



NAFSR Board Meeting Final Notes February 6 – 7, 2024 Denver, CO

Day 1 – Tuesday, February 6

Attendees

Board Members - Steve Ellis (Chair), Jamie Connell (Vice Chair), Johnny Hodges (Secretary), Rich Stem (R-1), Sharon Friedman (R-2), Lynn Sprague (R-4), Mike Rogers (R-5 south), Becki Heath (R-6), Marisue Hilliard (R-8), Don Howlett (R-9), Earl Stewart (R-10), Rich Guldin (Research), Ralph Crawford (Research), Doug Crandall (Congressional Liaison), Gene Blakenbaker (National), Ranotta McNair (National), Nora Rasure (National), Susan Skalski (National), Bill Timko (National), Bill Avey (National), Jeanne Wade Evans (National), Tim DeCoster (National), Ed Shepard (PLF Liaison)

Committee Chairs – Rich Guldin (Climate), Nora Rasure (Recreation), Bill Avey (Restoration), Tim DeCoster (Awards)

Staff – Bill Disbrow (Webmaster)

Washington Office – Chief Randy Moore on Tuesday afternoon

Others – Mary Jo Rugwell (President, Public Lands Foundation) on Tuesday, Tom Thompson on Tuesday

Unable to Attend – Greg Griffith (R-3), Steve Eubanks (R-5 North), Mike Dudley (Fire Committee)

Welcome – Steve Ellis

Steve gave a Welcome to everyone, especially to our newest Board members – Bill Avey, Tim DeCoster, and Ralph Crawford. Bill will chair the Restoration Committee and Tim will chair the Awards Committee.

Welcome to Ed Shepard (liaison) and Mary Jo Rugwell (president) of the Public Lands Foundation.

Steve did a brief review of our 2023 accomplishments. The report has been distributed to all members and is also posted on our website.

Steve commented that we are receiving an increasing number of media calls asking for comments on various issues.

Steve thanked the Task Forces for their work this past year on Bylaws, Recruiting, and Membership.

Website Update and Discussion – Bill Disbrow

Bill shared a handout with some statistics about our website for 2023.

- Total visitors – 41,718
- Average visitors per day – 114
- Total unique IP's – 26,236

The Board discussed the website.

- Generally, everyone is very pleased with the website.
- Continue to keep information up to date and remove older documents.
- What to put at the top of the home page – fun things or our work? The consensus was to feature things we are working on or have accomplished.
- Maybe sort information by topic rather than just by date. Maybe add another dropdown for this.
- Need to show the members of various committees.
- We need help from the committee chairs on content.

Administrative and Finance Update - Johnny Hodges

Johnny shared two handouts for the financial discussion.

The first handout was a summary of income and expenses from 2016 through 2023 and included the 2024 budget.

- We finished 2023 with a final balance of approximately \$50,000 and a gain for the year of about \$1,000.

- The 2024 budget was approved at the November 2023 Board meeting. It projects a small deficit of about \$750.
- Johnny felt the revenue projections for 2024 may be too conservative. The current budget contains revenue of about \$14,500 which is comparable to 2022. Revenue in 2023 was approximately \$19,000.
- There were two major issues with the current budget – (1) we promised the Public Lands Foundation \$2,500 as our donation to the Student Congress, but due to an oversight, it was never paid, and (2) the travel budget is only funded at \$2,000. We spent over \$6,000 on travel in 2023, much of it due to two trips for Congressional testimony. Travel expenses vary greatly from year to year.
- After extensive discussion, the Board agreed to increase the 2024 budget by \$6,000 with \$2,500 for the Student Congress and a \$3,500 increase for the travel budget.

The second handout was a new document, *NAFSR Financial Management Guidelines*. This document was produced after a meeting with Steve, Jamie, Don, and Johnny last November. There are 12 items in the document. A few highlights –

- If there is a request to spend money on an item that is not included in the approved budget, the Chair or Secretary can approve changes up to \$500 per instance. Any changes over that dollar limit must be approved by the Board.
- We will maintain a minimum of 2 years of annual expenses in cash.
- We will maintain our investment account at 30% to 50% of our total assets. At the end of 2023, our investment account was 28% of our total assets.

The Board approved the new *NAFSR Financial Management Guidelines*.

