



**Final Notes**  
**NAFSR Board of Directors Meeting**  
**Denver, Colorado**  
**February 11-12, 2025**

**Day 1**

**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), Bill Timko (National), Tim DeCoster (National), Bill Avey (National), Susan Skalski (National), Ed Shepard (PLF Liaison)

**Committee Chairs** – Rich Guldin (Climate), Nora Rasure (Recreation), Mike Dudley (Fire)

**Staff** – Bill Disbrow (Webmaster)

**Unable to Attend** – Lynn Sprague (R-4), Chief Randy Moore

**Welcome – Steve Ellis**

- Welcome to Becki Heath as our new vice chair.
- Thanks to Jamie Connell for her service as the previous vice chair.
- We received a Thank You card from PLF for our donation to the Student Congress.
- This administration is nothing like we've ever seen in our lives.
- One objective for this meeting is what our approach should be to the sudden changes.
- We sent a letter to the transition team at the Department of Agriculture on December 26, 2024, but have received no response from the administration.

- We have received several contacts from members – what is NAFSR doing? We sent a message to members and posted it on our website. We might focus on where we can have more effects, even if we are nothing more than a cork on the surface of the ocean.
- All of us have networks which is positive. If any of you have contacts, utilize them.
- Federal employees have lost trust with the new administration. How can we best support employees?
- We need to try to keep communications open with the new administration.
- Our 2024 Accomplishment Report is Handout #1. It has been distributed to all members and is posted on our website. A few highlights –
  - Marvelous job on our first membership drive in January 2024.
  - Media contacts and responses – keep it up. Be careful what we say. Doug doing great job on the Hill. Also, Bill Timko and Tim De Coster are attending meetings.
  - The Climate Committee is doing an excellent job. “Climate change” is currently an unpopular phrase, but we will stay engaged.
  - The Fire Committee is never bored.
  - The Restoration Committee has shifted chairs from Sharon Friedman to Bill Avey. Old Growth seems to be going the way of Climate Change for a while, at least for now. We worked with SAF on the Old Growth summit in DC last summer.
  - Recreation – The Explore Act was signed in December.
  - There is good momentum on the Recognitions Committee with Tim De Coster as chair.
  - The Student Congress was held in Las Vegas in the Fall. Ranotta McNair and Gene Blakenbaker attended. It was a great success. Funding from BLM and FS will likely be a challenge for the future.
- Becki – There is a lot of street cred with this group. There is good diversity with new members. Lots of experience in the room. Grateful for all you are doing. Thanks for stepping up. Remember we are volunteers and can only do so much. We must be deliberate in what we take on. We need to look at new ways of doing things.
- Steve has a draft letter to the new Secretary. He will share with the Board for review.

### **Legislative Landscape – Doug Crandall**

- Congress seems to be more polarizing and dysfunctional than ever.
- The new administration is much different than 2018. There is a barrage of many things with 52 Executive Orders so far.
- A hiring freeze happens with every new administration, but it is usually temporary.
- There is a discussion about a Wildfire Intelligence Agency.
- There is discussion about moving the FS to the Department of Interior.
- Checks and balances have worked well before, but now the judiciary could be the only check because Congress is so dysfunctional.
- Brooke Rollins is the new Secretary of Agriculture.
- Michael Boren has been nominated as the Under Secretary. I don’t know him. He owns a ranch near Stanley, Idaho. He founded several companies including Clearwater Analytics.

- Under the Congressional Review Act, there are 60 days to vote on EO's from the last 6 months.
- Congressional hearings will take a lot of time. There are 1,200 different slots to fill.
- The current Continuing Resolution (CR) expires March 14. There is a 1 vote Republican margin in House. The House usually goes first, but it may be the Senate this time. There could be another CR or a government shutdown.
- A Reconciliation Vote in the Senate needs only 50% to pass.
- Congressman Westerman has the lead on resource issues in the House.
- Changes in NEPA regs?
- FS Employees in the Yates building are all supposed to be back next week.
- Most international FS employees are paid through USAID.

