



Final Meeting Notes

NAFSR Board of Directors Zoom Meeting

August 5, 2025

Attendees

Board Members – Steve Ellis (Chair), Becki Heath (Vice Chair), Johnny Hodges (Secretary), Cheryl Probert (R-1), Frank Beum (R-2), Jerry Perez (R-3), Lynn Sprague (R-4), Teresa Benson (R-5), Debbie Hollen (R-6), Marisue Hilliard (R-8), Don Howlett (R-9), Earl Stewart (R-10), Rich Guldin (Research), Ralph Crawford (Research), Gene Blakenbaker (National), Nora Rasure (National), Jeanne Wade Evans (National), Tim DeCoster (National), Bill Avey (National), Susan Skalski (National), Mike Dudley (National), Ed Shepard (PLF Liaison).

Others – Jack Troyer

Unable to Attend – Doug Crandall (Congressional Liaison), Bill Disbrow (Webmaster)

Chair Update - Steve Ellis

- Remembrance of Board Member Bill Timko who passed away on July 18. He had served on the Board since 2017.
- Yesterday, Frank Beum, Rich Guldin and I talked via Zoom to the House Natural Resources Committee staff about the RO, Research, and Fire organizations. This meeting was at their request.

Lynn Sprague Announcement

- Lynn announced that he is stepping down from the Board.
- I was in on the original creation of NAFSR. I have served on the Board for the last 5 years.

- I am 86 years old.
- I have served for 27 years on the FS Museum Board and will continue until at least the opening of the Legacy Center.
- I have provided 2 names as potential successors.

Membership and Finance – Johnny Hodges

- We currently have 1,120 members. We have gained over 350 new members in 2025.
- Financially, we are doing well and staying on budget so far this year.

New BOD member nominees – Becki Heath

- Becki presented two nominees to join the Board - Paul Ries and Chuck Marks. Their bios were provided to the Board before the meeting.
- We may need to restructure the Board depending on future FS regional organization.
- Lynn will remain on the Board until the FS Retirees Reunion in September. These will be “national” positions for now.
- Both Paul and Chuck were approved unanimously by the Board.

Public Lands Foundation – Ed Shepard

- The PLF Annual meeting will be held October 7-8 in Boise. Steve plans to attend. The theme is wildland fire management. The banquet is on the 7th and a Board meeting is on the 8th.
- Bill Groffy is the current acting director of BLM. He came from a natural gas organization in Colorado.
- Becki joined our Board meeting on July 24th.
- We held an all members Zoom meeting on July 31.
- Membership and recruitment are two big issues. We continue to lose members. We have lost as many members as you have gained this year.
- All administrative employees are moving to the department (DOI).
- Resource Management Plans (RMP's) are being viewed as rules by this administration. Under the Congressional Review Act they are being sent for a 60-day review.

NAFSR Work/Positions – Steve Ellis

- We are 6 months into the new administration.
- NAFSR has made an abrupt change and increased pace of our workload.

- In previous times we prepared a lot of position papers. We have now shifted to engagement for employees and pushed back on some actions such as fire and the FS organization. There have been various attempts to hollow out the FS.
- We have become more relevant on the Hill in recent months.
- The Administration may, at times, consider us roadblock, and they may not always be fond of what we're doing.
- This is the path we are currently on. Is the Board comfortable with this?
- The former Chiefs have become more active. We will continue to coordinate with them.
- We sent a letter to Senators Boozman and Klobuchar last week. We were on the clock to get the letter out before the Ag Committee hearing in 3 days. It was entered into the hearing record. We didn't have time to run it by the full Board.

Thoughts from the Board –

Tim DeCoster – I've got your back. We must all hang together or we'll hang separately. I am always an advocate for a middle of road (MOR) approach. It is sometimes uncomfortable. MOR has served us well, but in this day and age maybe MOR does not serve us as well. Sometimes we have to draw a line, and it may upset some people. We have served well as an advocacy group. I am a strong supporter of what Steve is saying in the media and our letters.

Bill Avey – I am on the same page as Tim. I am proud to be part of NAFSR. We are following the correct approach.

Jeanne Wade Evans – The pace of our need to have meetings speaks to the increased workload. We need to give our chair and others the ability to maneuver quickly when necessary. We need a rapid response at times.

Debbie Hollen – We are in the right place. Some administration actions are so extreme. Are we becoming partisan? We are pushing back on actions in opposition to our values. These are not normal times.

Rich Guldin – I am a wingman under Ann Bartuska's leadership style. I'm out on the wing dealing with science issues. Contact me with any issues you have concerning science.

Nora Rasure – Debbie hit it out of the park. We are a values-based organization. We have to amplify it more to protect our values. We have a lot of support as shown by the public lands issue. We are on the right track.

Frank Beum – I agree with Tim and others. We need to stand up and do the right thing. At the Congressional hearing in March, we were able to talk to both sides.