Today's Legislative Landscape - Doug Crandall

- The Border Bill needs 60 votes to move it. It probably won't make it. It has been a tough week for McConnell and a tougher week for the House.
- The Interior Bill markup is on the 8th. Expecting a 3% cut. Last year everyone was cut except the FS.
- The Continuing Resolutions (CR's) maintain fire funding pay at current levels (after this year's increase). The permanent fix is in the Farm Bill.
- The Senate isn't making progress on the Farm Bill.
- The House is moving on the Farm Bill, and it includes good things.
- Steve is getting a lot of requests from the press. NAFSR has a good reputation on the Hill.
- Waiting on the Supreme Court ruling on the Chevron doctrine.
- Steve is working on op eds on Oregon Firefighter Arrest and Firefighter Pay.

Climate Committee Report - Rich Guldin

Rich shared two handouts – the Carbon Position Paper and the Carbon Science Document.

- Climate Change papers were approved last February.

- Rich and his team of scientists have been working on the Forest Carbon papers for the last year. Rich provided background information for this effort.
- The Board voted to approve the position paper and science paper.
- The cover letter will clarify this includes nation's forests and grasslands.

Public Lands Update (PLF) – Ed Shepard

- We are working on the annual report and will use it as a fund-raising tool.
- PLF has 3 new directors at large and 3 new state directors.
- Bill Disbrow now manages our website. He is replacing George Stone.
- The “BLM Daily” pops up on employee computers when they turn them on in the morning. We’ve had 3 articles included so far.
- Some conflict between the “BLM Foundation” and the newer “Foundation for America’s Public Lands” in terms of fundraising for the BLM.
- PLF held their 2023 Annual Meeting in Cheyenne. Sharon Friedman attended representing NAFSR.
- PLF will hold their 2024 Annual Meeting on October 8 and 9 in Las Vegas in conjunction with this year’s Student Congress.
- The “Conservation Rule” is expected to be finalized in April. This will be a big deal! It is possible that Conservation Leases could be managed by a non-government entity including NGOs.

Prep for Chief’s Visit – Jamie Connell/Steve Ellis

The Board discussed possible topics/questions for the discussion with the Chief. Steve had already developed a list. Some of the topics -

- Workforce Capacity – The current CR has the same budget as last year. With a 5% salary increase, is that a reduction?
- Thank the WO for their support of the FS float in the Rose Parade.
- We are 3 years into the 10-year plan for Wildfire Crisis Strategy. How is the progress?
- Keystone national agreements and new partnerships.
- Current challenges or challenges on the horizon where we could help.
- Jeanne and Tim will take notes on the Chief’s comments. We might use them on a “NAFSR All Members Call” later this year.

2024-25 Program of Work – Ranotta McNair

- Handout #7 is the 2023-24 POW that we can use as a starting point.
- The Governance Task Force completed their task and can be deleted.
- Keep the Membership Task Force, but we may need to update their tasks.
- Keep the Accomplishment Report.
- 2024 Student Congress – change to Ranotta as the lead.
- Rich Guldin is our representative on the Forest Climate Working Group.
- We need a Lead or Task Force for climate issues on public lands. Sharon Friedman volunteered.

Strategic

- Wildfire Crisis Strategy – Bill Avey as lead, Earl Stewart will assist.
- Delete fire retardant litigation.
- Keep emerging issues.
- Mature and Old Growth (MOG) – Bill Avey, Restoration Committee
- Climate
- Recreation

Becki/Marisue/Rich will write the 2024-25 POW with additional details.

One month turnaround (March 7) for review/approval by Board.

Committees

Climate – Rich Guldin

Restoration – Bill Avey

Recreation – Nora Rasure

Awards – Tim DeCoster

Fire – Mike Dudley

Leads

CEQ and NEPA – Sharon Friedman

Legislation – Doug Crandall

Student Congress – Ranotta McNair

Chief Randy Moore

- Meeting with NAFSR is something of a Homecoming, but you all left and I'm still here.
- I will keep our discussion at a higher level today.
- Some personnel changes.
 - Jaelith Hall Rivera to Chief of Staff.
 - John Crockett to SPT.
 - Tony Dixon to R-9 RF.
- Rick Snodgrass, the burn boss in R-6 who was arrested for a prescribed fire escape two years ago will have his case go before a grand jury on March 5.
- The Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) has been in place for 2 years. We are trying to provide information to OMB.
- We continue to pay the \$20,000 firefighter pay bump using suppression dollars to backfill.
- We have almost reached our goal of 11,300 firefighters.
- Damage assessments are underway in CA from flooding.
- Our workforce lost 36% of our non-firefighter employees, about 8,000 people. Our goal was to hire 4,000 new employees. We hired 4,200. We will use partnerships for the balance of the workload.