#### Comments/Questions –

- Executive Orders (EO) must be in existing law (interpretation).
- Mature Old Growth came from an EO and Vilsack memo. Trump wiped them away.
- Legislatively mandated information can remain on websites.
- Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA) is working on fire/FS issues.

#### **Discussion on Fire Issues – Mike Dudley**

- Coming out of 2024 we had budget issues that included fire.
- The hiring freeze from the new administration is currently across the board.
- The “Fork in the Road” letter was sent from OPM. Never have we seen a direct letter from OPM that bypassed all agencies.
- Many skilled fire people are taking the deferred resignation.
- Keep an eye on Senators Padilla and Sheehy, Senate Bill 441.
- A National Wildland Fire Service is getting serious consideration.
- The Grassroots Wildland Firefighters organization is supportive of the National Wildland Fire Service proposal.
- Senator Sheehy is supportive because of the perceived inefficiencies in contracting air resources. His company contracts with the government for air resources.
- There is frustration with line leadership from some firefighters.
- The wildland fire community doesn't care who they work for.
- They want to stove pipe the fire organization like the law enforcement organization and take line officers out of decision making.
- Here are a couple of links concerning the National Wildland Fire Service -
  - [Grassroots Wildland Firefighters](#)
  - [Fit for Purpose Wildfire Readiness Act of 2025.pdf | Powered by Box](#)

#### **Forest Climate Working Group – Rich Guldin**

Rich had three handouts that were distributed before his presentation (they are available on request).

Handout #3 – Intro to Required Prework – 4 pages

Handout #4 – FWCG Policy Platform Overview – 17 pages

## Handout #5 - FWCG Policy Platform Final Draft – 12 pages

The 2025 Policy Platform has 5 major sections -

1. Private forests.
2. Public forests.
3. Forest products.
4. Forest and climate data and applied science
5. Workforce.

There are 62 specific policy recommendations in the five sections. Rich focused on 39 of these recommendations.

After extensive discussion, the Board made the following recommendations -

- Set priorities for FCWG based on current politics.
- Focus on 3-5 specific priorities.
- The target audience is the Hill.
- Key things – how to address big wildfires and rural jobs.
- Keep it short, use good marketing, and include wood products companies.

### **Discussion on NAFSR Response Strategy**

- Weigh in on the fire situation.
- Are there other issues where we should engage?
- Current employees' situation.
- What we have done – transition letter, support employees with a message on website.
- The Grassroots Wildland Firefighters was started about 5 years ago by retirees – good job of messaging, not FS centric.
- Is our transition letter still good? New priorities?
- Coming attack on federal lands.
- There is the perception that some retirees don't want change. We are open to change. We want to be part of the dialogue.
- Pros and cons of a fire stove pipe organization. Prepare a position paper.
- Pending legislation.
- Don't stay silent with employees.
- May want to respond to Grassroots proposal and Senator Sheely legislation. Pros/cons.
- Concerns about employees.
- Do the right thing. How has that worked historically?
- Reach employees to let them know we care.
- Do sensing.
- It is important to understand how the younger generation communicates.
- We may want to pursue alliances.
- New ways of communicating.

- There are rumors that current leadership may not be allowed to talk to employees. Can't (or haven't) hold/held all-employee meetings.

#### Steve's Thoughts –

- Transition letter – was our best given what we knew at the time. Once we get the Secretary and Under Secretary confirmed, we can then adjust our messaging.
- Disposing of public lands – higher probability.
- Pros/cons on fire organization. We need a small group to work on – Mike Dudley, Cheryl Probert, Jerry Perez, and Jeanne Wade Evans. Prepare a draft document for the Board to review. Legislation pro/con.
- Grassroots – Mike Dudley/Bill Avey already talking to them. Propose a Zoom call. Support for the pay issue.
- Report back to the BOD by 2/22.
- Helping Employees – Could write op ed. Write a message that could go to regional retiree organizations. Target message for various audiences.