Ralph Crawford – We are aligned with the correct principles. I trust and support the entire Board.

A number of other Board members weighed in on Steve's request on the Zoom chat box. There was strong support for the concepts.

Steve – Board members should feel free to give me a call. Go forth and use your networks.

Response to Secretarial Reorganization Memo – Steve

- We will write a letter.
- We will encourage members to write their own letter.
- We will write something that everyone could use in their response if they wish.
- We will send a letter directly to the Secretary and/or Under Secretary.
- There is next to no info about state/private/tribal. What do we want to say?

FS Retirees Reunion – Becki and Johnny

- On Monday from 3:00 to 5:00 NAFSR will host an Open House for members (non-members are also welcome). The session will have some short presentations and time for Q&A's. The Chief has been invited to attend. If the Chief attends, there may be a larger crowd. We have a meeting room that will hold 90 people.
- NAFSR is hosting the Evening Welcome Reception for all attendees from 5:00 to 7:00.
- Bill and Becki will give a review of NAFSR achievements to all attendees on Tuesday from 12:15 to 12:45.
- NAFSR will also staff a booth during the week. If you would like to help with the booth, let Johnny know. He will set up a schedule.

Fire Updates – Mike Dudley

- PL4 on July 12, then down to PL3 and now back to PL4 in Northern Rockies. All other regions are currently PL3.
- This is not a normal monsoon season in the Southwest.
- Extreme conditions predicted for the Northwest and Intermountain Regions in August.
- The Megafire action group wants to talk to us about the FS fire organization moving to DOI. They are in favor of the proposal.

Forest Congress Report – Ralph Crawford, Rich Guldin, Steve Ellis

- 500 attendees.

- There were lots of NGOs represented. Some were national organizations; others were regional or community organizations. Thus, a broad diversity of perspectives and views were represented.
- Biodiversity concerns were voiced often by attendees from the floor, in the group drafting Principles and Resolutions, and from the floor during plenary presentations.
- Western tribal interests were prominent.
- We split up so we could cover concurrent sessions.
- Rich wrote a report that is posted on our website and has been sent to all members.
- Kristin Sleeper opened the first plenary session – “the President and Secretary said...” was her go to opening for her statements.
- The Chief emphasized there would be 20-year contracts with the states and other entities. He plans to have 40 contracts nationwide. NAFSR needs to pay attention and better understand what it means.
- Chris Topik and Jim Lyons were there as well as several leading FS scientists who recently either left the agency or were on leave pending deferred resignations.
- SAF and The Forestry School at Yale co-hosted a reception one evening to jointly celebrate their 125th birthdays. Steve and Rich attended.
- We (NAFSR) were very visible.
- The Doris Duke Foundation and American Forests were the money behind the Congress. American Forest has been very active in organizing these Congresses since the first one in 1882.
- Rich has detailed notes that he will share with anyone that is interested. You can have a copy, but please don't share with anyone else.

Reactions and Comments to the Congress Report

- Jeanne Wade Evans – There is a sense that feds are turning things over to the states. Is this a trend? Yes.
- The Chiefs group is aware of the same thing. Maybe the camels are getting their noses under the tent.
- Cheryl Probert – My experience with Chief Schultz makes this unsurprising.
- Bill Avey – Each state is different. In Montana the state gave the timber sale operators maximum flexibility to try to generate the most receipts for the state.
- Mike Dudley – Idaho jumped all over Good Neighbor Authority.
- Montana tried the same thing, but it was never the same as Idaho.
- Tim DeCoster – How will these contracts deal with Forest Plans? How will outside communities of interest react to this?

Keeping Public Lands Public – Jack Troyer

- I don't have much to say.
- I need to re-do our talking points introduction.
- We hope the Public Lands Caucus will keep its legs.
- We need to maintain constant vigilance. Senator Mike Lee won't give up.
- Adding language in reconciliation bills in the future is a danger. It could get attached to a CR.

One Fire Org – Mike Dudley

- State Foresters are neutral on the transfer of Fire from the USFS, but they want to make sure the grant funds continue in the same manner.
- Megafire is a high-tech company from the Bay area. Why are they so engaged? No one has fire experience. They want the entire FS to go to DOI.
- Managed fire makes Evergreen crazy. They are opposed to moving fire or the agency to DOI.
- Things are quiet for now.

Closeout

Becki –

- Could we stimulate interest for reunion attendance?
- Frank and Tim will volunteer for the November BOD meeting.

Steve –

- Thanks to Lynn for your time on the Board.
- Congrats to new Board members.
- Thanks for feedback.
- We are currently engaged in lots of high-level politics.
- Kevin Martin is at AWCP meeting in Calgary. Kevin is leading two agenda topics – fire and public lands.
- See you in Missoula.

Final Notes by Johnny Hodges

August 14, 2025