planning and public involvement before being undertaken as an operational fire management tool.**

**The increasing concerns about wildfires has lead NAFSR Exec. Officer, Darrel Kenops to form a Fire Committee chaired by retired Deputy Chief Al West. While the full committee is formed, Al assisted by Jim Golden, Gordon Schmidt and Steve Eubanks, are developing a fire problem statement paper. This paper will guide NAFSR future actions to help the Forest Service work through critical fire issues. The paper should be ready for full committee and membership review by early spring.**

**Other individuals and organizations are also looking at wildland fire management issues. A group of wildland fire retirees in Trinity County, California has published a 58-page report of observations, fire history and fire fighting issues on the national forest lands in the county. This report has been circulated to others interested in fire issues and presented to Congressman Wally Herger (R-CA).**

In Montana some 31 bills have been introduced into the current session of the State Legislature dealing with wildfire issues including a bill to give the state more say in firefighting activities on federal lands. Another piece of legislation asks for the authority for state and local governments to carry out fire hazard reduction work on national forest lands when the Forest Service can't.

## **Economic Stimulus:**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009" or Stimulus Bill passed by the House January 28, 2009, promises \$1.5 billion for forest improvement and maintenance. It still requires Senate action and Presidential signature. Here is a summary of House funding for Forest Service projects:

**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT AND MAINTENANCE (INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)**

***For an additional amount for “Capital Improvement and Maintenance”, \$650,000,000, for reconstruction, capital improvement, decommissioning, and maintenance of forest roads, bridges and trails; alternative energy technologies, energy efficiency enhancements and deferred maintenance at Federal facilities; and for remediation of abandoned mine sites, removal of fish passage barriers, and other critical habitat, forest improvement and watershed enhancement projects on Federal lands and waters:***

***Provided, That funds may be transferred to “National Forest System”:***

***Provided further, That the amount set aside from this appropriation pursuant to section 1106 of this Act shall be not more than 5 percent instead of the percentage specified in such section.***

**WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT (INCLUDING TRANSFERS OF FUNDS)**

***For an additional amount for “Wildland Fire Management”, \$850,000,000, of which \$300,000,000 is for hazardous fuels reduction, forest health, wood to energy grants and rehabilitation and restoration activities on Federal lands, and of which \$550,000,000 is for State fire assistance hazardous fuels projects, volunteer fire assistance, cooperative forest health projects, city forest enhancements, and wood to energy grants on State and private lands:***

***Provided, That amounts in this paragraph may be transferred to “State and Private Forestry” and “National Forest System”:***

***Provided further, That the amount set aside from this appropriation pursuant to section 1106 of this Act shall be not more than 5 percent instead of the percentage specified in such section.***

**The Forest Service is preparing for the opportunities and momentous workload that this legislation will create. More details as we receive them.**

**GAO’s Study of Organizational Change for the Forest Service:**

Last summer the Government Accountability Office was directed to look at the implications of moving the Forest Service to the Department of Interior by Congressman Norm Dicks (D-WA). The report is expected to be released sometime in February 2009. We have very unofficial information the report will make no recommendations, but present an analysis of pros and cons of such a move.

## **McGuire Award:**

An important reminder from Stan Tixier, Chair of the McGuire Award Committee:

At the Forest Service Retirees Reunion in Portland, the Chief and the NAFSR Chair presented John R. McGuire Awards to Joe Hartman and Dick Bennin of the Cimarron National Grasslands. It was a most appropriate setting for the award presentations as it made a large number of FS retirees aware of the existence of the John R. McGuire Award.

As you are well aware, Forest Service Retirees will gather again in Missoula this coming September. It would sure be nice if we could have another (or perhaps more than one) McGuire Award ready for presentation at that meeting. The Awards Committee of NAFSR would be pleased to consider nominations in the next few months, which if approved could be timed for presentation at Missoula.

NAFSR regional representatives are the people responsible for stimulating, receiving and forwarding nominations to the Awards committee. The committee is not able to instigate awards but rather we are dependant on the regional reps to submit nominations. So far, all the awards presented have come from R2, R6, R8 and one from R5 and another a joint award with FS Research. There are a lot of worthy recipients out there if they can be identified and nominated. I hope to hear from some of you soon. If you need a copy of the John R. McGuire Award charter and criteria, please let me know.

Thanks, - **Stan Tixier.**

**Don't Forget the Reunion in Missoula, September 6-11, 2009!!**

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