- We now have a budget issue. The 5.2% pay raise cost us \$160 million in additional cost. If we compare it to FY22, the hit is \$400 million.
- There is a chance of RIFF's, but we think we can get by this year.
- We are losing about 2,000 people through attrition per year, which gives us options.
- Much of our funding is going to partnerships.
- "Culture wraps itself around history."
- Build the system (year 1), feed the system (year 2). We are now seeing results in WCS.
- We completed 3.4 million acres of fuels treatment last year.
- Our reforestation program is making huge progress.
- How we report accomplishments is becoming outdated. We need to include the accomplishments of our partners. We need to report more about outcomes, not outputs.
- How do you determine the value of protection of communities and watersheds? We spend \$3 billion to protect \$100's of billions of values.
- We need to change the conversation and our partners need to help us.
- Most of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy funding is going to the West. It affects 137 million people, almost half of the population of the country.
- The Wildfire Commission Report included 100 recommendations. We asked the State Foresters Board to focus on just a few.
- The Carbon Platform is a standardized approach to carbon calculations. It will cost \$5 million over 2 years to build. We have expertise to give to that project (Rich Guldin).
- The major threats to Old Growth (OG) is insects, fire and diseases, not logging.
- We need to find a consistent way to manage OG across the country.
- The OG EIS will delay Forest Plan revisions. There will be no new starts until it is finished.
- The draft on the OG study is due this June. Review in December, and sign by January 2025.
- It is a 3 year process to complete plan revisions. We need to do 120. We will complete 10-15 plan revisions per year.
- Under Secretary Wilkes gives deference to the FS. He works well with us.
- What can we do to help you in the next 8 months? Demonstrate the effectiveness of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. Who is the target audience? Congress.
- What makes me happy? I come home and someone greets me with a smile. I don't let the job control me. I took 2 weeks off at Christmas.
- Regions and forests have staffed up 19% on average.
- Are people in the office?
 - WO, SES people are in the office 3 days a week.
 - Regions and Forests are in the office 1 day per week.
 - We have demonstrated we don't have to be in the office full time.
 - We are still trying to find the correct balance. We probably won't ever go back to the way we were. I go to the office every day.
- Partners contributed \$978 million in value last year.

- There are no more buckets of money. One salary and expense account at the agency level. This helps with our priority work.
- Each RF can offer a COLA to employees other than firefighters.
- A GS-5 is minimum wage. GS-3 and 4 is below minimum wage.
- We have developed a new Firefighter Series. New hires will be recruited into that series.
- The FS has been stuck at 18% diversity for years. We moved up to 25% last year. We took the hiring authority away from local officials and began using a National hiring team.
- International Programs –
 - What do countries want from us? Education on water use and grazing practices.
 - Don't allow sheep to roam and eat everything down to the sand.
 - All forests in Israel are planted. They are aging out and dying. What can be done?
 - It is an eye opener to see how the FS is looked at and admired by other countries.
- Last comment from the Board – It is difficult for us to connect with FS employees.

Day 2 – Wednesday, February 7

Old Growth Subcommittee Update/Report - Bill Avey

- There is an SAF Summit on Mature and Old Growth in DC, March 2024.
- Tim DeCoster, Bill Timko, and Rich Guldin will attend and represent NAFSR.
- An Executive Order required a MOG inventory.
- The inventory identified major threats to OG as fire and climate change.
- An EIS will be completed in one year for all forests.
- The goal is to keep OG resilient and increase recruitment.
- MOG is now just OG.
- NAFSR provided a response to the OG NOI on January 27. It is posted on our website in the "Advocacy" box.
- Many recent plan revisions already incorporate this direction.
- We support this approach over a one size fits all rulemaking.
- Make sure field units can continue to manage vegetation.
- This could become a funding issue.
- We need a timely review of current projects. They are all currently going to the Deputy Chief's office for approval.
- We care about involving the local public.
- SAF has a grant from the FS to host the summit over 3 days.
- It will be held March 4-6 in DC.
- Goals –
 - Outline the state of science around OG.
 - Successful collaboration.

- Shared priorities.
- Strengthen relationships.
- “Nature based climate solutions.”
- SAF will produce a report.
- Planned for 300 attendees.
- Our talking points will be the bullet items in our January 27 response letter.

New Board Member Nominee for R-5 South – Mike Rogers and Jeanne Wade Evans

Mike has been on the Board since 2004 and is ready to step down. He and Jeanne gave some background information on the nominee, Teresa Benson. She was approved by the Board.

ACES Update – Becki Heath

In 2018 there were 70 enrollees in the ACES program. Becki began working in management of ACES in 2020. By the Fall of 2023, there were 700 enrollees.

