



Meeting Notes

NAFSR Board of Directors Zoom Meeting

November 4, 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), Teresa Benson (R-5), Debbie Hollen (R-6), Marisue Hilliard (R-8), Don Howlett (R-9), Earl Stewart (R-10), Doug Crandall (Congressional Liaison), 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), Chuck Mark (National), Paul Ries (National), Ed Shepard (PLF Liaison).

Others – Bill Disbrow (Webmaster), Jack Troyer

Chiefs Emeritus – Tom Tidwell, Vicki Christiansen

Welcome and Agenda Overview – Frank Beum

- Frank will serve as the facilitator today.
- He reviewed the agenda and encouraged participation from everyone. Keep your remarks brief and focused.

Chair Update - Steve Ellis

- This is the first meeting for new Board members Chuck Mark and Paul Ries. Welcome!
- At the Retirees Reunion in Missoula, NAFSR hosted an “open house” for our members. Chief Schultz was also present for two hours. There were 50 attendees including Associate Chief Chris French.

- The Reunion was a success with almost 500 attendees including a large number of NAFSR members and the majority of our Board members.
- Becki Heath and Bill Avey gave an update on NAFSR work to all attendees at the Reunion.
- We continue to receive numerous media requests on various issues.
- Steve has been invited to participate in a Capitol Hill wildfire session hosted by The Nature Conservancy in Washington, DC in December.
- Becki noted the “full house” for this Board meeting with all Board members present.

Potential Transfer of the FS to DOI – Steve Ellis, Doug Crandall, Tom Tidwell

- Draft legislation has been prepared that would move the Forest Service from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Interior.
- The legislation has not been introduced in Congress.
- The Board had an extensive discussion on this issue.
- Board members were asked to answer these questions –
 - What are the benefits and drawbacks of a transfer of the Forest Service to the Department of the Interior?
 - Do you support or oppose the transfer of the Forest Service to the Department of the Interior? Why?
 - What position, stance, or action should NAFSR take regarding this proposal?
 - Board members should send their answers to Johnny, and he will compile a summary of the responses.
- We have put together a small group to draft a position paper. Group members are Tim, Teresa, Chuck and Marisue.

Congressional Update – Doug Crandall

- You won’t see much immediate Congressional activity on the issue of moving the FS to DOI. When they go back into session, they will probably be too busy.
- It is 364 days to the mid-term elections.
- Hopefully the Shutdown is close to the end.
- It is important to watch the cases at the Supreme Court. They sided with the administration on 19 of the 21 cases they have considered on the “shadow docket.”
- The administration has lost House seats in 20 of 22 mid-term elections. Odds are the Democrats will take back the House.
- It is likely the Republicans will retain the Senate. The Democrats would need to net 4 new seats.

- The Fix Our Forest Act is likely to go before the Senate before the holidays. NAFSR supports the bill.
- The Great American Outdoors Act has lapsed.
- OMB has some flexibility in manipulating funds in a longer-term Continuing Resolution. Keep an eye on that.
- Working with our coalitions is important.

Shutdown and Employee Care – Earl Stewart

- The Shutdown has now lasted 35 days. There have been no paydays since October 4.
- There have been no new RIF announcements.
- Probationary employees are still being terminated at the end of their probationary period.
- Employees are scared of retaliation. They receive little information from the agency and the answers they do receive are too general to be helpful. Morale is low.
- Jeanne reminded everyone that at our meeting with Chief Schultz at the Reunion, he said to call him if anyone has a problem and there would be no retaliation.
- There are lots of changes in direction from OPM. Our website with the “We’ve Got Your Back” list of documents is helpful to current employees.
- There was discussion of creating a directory of retirees to assist current employees as advisors or mentors to address knowledge gaps in the workforce after the loss of so many employees to DRP. The Board felt this would be helpful.
- Board members were asked to answer the following questions –
 - Does the information offered align with what you have been hearing from current employees?
 - What else have you heard and what concerns do you have about what agency employees are experiencing?
 - What do you think about creating a directory of retirees, either by region or area of expertise (or both), who are available to assist as advisors/mentors to current employees?
 - What else can we do to be forward-looking and relevant to current employees, and cultivate relationships with this audience who will one day be our future source for recruiting new NAFSR members?
 - Send your answers to Earl.