#### **Round Robin - Regional Representatives and Committee Chairs**

##### R-1 – Cheryl Probert

- Challenges with POW, sale volume, and workforce.
- Retiree reunion in Missoula in September.
- RLT has transitioned to less experienced members.

##### R-2 – Frank Beum

- Couple of meetings with RF.
- Reduced the RO from 3 floors to 1. Now they are trying to find room for employees.
- Outside agencies are hiring seasonals.
- Eliminating leases is a big issue. The Denver Federal Center has 6,000 employees.

##### R-3 – Jerry Perez

- Budget discussions.
- We have had a long stretch without rain. There is currently a fire on the Prescott which is unusual for this time of year.

##### R-5 – Teresa Benson

- Communications to the workforce.
- Leadership is finding out things at the same time as employees.
- FS has the full spectrum of the public working for them.
- Looking forward to new leadership.
- Pivot and focus on what the new administration wants.
- Review the fire organization proposal.
- Watch the fire organization. Learn about Senator Padilla.

#### R-6 – Debbie Hollen/Becki Heath

- We hope to talk to the RF at the end of the month.
- There is fear of the employees on what to say or not say.
- Interested in engaging with retirees.
- Committed to the ACES program.
- Mentoring program – retirees and current RLТ.
- RO downsized their floor space.

#### R-8 – Marisue Hilliard

- Effects of Hurricane Helene
  - Occurred on September 26.
  - 140 mph winds.
  - \$50 billion in damages.
  - Killed over 200 people.
  - No information on FS website except trails openings.
  - Lots of spotty blowdown.
  - Smaller communities may not return.
  - Asheville is recovering well.
- Working with retiree organization
  - 320 members
  - Raised annual dues to \$25.
  - Zoom social calls with members and a speaker.
  - RF came to the holiday meeting in December.

#### R-9 – Don Howlett

- Hiring – Lost 40% of permanent staff. About ½ were filled.
- 89 tribes in the Region.
- 40% of the US population is in the Region.
- RO space was reduced.
- 11 folks are currently interested in hosting the 2028 FS Retiree Reunion.
- “In 199 I worked for Mike Dombek as Special Assistant to the Chief on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Sand County Almanac national conference and organized one of the first webcasts of a national conference.”

#### R-10 – Earl Stewart

- New Tongass Forest Plan is out for comments.
- Reduced lease space.
- New District Ranger in Petersburg.
- Lots of landslides in various towns created by melting glaciers.

#### Research – Rich Guldin and Ralph Crawford

- Change in Southern Station Director.
- Space issues in Yates Building.

- Deputy Chief - Are scientists getting full credit for their research? Research Grade Evaluation Guide.

#### WO – Bill Timko and Tim De Coster

- Retirees group meets every other month.
- It is harder to get speakers from WO.
- Only about 15 attendees for lunches.
- Large % of members are also NAFSR members.
- Creation of Super Director group in WO.
- People may not fit into Yates Building if everyone shows up.

#### Committee Chairs

##### Restoration – Bill Avey

- Thanks to Bill Timko and Tim De Coster for attending the Old Growth summit in DC.
- Ed and I are on the steering committee for Wildfire Resilience Commission.

##### Fire – Mike Dudley

- Not a lot for committee currently.

##### Recreation – Nora

- Explore Act passed in last administration.
- Good coalition at state level.
- Federal lands will come under attack.
- Gordie Bloom is Director of Recreation. I have not seen the proposed recreation strategy on the website.

##### Climate – Rich Guldin

- I need someone to serve on the public lands committee for the climate group.
- 1 hour/month on Zoom.
- Some writing.
- I need someone with public lands experience.

##### Recognition – Tim De Coster

- Call letter for nominations for the Leisz award sent out last week. Possibly 2 candidates.
- McQuire award nominations letter

#### Closeout of Day 1

- Steve –
  - Helpful to hear from you, lots to digest.
  - Troubling landscape.
- Becky –

- The intros were fun and interesting.
- Lots of thinking in the room.
- I am happy to be part of the group that can be helpful.