When the Farm Bill expired on 9/30/2023, ACES was shut down. It is now being reactivated, but if the Farm Bill is not approved by July, the ACES program will be shut down again.

Student Congress – Ranotta McNair and Lynn Sprague

This year’s Student Congress will be held in October in Las Vegas over 3 days. There will be 25 students invited. They will write a report with recommendations which they will present to the Chief later.

The Public Lands Foundation started the Student Congress in 2012. It is sponsored by Boise State University/Andrus Center. There is now a participating agreement and a \$25,000 commitment from the FS. NAFSR began offering support to the Student Congress a few years ago. Ranotta McNair and Jim Caswell are our leads for this year.

The Board voted to reaffirm our continued support of the Student Congress.

Update on Membership Drive Efforts and Results – Nora Rasure and Johnny Hodges

NAFSR held a Membership Drive for the first time ever over four weeks during the month of January. We recruited 91 new members during that time, boosting our membership to just under 800 members.

Nora discussed some of the ideas we tried out during the Drive. Publicizing the Drive with the Regional retiree groups was effective, as was social media. But most of our success was the person to person contacts.

We offered a Grand Prize of a complimentary Lifetime Membership. Each member that “referred” a new member received one ticket in the drawing for the prize. We had 40 tickets in the drawing. Linda Goodman was the winner. Since she was already a Lifetime Member, she donated the membership to Connie Redmond, a new member that she recruited.

Membership Retention - Nora/Johnny

We took 30 minutes during our Board meeting to conduct our first ever "Call-a-Thon."

We attempted to call every member that had not paid their 2024 dues. There were about 150 members on the list.

Each Board member was asked to call 6 members.

As you can imagine, not everyone we called answered their phones, but we got through to a surprising number of people. Not only did we reach people with unpaid dues, but we also reached a few that had made their payments.

Many members were surprised (and some excited) to talk to a live person on the Board. And it was a productive 30 minutes - within 2 days we received 27 dues payments including 4 new Lifetime Memberships.

Membership and Revenue - Nora/Johnny

Some ideas on how to increase revenue –

- Golden Members do not pay dues. Send a letter asking for a donation to those Golden Members that have not made a donation this year. We have been doing this for the last 2 years.
- Lifetime Members do not pay annual dues but are probably some of our most supportive members. Send a letter asking for a donation to Lifetime Members that have not made a donation this year.
- Fundraising ideas
 - Auction items or trips.
 - Silent auction at the FS national reunion.
 - Bequests

All Members Zoom Call – Nora Rasure

Last September we held a one hour Zoom call for all NAFSR members. We had about 40 members participate. There were five presentations. We posted the video on our website and it was viewed many times.

The Board agreed that we should have another call this year, maybe in March. Some thoughts about the next call -

- Ask for questions ahead of time with no specific topics identified.
- Get word to regional associations.
- Good to keep it short.
- Nora was excellent as the moderator.
- Possible topic is a report out from this Board meeting.
- Discuss strategic items we listed in our Plan of Work.
- Recognize who is on the Board.

- Different presenters.
- Invite outside speakers.
- A student from the Student Congress.
- Have non-Board members on committees do a presentation.

FS Staffing Levels - Gene Blankenbaker

- Last year we had 29,820 permanent employees.
- 2017 was our low point with 27,000 permanent employees.
- We now have 33,400 permanent employees which will probably be our high point.
- Our temporary workforce is decreasing from about 8-9000 down to 5,200 currently.
- Trying to move to a more permanent workforce.
- Permanent employees cost 30% more than a temporary workforce.
- We have 1,000 positions of 13/13 instead of temps.
- Attrition rate of 2,000 per year.
- Attrition over the last 5 years has varied from 2,500 to 3,000.
- Current attrition - retirements about 40% and 60% left the agency.
- Fire staffing has an attrition rate of 25-35%.
- Fire program/staffing has increased by 5% to 30% of total employees.
- GS-456 position descriptions for GS-11 and above are ready to roll out.
- Current employees can opt in to the new 456 series from the 462 series.

Round Robin

Committees

Fire Committee – Jeanne Wade Evans

- Mike Dudley is Chair but was unable to attend the meeting.
- Our Fire Charter was completed 3 years ago.
- Good contacts with fire leadership.
- Involved in Fire Retardant litigation.
- Comments submitted to EPA on proposed rulemaking on fine particulate matter, PM 2.5
- Firefighter pay issues.

Restoration Committee – Bill Avey

- Recently took over as committee chair.
- Sharon Friedman has been very helpful.

Recreation Committee – Nora Rasure

- Monitor legislation.
- Monitor recreation strategy progress.

