

2020 Accomplishment Report

by
Jim Caswell

This past year has brought many unimaginable challenges to everyone including your Association. Despite the pandemic, NAFSR has had a very busy year and every engagement, communication, and contact has been influenced by Covid-19. Despite that, there has been no lack of opportunities to work within our Program of Work priorities.

Your Association had tremendous opportunity to influence significant issues facing natural resource and national forest management. We have further strengthened our working relationships with coalitions and the Forest Service, providing us with unique opportunities to be more successful. What follows is a summary of NAFSR accomplishments and activities for CY 2020.

American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP): We joined others in supporting or commenting and lending our signature to 15 letters and participated in group calls and meetings. The legislative proposals included: Great American Outdoors Act, Replant Act, Federal Lands Transaction Facilitation Act, American Conservation Enhancement Act, and Recovering American Wildlife Act just to name a few.

Pete Griffin represented NAFSR while attending the AWCP meeting in Omaha, NE in March. Sandra Holsten represented NAFSR with the AWCP meeting in August via Zoom Meetings.

Program of Work Successes (POW): Our efforts in advocacy of the POW increased significantly and took many forms such as, written testimony, letters to committees, joint letters with Public Lands foundation (PLF), outreach to various local governments, national groups, and collaboratives. The subject of those efforts spanned the range of our POW priorities including: NEPA reform (CEQ and FS), ESA, Infrastructure, Capacity, Wildfire, Forest and Grassland, Restoration, Forest Climate Working Group, Reforestation, and multiple Budget initiatives. While not all our efforts were total successes, in every instance advances were made in our positions. Our priorities remain a work in progress.

Sustaining the Forest Service Mission: NAFSR relationship and communications with the agency and the Chief's office has never been stronger, more respectful, and healthy. Communications between the Chief, Deputy Chiefs, and Directors not only met our goal of quarterly calls, but also many impromptu conversations on matters of specific interest.

We have had the unprecedented opportunity this year to engage the Chief's office in 8 Teams/Zoom conference sessions, several that included the entire Board and the membership at large. NAFSR is held in high regard by Forest Service leadership and our relationships are strong. We are in an ideal position as we move into a new Administration.

Fire Committee: The Fire Committee continues to maintain a close relationship with the fire leadership of the Agency. They held their annual Committee meeting remotely and have provided leadership for the several virtual fire briefings for the membership to keep retirees informed on fire policy, fire activity, and Covid-19 protocols at the national level. The Board and Committee revitalized efforts to serve as liaisons with Regional Foresters to share accurate and timely fire information at the local level. We have received positive feedback on this dual approach of communicating and keeping everyone informed.

We added two new members to the Fire Committee this year and more change is on the horizon. Al West, the long tenured Chair of the Committee has decided to step aside and take a less active role in Committee business. Mike Rogers has agreed to fill in as interim Chair while we search for a permanent replacement. We are grateful to both Al and Mike not only for their years of service with the Forest Service, but also for their commitment to NAFSR. The Committee will play a major leadership role in the wildfire issue going forward.

Outreach and the Media: This was a year in which our organization strengthened our advocacy for what we believe and the issues we care about. We have achieved a new level of credibility amongst our peers, members of Congress, and the news media. We draw this conclusion from the number and frequency of contacts and inquiries we have received. Media contacts include: Greenwire, E&E News, The Hill, The AP, NFPA, and NBC News. We received several requests for review of legislative proposals from various members of Congress. The advice and feedback we provided was always direct and appreciated by the members and their staffs.

Member Services: For several years Board members have worked to make improvements in our business operations and member services. This year efforts came full circle and thanks to the dedication of Johnny and Ellen Hodges, Darrel Kenops, and Bill Disbrow, our historical records from inception through 2014 have been archived at the NMFSH, and work continues from 2015 to the present.

There has been a complete rework of our website with a new look, more information, better organized, and easier to access. Johnny has worked tirelessly this year to successfully communicate with the membership on emerging issues, important information, job and volunteer opportunities, Board actions, and responded quickly to your inquiries or complaints. Our efforts are designed and focused to better serve our members.

This year the John R McGuire (JRM) award committee recommended and the Board approved language changes to the bylaws, and one JRM award recipient. Due to Covid-19 we have yet to hold the award presentation, but plans are in the works for this Fall. A big thank you to Phil Aune and the JRM committee for their work this year.

NAFSR is extremely honored to have Dr. Richard Guldin as a Board member and this year's recipient of the prestigious Sir William Schlich Memorial Award. He is the first Forest Service honoree in 24 years. We could not be prouder of Rich.

All in all, it has been a good year. Our credibility as a reliable source of information and sound advice has allowed us to influence issues of importance to the Board and our members. As I write this, the inauguration of the Biden Administration just wrapped up and now the work begins. We have shared with the transition team our formal position paper and believe NAFSR is well positioned and poised to make a difference in the year ahead.