## **Day 2**

### **Short info topics**

#### **Public Lands Update – Ed Shepard**

- Message to employees is on PLF website. It was picked up by Politico.
- We appreciate our relationship with NAFSR. It has been going on for 10 years.
- Tracy Stone Manning left for the Wilderness Society. She was supportive of PLF.
- Secretary Burghum is confirmed. He will be the most powerful Secretary in Interior history (per Doug Crandall).
- Currently there are no political people wandering in the hallways (unlike the previous Trump administration).
- We are struggling with membership.
- Our partnership with DOI credit union is being used to recruit members.
- We are planning an “all members” call/Zoom.
- Our annual report is on our website – publicland.org
- The 2025 annual meeting is scheduled for Boise in October.
- Our new foundation (The Foundation for America’s Public Lands) is staffed. We have low expectations for the next 4 years. Some grants have been awarded. We hope it survives.
- It was just announced that Kathleen Sgamma is the new BLM Director. She was president of Western Energy Alliance.

#### **Finance – Johnny Hodges**

Johnny had 2 handouts that were distributed ahead of the meeting (they are available on request).

- Handout #7 – Financial Summary 2016-2024
  - This spreadsheet summarizes income/expenses over the past 9 years. The trend has been upward. Our assets have almost doubled from \$31,866 at the end of 2016 to \$61,600 at the end of 2024.
- Handout #8 - 2024 Final vs. 2025 Budget
  - This spreadsheet shows the final income/expense/balance from the end of 2024 compared to the 2025 budget. We finished 2024 with a surplus due mainly to limited travel expenses.

#### **Website – Bill Disbrow**

- Bill shared Handout #9 and led a discussion on email spam and how to prevent it, and a caution on spam filters.
- Website stats



- Total visitors – 61,545
- Total page views – 280,289
- Most active country – U.S., 59% of visitors
- 2<sup>nd</sup> most active country – China, 7%
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> most downloaded file was our Workforce Capacity Study which we completed in 2019. It remains popular after all these years.

### **Personnel - Gene Blakenbaker**

- Forest Service Stats –
  - On 9/30/2024 – total employees were 35,647.
  - Today there are 34,836.
  - Temporary employees in 2024 – 3,000
  - Temporary employees in 2025 – 290
  - In 2019 there were 27,400 permanent and 8,000 temporary employees.
  - We have reduced temps and increased perms.
  - 11.5% of employees are retirement-eligible this year.
  - Over a 5-year average 2,600 people leave each year. This is a mix of retirement, resignations, etc.
  - There are currently about 5,000 employees on probation. The probation length is 1 year for newly hired, and some 2 years for special authorities.
  - No jobs are currently advertised.
  - We can process WGI and in-grade increases.
  - 1,500 fire positions are in limbo per DOGE review

### **All Members Zoom – Nora Rasure**

- The Board supports having another Zoom meeting for all members.
- Should we invite current employees? It depends on the topic.
- Possible topic – making templates available for our members to help them contact their Congressional members.
- Our next all members Zoom is tentatively scheduled for April 16.
- Nora Rasure and Marisue Hilliard will work on the presentation.

### **Social Media – Becki Heath**

- How to develop products for various media.
- Social media is hit and run and changes quickly. That generally doesn't apply to us.
- Communication strategies.
- We used FS Facebook (FB) pages for the recruitment of new members.
- Our own FB page would be too much work for us. We are all volunteers.
- Individual Board members can post their own information to social media.

### **Continued Discussion on NAFSR Response Strategy -**

- Communicate through social media with employees. We need to provide messaging from us.

- Talk to employees individually.
- Written documents or podcast? The Washington Post is publishing letters from around the country.
- Use current FB accounts that are popular, then point them back to our website.
- Utilize Linked-In and Reddit.
- Do we have members with skills we could use.
- Who is our audience? Membership, employees, and others.
- Encourage employees to write their elected officials.
- NAFRE has tools – what if we linked with them – add to our website.
- Climate Change is a good reason for doing many things – harvest, refo, fire/fuels. Use the word “adapt” rather than CC.
- Agree to a process to decide when progress with Doug can start.
- Our position on DEI.
- Tribal interest.
- We need to pick up the pace of work – maybe change our process.
- If Board members speak to the media, let Steve/Becki know. Be careful of how it may reflect on NAFSR.
- How do we manage our relationships with current employees and keep them safe?