Climate – Rich Guldin

- Finished carbon papers.

- Looking for future assignments.

Awards – Tim DeCoster

- Recently took over as committee chair.
- Looking for ways to streamline the awards process.

Leads

CEQ/NEPA – Sharon Friedman with Joe Carbone

- Legislation full of stupid ideas.
- Permitting for energy projects
- Defining Vegetation Management.

Regional Updates

R-1 – Rich Stem

- I talk to the RF every 2 months.
- Reforestation program is growing substantially.
- Hiring – shifting 500 temporary positions to permanent.
- Shifting 500+ positions in fire to new series.
- 40% of employees with 5 years or less experience.

R-2 – Sharon Friedman

Personnel Updates

- Jacque Buchanan recently left the Region for the Pacific Northwest Region where she is serving as Regional Forester; announcement for two permanent Deputy Regional Foresters closed recently, and selections are anticipated later this month. Steve Lohr is currently on a detail assignment with the National Wild Turkey Federation as part of his SES Candidate Development Program.
- The Region currently has three Acting Deputy Regional Foresters (Chad Stewart, Scott Fitzwilliams, Gerald Connor).
- New permanent Forest Supervisors have recently started on the Black Hills NF (Shawn Cochran), the Pike-San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands (Ryan Nehl), and the Rio Grande NF (Dennis Kuhnel).
- Kevin Khung starts on 2/11/24 as the Regional Director for State, Private, and Tribal Forestry.

Regional Priorities and Updates

- In 2023, the Regional Leadership Team identified three overarching priorities to guide the strategic work of the Region:

- Restoring and Maintaining Resilient Landscapes.
- Providing Outstanding Recreation Opportunities.
- Fostering a Work Environment that Values and Respects all Employees.
- The Region continues to focus on the Front Range Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscape on the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pike/San Isabel National Forests. The Region is also making considerable investments in high-risk fire sheds on the Black Hills and Shoshone National Forests.
- The Region continues to invest in new partnerships, including BIL and IRA funding leveraged through “keystone agreements” with the National Forest Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, and National Wild Turkey Federation.
- In 2023, the Regional Forester’s Team established the People and Cultural Transformation Team (PACT) to oversee elements of the employee life cycle. The team includes a regional recruiter, a military recruiter, hiring and workforce planning specialist, an onboarding coordinator, and a social scientist and equity lead.
- The White River National Forest continues working with partners to plan for the newly designated Camp Hale – Continental Divide National Monument
- Last fall, Regional Forester Beum signed an historic MOU with 5 tribal nations regarding co-stewardship of the Pactola Visitor Center in the Black Hills.
- We are making progress on two withdrawals, Thompson Divide in Colorado, and the Pactola Reservoir – Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal in South Dakota.
- At the RO, we’re assessing our space needs and are likely looking to downsize, with the expectation of relocating to a smaller facility at the end of the current lease in 2027.

R-4 – Lynn Sprague

Waiting on report.

R-5 – Mike Rogers

The RF is good at sharing updates with retirees.

Mike gave his “first generation” NAFSR shirt to Steve Ellis.

R-6 – Becki Heath

- Jacque Buchanan is the new RF.
- 9 months of acting RF’s.

R-8 – Marisue Hilliard

- Recruitment drive for retirees.
- Trying to diversify membership.
- 6 new members on Board.
- We have changed the name of our newsletter, “Dixie Ranger” to “Southern Forest Lookout.”
- Oral histories for museum.

R-9 – Don Howlett

- Last meeting with the RF was in September.
- The current employees are very young with little experience.
- New RF.

R-10 – Earl Stewart

- The RF retired in September.
- Actings since then.

Next Board Meetings

May 7 – Jamie Connell and Becki Heath – planners.

August 13 - TBD

Nov 12 – Jamie Connell and Bill Timko – planners.

Feb 4-5, 2025 – Tim DeCoster, Rich Guldin – planners.

Last Word from Steve

- Thanks to Susan Skalski as moderator.
- Thanks to Jamie Connell for her work as vice chair and as the primary planner for the Board meeting.
- Thanks to Nora Rasure on membership drive.
- Thanks to Rich Guldin on carbon papers.
- Thanks to Ed Shepard and Mary Jo Rugwell for attending and representing Public Lands Foundation.
- Support for Student Congress.
- Working on budget issues.
- Media calls are often time sensitive.
- Co-signed letters are important to our advocacy.
- We sometimes hear that some FS retirees have the perception that NAFSR is an “elitist organization.” This is something we need to work on. It is our intent to represent all FS retirees.

Final Notes by Johnny Hodges

February 23, 2024