



2025 NAFSR Accomplishment Report

December 22, 2025

It would be an understatement to say that 2025 was a tumultuous year for the Forest Service and career federal employees. It could be argued that 2025 has been the most disruptive year in the 120-year history of the agency. All the many changes being proposed and/or implemented by the administration have resulted in no shortage of critical issues for NAFSR to engage in, from standing up for career employees to pushing back on the possible dismantling of the agency itself. As a result, we have engaged frequently with Congress, the Department, the agency, and the news media.

The NAFSR Board just recently elected a new Chair. As a result, I will officially hand over my duties to **Bill Avey** at our annual Board meeting in Denver, February 10-11, 2026. Per the bylaws, the Chair term is not to exceed five years. That time has really flown by! Also, per the bylaws, I will remain on the Board as “immediate past Chair” for one year before rotating off. Becki Heath has graciously agreed to remain onboard as our Vice-Chair. We all look forward to Bill and Becki’s leadership!

On the agency leadership front, we all bid farewell to Chief Randy Moore as the agency’s 20th Chief. We are proud to salute Randy for such a stellar career and the remarkable job he did leading the agency. We wish Randy and his family the very best!

Our welcoming letter to new Chief Tom Schultz expressed a desire to continue the open and welcoming relationship NAFSR has built with the Chiefs office over the years. In 2025, we had several coordination contacts with the Chief’s office via text, email, and an occasional Zoom session. I was able to meet with Chief Schultz and USDA Deputy Undersecretary Kristen Sleeper at the *American Forest Conference in Washington, DC* in July. In addition, the NAFSR Board met with Chief Schultz and Associate Chief Chris French at our September meeting in Missoula. Big thanks to all who were able to attend the Forest Service reunion in Missoula.

As for NAFSR, I would like to thank the Board and membership for their support and engagement in a crucial and perhaps pivotal 2025. Our Board members are volunteers who cumulatively contribute many hundreds of hours to the success of the organization. We welcomed two new Board members in 2025: Paul Ries and Chuck Mark. We also bid a fond adieu to two long-time, seasoned and respected Board Members:

As most of you know, long-time Board member Bill Timko passed away unexpectedly last summer. We were pleased to honor Bill's legacy at September's retiree reunion in Missoula, both at our Board meeting where we all raised a glass in his memory, and at the banquet where Tim DeCoster delivered some touching remarks. Bill was a vital Board member, a wealth of knowledge and a very kind man. He will be missed by all.

Lynn Sprague stepped down from the NAFSR Board after more than a decade of service. We appreciate Lynn's many contributions. Lynn and Jim Caswell were the well-deserving recipients of the *Leisz Leadership Award*, a very special recognition that is presented by NAFSR and the Museum of Forest Service History every three years. We thank Bill, Lynn and Jim for their many years of invaluable service to NAFSR, the agency, and the American people.

NAFSR continues to be a respected voice in Congress and the media. In 2025, we were contacted by several media outlets for our comments and thoughts on what turned out to be a steady stream of natural resource and federal employment related matters. Media outlets that reached out included: *NPR*, *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *The Hill*, *Politico/E&E News*, and numerous western and mid-west regional newspapers. Kudos once more to Doug Crandall for his help and advice (usually on tight media deadlines) in responding to these many inquiries. **The media inquiries/coverage have contributed to our organization's visibility, credibility, and respectability.**

Doug Crandall continued doing exceptional work for NAFSR as our Congressional Liaison. Doug's contacts on Capitol Hill and with a variety of NGOs contribute immensely to the advocacy portion of our mission. Doug continues to play a key role as a primary reviewer of NAFSR media statements and letters to various policy makers.

In March, NAFSR Board member Frank Beum testified before the Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Forestry, Natural Resources, and Biotechnology. The hearing topic dealt with impacts to essential services caused by the administration's actions to reduce the Forest Service workforce.

I would also like to give a special nod to our new "Employee Care Team" chaired by Earl Stewart. Earl, in partnership with Mary Beth Lepore and a group of remarkable HR retirees, gathered and posted on the NAFSR website, critical HR related information and tips for current FS employees. This was information that regrettably, our colleagues were unable to access in a timely manner through normal channels as they dealt with the disruption of DOGE and other administration-created personnel actions.

NAFSR held its second annual membership drive in January. We recruited over 400 new members. Our membership numbers have increased and hovers around 1,160. Kudos to Nora Rasure and others who helped make this membership initiative such a success.