### **2025 Program of Work – Becki Heath**

- Need lead/team for 2025 product
- Handout #6 – 2024 Program of Work (POW)
- Remove from 2024 POW –
  - Recreation
  - Mature Old Growth
  - Climate

### 2025 POW Priorities –

1. Workforce Care
  - Earl Stewart – lead
  - Don Howlett
  - Susan Skalski
  
2. Fire Organization
  - Jerry Perez - Lead
  - Jeanne Wade Evans
  - Cheryl Probert
  - Frank Beum
  - Mike Dudley
  
3. Core Tenets (Values that are being threatened)
  - Teresa Benson - Lead

- Ralph Crawford
  - Marisue Hilliard
  - Tim De Coster
4. Communications (Members, current employees, externals)
- Debbie Hollen – Lead
  - Becki Heath
  - Nora Rasure
  - Frank Beum
5. Known and Emerging Issues
- Tim De Coster - Lead
  - Bill Avey
  - Bill Timko
  - Gene Blakenbaker
  - Nora Rasure

Becki Heath will complete the 2025 POW.

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

- We recruited 137 new members during our membership drive in January. In our first Drive last year we recruited 102.
- 53 membership applications identified their recruiter. The names of the recruiters were entered into a drawing. Gwen Beavans of Bristow, VA was the winner of a Lifetime Membership.
- Some of our tactics for the Drive this year –
  - We began sending out teasers in our emails during the month of December.
  - We involved our regional representatives in December to help with the drive. They worked with their regional organizations, when possible, to help us with spreading information about the drive through newsletters or direct mailings.
  - We utilized mailing lists from many regional organizations.
  - We featured Membership Drive on our website.
  - We included two messages on our website that members could copy and paste into their emails to potential members.
  - Many members posted on their Facebook page.
  - Every Monday during January, we sent out an email to all members with reminders about the Drive and a list of new recruits from the previous week as well as some tips on recruiting.
- Discussion
  - Research Stations were not too helpful.
  - In R-6 NAFSR and the Old Smokeys were able to speak to the RLT. We asked them to share with employees.
  - Problem with R-4 accessing mailing lists.

- R-5 worked through Forests to pass on information.
- Should we have more than one drive per year? No.
- Should we do this every year?
- NAFSR doesn't have an operating agreement with FS, which might block us from some mailing lists.
- Consolidate what everyone did and keep a record.

### **Membership Retention – Nora Rasure and Johnny Hodges**

- We need to work to retain all these new members, as well as long-time members.
- Johnny reviewed his protocols for collecting dues and donations.
- Johnny passed out a list of members with unpaid dues. Each Board member was assigned 5 members to call within the next week and remind them to pay their dues.

### **New Board Member**

Mike Dudley was unanimously elected to serve on the Board of Directors. He will continue to chair the Fire Committee.

### **2025 Board Meeting Dates and Agenda Prep**

Here are the dates for Zoom Board meetings for the rest of 2025. Also, two people are assigned to each meeting to assist Becki with the agenda.

May 6 – Cheryl Probert and Jeanne Wade Evans

August 5 – Earl Stewart and Jerry Perez

November 4 – Frank Beum and Tim De Coster

We will also hold a Board meeting at the Reunion in Missoula on September 22. It will not be a traditional Board meeting and will be open to all NAFSR members.

### **Final Remarks – Steve**

- Steve reminded the Board about nominations for the Leisz Award.
- Be careful what we post and speak.
- We have never seen such an assault on the federal workforce in our lifetime.
- Thanks to all for traveling to Denver.

Notes by Johnny Hodges

Final Edits 2/23/2025