Financial Update, 2026 Budget, 2026 Board Meeting – Johnny Hodges

- Johnny compared the 2025 budget and our revenue/expense balances at the end of the 3rd quarter. We are on track to finish the year in the black.

- He then presented the proposed budget for 2026. With the addition of 400 new members so far this year, we are anticipating an increase in revenue of \$8,000. The proposed budget was approved unanimously.
- Our 2026 in-person Board meeting is scheduled for February 10 and 11 in Denver. Travel days will be February 9 and 12. More details to follow after we have finalized the contract.

Regional and Committee Updates

All Regional Representatives mentioned the interim leadership with RF's covering 2 Regions each –

R1+R2 = Troy Heithecker

R3+R4 = Michiko Martin

R-5+R6 = Jacque Buchanan

R8+R9 = Ken Arney

R10 = Jerry Ingersoll

R-1 Cheryl Probert

- One Deputy RF.
- Two Directors are left.
- 75% of the employees are working.

R-2 – Frank Beum

- I met with the RF Troy Heithecker.
- His current priority is the Montana Shared Stewardship Agreement.

R-3 – Jerry Perez

- Morale is poor.

R-4

- No report.

R-5 – Teresa Benson

- We currently have 3 Deputy RFs.
- Travel is allowed but is very restricted. RLT was cancelled.
- Planned meeting of Regional Foresters and Chief in DC on November 17.

R-6 – Debbie Hollen

- Pass

R-8 – Marisue Hilliard

- Athens, GA is planned as a service center.

R-9 – Don Howlett

- Here is a common problem - We have one engineer left on the Forest. Here is my list of projects which I can't do by myself. What should I do? No response. Do more with less, but we can't even find less.

R-10 – Earl Stewart

- Plan revision on Tongass.
- Staffing is 70% active, but out of funds this week.

Restoration Committee – Bill Avey

- Pass

Fire Committee – Mike Dudley

- Public Lands Foundation (BLM retiree association) asked for documents on fire talking points.

Recreation Committee – Nora Rasure

- Great American Outdoors Act – trying to get it reauthorized.

Recognitions Committee – Tim DeCoster

- Pass

Climate Committee – Rich Guldin

- Pass

Communications Committee – Debbie Hollen

- Nothing recent

Public Lands Foundation – Ed Shepard

- PLF membership is dropping.
- The agency is down 2,000 employees from 9,000.

- Proposed RIF of additional 400 employees have been stopped by the courts.
- We have groups working on the fire organization and membership.
- There will be no student Congress in 2026.

Partnerships – Becki Heath

- At the Reunion in Missoula, several Board members met with Meryl Harrell. She is organizing a new group, Friends of the Forest Service.
- Debbie Hollen attended another of her meetings in Portland.
- NAFSR is not planning to formally join the group, but we will remain in contact.

Steve Ellis – Closing Comments

- I am hearing that employees are afraid to talk for fear of retribution. My advice to them has been to focus on your job and keep your head down.
- Thanks to Kevin Martin and his work with AWCP. Letters that we have co-signed with them are posted on our website.
- My term as Chair of NAFSR is coming up on 5 years. Our bylaws limit the Chair's term to 5 years. Subsequently I will be stepping down as Chair on March 1, 2026.
- Per the bylaws, I will remain on the Board as past chair for 1 year before rotating off.
- My proposal to select a new chair is for each Board member to submit 3 names ranked from 1 to 3. Give your reasons why. Send Johnny your nominations within 2 weeks (November 18).
- We will select the next chair at our February meeting.
- Becki – Nominations are not limited to current Board members.
- Also think about your role on the Board. If you don't want to continue to serve, please let us know.
- Tim, Susan, Debbie, and Ralph will work on the agenda for our February meeting.