On the budget front, thanks to your membership and donations we finished in the black in 2025. A summary of our 2025 and Board proposed 2026 budget can be found in November 4, 2025, meeting minutes on our website. We are grateful to Johnny and Ellen Hodges for the excellent job they continue to do in managing our finances. In 2025, Johnny pushed out 66 official announcements, notices, and updates of NAFSR work accomplishments to the Board and membership. Bill Disbrow continues to maintain our website with current documents and relevant information produced by NAFSR.

American Forest Congress was held in Washington, DC in July. NAFSR was represented by me, along with Board members Rich Gilden, Doug Crandall and Ralph Crawford. More than 500 individuals were in attendance. NAFSR had a visible presence and actively engaged with many key players/organizations in the forestry realm. Rich prepared a summary of the meeting which is posted on our website.

Tim DeCoster was on Capitol Hill on December 10 to represent NAFSR on a panel discussing wildfire and fuels management. The session was sponsored by *The Nature Conservancy* and *The Association of State Foresters*. Thank you, Tim! I was able to make several “virtual” key House and Senate Congressional staff contacts on behalf of NAFSR in December: both Authorizing and Appropriations committees.

American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP): Kevin Martin represented NAFSR with AWCP again this year. Kevin attended the organization’s 2025 summer meeting which was held in Calgary, BC. Kevin’s meeting notes are posted on the NAFSR website.

For those who may not be familiar, AWCP is a coalition of 52 organizations, including NAFSR, that represent the interests of America’s millions of hunter conservationists, professional wildlife and natural resource managers, outdoor recreation users, conservation educators, and wildlife scientists. Individual organizations each have their areas of interest, but collectively all are dedicated to ensuring the vitality of our wildlife resources, providing sustainable public use and enjoyment of those resources under science-based management of the state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, in cooperation with habitat and land management by federal, state, county, and local governments. Kevin continues to do an excellent job as NAFSR’s representative during a very critical time. The many position letters AWCP has sent to Congress, several of which NAFSR has signed on to, are posted on their website. Letters signed by NAFSR are also posted on our website.

Climate Committee: Rich Guldin is Chair of the climate committee and serves as NAFSR’s representative to the *Forest Climate Working Group*. The activity of the climate committee was limited this year. The *Forest Climate Working Group* has paused its activities to refocus on policy priorities of the new administration.

Rich reports that an estimated 60% of the R&D mission area employees left the agency in 2025, substantially reducing the capacity of the R&D mission area across the board. Research priorities related to the effects of climate on forests were refocused. Higher priority was assigned to two research topics: (1) how changing weather patterns and increased frequency of more extreme conditions (e.g., multi-year droughts) are affecting wildfire threats, and once ignited, wildfire behavior; and (2) effects of changing weather patterns and extreme conditions on insect and disease outbreaks.

Fire Committee: We once again tip our hats to Mike Dudley for yet another year of stellar work as fire committee chair. Committee activity started almost immediately at the start of the new Administration last January. The first order of business was tracking on various wildland fire related bills coming from Congress, starting with the *Fit for Purpose Wildfire Readiness Act*, Sen. 441 cosponsored by Senators Tim Sheely (R-MT) and Alex Padilla (D-CA). This bill was the start of a move by some to consolidate all wildland fire agencies (including FS FAM) into one new agency within DOI. During the same period Steve had a discussion with Chief Tom Schultz who asked for a response to 3 questions which were passed to the fire committee for development.

1. How would we design a fire structure today if we started from scratch?
2. What could be improved?
3. How could we get better coordination at NIFC?

The fire committee's response morphed into a multi-page document with detailed responses to each question. The 3-question response was eventually made into "short" and "long" versions of NAFSR talking points and was used extensively in communication with Congress and various media outlets. They also came in handy for NAFSR position papers on additional wildland fire legislation and draft Executive Order(s). Also, the talking points ended up being partially used in the Retired Chief's letter to Congress opposing the removal of FAM from the Forest Service. They were also used by the *Public Lands Foundation* (BLM retiree organization) in their official response to the reorganization of the fire programs within DOI. Members of the fire committee engaged in several media interviews on the topic of proposed organizational changes to the federal wildland fire organizations.

Restoration Committee: Committee Chair Bill Avey serves on the steering committee and represents NAFSR on the *Wildfire Resilience Coalition* (WRC). The WRC is made up of over 50 different entities including NGO's and National Association of State Foresters. The WRC lobbies Congress for more focused efforts and funding on landscape level and WUI treatments to improve wildfire resilience and ensure wildfire adapted communities. Bill also represents NAFSR on the *Fix Our Forest Act* caucus group, which is leading efforts by advocating Congress to get the bill passed and signed into law; The restoration committee, along with other NAFSR members drafted the NAFSR response to the administration's proposal to repeal the Roadless Rule. NAFSR's letter (posted on our website) provided specific rationale on why the rule should be kept in place while proposing some reasonable revision solutions (revise instead of repeal).

Recreation Committee: The recreation committee, led by Nora Rasure (thank you Nora!) tracked various legislative proposals including the extension of the *Great American Outdoors*

Act, and the Legacy Restoration fund. Committee members engaged with national recreation staff and leadership and developed new contacts with other non-government recreational organizations.

Recognition Committee: Tim DeCoster is Chair of our Recognition Committee. NAFSR has two major awards with the details for consideration and nominations described on the NAFSR website. There were no nominations received for the John R. McGuire award this year. As mentioned previously, the Leisz Leadership Award was presented to two individuals at the FS reunion in Missoula.

Keeping Public Lands Public Work Team: Jack Troyer is leading our advocacy and awareness efforts at “Keeping Public Lands in America’s Hands”. He has developed talking points and correspondence that NAFSR has used to continue advocating against the transfer of public lands (i.e. America’s Lands). While we were successful at getting Senator Lee’s public land transfer provision out of the “Big Bill”, we are continuing our efforts to oppose additional large scale public land transfer proposals.

Communications Team: This new team, admirably led by Debbie Hollen, was established by NAFSR following the February board meeting. This is a new group/team focused on increasing communication to membership and providing tools for members to utilize and interact with policy makers and peers about NAFSR and our policy perspectives. The team engaged Stephanie Johnson (Former R8 Communications Director), and others to develop the strategy and approach to communications. The team’s accomplishments include:

1. Created website content to support NAFSR membership interaction with respective congressional delegations. Topics included: keeping public lands public, Forest Service reorganization, fire management and fire organization, employee care, and advocating for research and development, and the state, tribal and private forestry programs. The team provided templates for letters and social media posts including developing a photo/image library for members to access compelling images for their personal posts.
2. Developed video script and images and created video with voiceover message from the NAFSR Chair to membership regarding keeping America’s lands public.
3. Worked with NAFSR’s Employee Care group on content development for FS career employees.
4. Developed a “white paper” communication strategy that identifies audiences, and processes for how the Board wants to communicate – (product still in progress).
5. Supported Jack Troyer and the “Keeping Public Lands Public” work team and participated in calls with retired chiefs to support their engagement in the public discussion of important policy issues. It should be noted that in many instances, the retired Chiefs are starting to use the term “America’s lands” instead of “public lands”.

6. Connected with *Public Lands Foundation* leadership (Mary Jo Rugwell) and social media leads (Nancy Haug and David Howell) to learn their processes and share perspective and approaches to maintain alignment in messaging.

7. Developed content to launch a NAFSR social media presence (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn) in support of the 2026 membership drive, and beyond.

Letters we sent to Congress and others in 2025 include:

- Letter to Chief Schultz opposing rescission of the 2005 travel management rule.
- Letter to Congress opposing the transfer of the Forest Service (FS) to DOI.
- Letter to USDA commenting on the proposed rescission of the 2001 Roadless Rule.
- Letter to the USDA Secretary opposing the elimination of FS Regional Offices and other historically unparalleled organizational changes.
- Letter to Congress opposing the planned reduction and potential elimination of the research arm of the FS.
- Letter to Congress opposing legislative language calling for the disposal of millions of acres of public lands.
- Letter to Congress opposing the creation of a single federal wildfire agency and separating fire & aviation from the FS.

You can find all of our letters written in the last 12 months in the “Advocacy” box on our website. Older letters can be found in our “Document Archive”.

Thank you all for your continued commitment to being dues paying members, and for your donations. These are the **sole sources of funding** for our impactful advocacy and engagement so your membership matters. With your help, we will continue to influence policy makers, decision makers, and interested publics in recognizing the valuable perspective we bring to the table. I urge all of you to reach out to your networks and encourage agency retirees to join our organization. There will likely be many more critical natural resource related issues in the forefront in 2026.

Steve Ellis, Chair
National Association of Forest Service Retires
December 2025