



Final Notes

NAFSR Board Meeting

August 18, 2026

Attendees

Board Members – Bill Avey (Chair), Becki Heath (Vice Chair), Steve Ellis (Past Chair), Johnny Hodges (Secretary), Cheryl Probert (R-1), 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), Alex Friend (Research), Ralph Crawford (Research), Gene Blakenbaker (National), Jeanne Wade Evans (National), Tim DeCoster (National), Susan Skalski (National), Mike Dudley (National), Chuck Mark (National), Mary Erickson (National)

Others – Kevin Martin (AWCP Liaison), Mary Beth Stewart (Employee Care)

Chiefs Emeritus – Vicki Christiansen, Mike Dombeck

Unable to attend – Frank Beum (R-2), Paul Ries (R-4), Sue Spear (National), Ed Shepard (PLF Liaison), Bill Disbrow (Webmaster).

Chair Update – Bill Avey

- Thanks to Jerry and Marisue for agenda prep and facilitation.
- Also, thanks to Becki, Mary Beth, Earl, Mike, Johnny, Bill Disbrow, Steve and Doug for their contributions.
- Continued heavy media interest due to active fire season and other issues.
- Participated in the former Chiefs Zoom meeting last Friday regarding the Senator Sheehy letter with a Fire Emergency Order and proposal to move FS wildfire organization to the Wildland Fire Service in DOI.

- USDA is announcing a proposal today to rescind the Roadless Rule.
- Regular meetings with Chris French and Jaelith Hall Rivera who are trying to implement decisions they are told to do and minimize impacts to workforce. They are also in the process of selecting new state directors.
- Nora Rasure has stepped down from the Board and as chair of the Recreation Committee.

Thanks - Mike Dombeck

- Mike was only able to attend the meeting for a short time, but on behalf of the Chiefs group, he wanted to extend their appreciation for the work that NAFSR has accomplished.

Introduction of New Board Members – Becki Heath

- Becki introduced new Board members Mary Erickson and Sue Spear. Sue was unable to attend today's meeting.
- Mary spent a lot of time in R-4 and R-6 before finishing her career in R-1.

Mentoring MOU – Mary Beth Stewart

- Mary Beth reviewed the MOU and discussed the pilot project "Knowledge Transfer Program" beginning this Fall.
- As experienced employees retire and exit the agency, as they have done in the last 18 months at an unprecedented rate, the Forest Service loses irreplaceable know-how. This MOU is intended to facilitate a more structured path for retirees to stay connected, mentor, and support remaining employees – and those new to the agency - as they tackle wildfire, forest health, recreation access, leadership, and supervision with more limited resources than in recent years.

Pilot Project: Knowledge Transfer Program beginning Fall 2026

- As a next step to put the new MOU into action, the NAFSR Employee Care Team is coordinating with the Forest Service Workforce Development Team to pair NAFSR member volunteers with new supervisors attending New Supervisor Training (NST).
- New supervisors will receive training on the technical aspects of supervision, and their NAFSR partners will help them to navigate their new roles and challenges by sharing best practices and key considerations based on their previous supervisory experiences.

What is required of NAFSR members who volunteer for the pilot program?

- Email nafsrinformation@gmail.com if you are interested in volunteering for the Knowledge Transfer Program pilot.

- Apply online – interested applicants will be sent an email with a link to apply on **volunteer.gov** Applicants will be paired with a new supervisor.
- Attend a 1-hour virtual orientation session on the Knowledge Transfer Program.
- Meet with a new supervisor – 3 hours per month over the course of the 6-month training program, October 2026 – March 2027.
- Share post-pilot program feedback. This will help us assess the application process, communications, and program results to inform future projects between NAFSR and Forest Service.

Proposed Timeline (subject to change):

- Volunteers email interest to **nafsrinformation@gmail.com** by 8/31/26
- NAFSR/FS send email link to volunteer applicants by 9/5/26
- Volunteers apply online by 9/15/26
- FS/NAFSR match volunteers to new supervisors by 9/21/26
- Volunteers attend 1-hour virtual orientation session by 9/30/26
- Volunteers/Supervisors meet 3x month from 10/1/2026 – 3/31/2027
- Volunteers/Supervisors share post-pilot program feedback in April 2027

Other Questions/Comments

- How many people are we servicing? – Looking at 35 new supervisors, paired one on one. Would like extra mentors to be available.
- Will we advertise through the website or social media? We will do both. Must be a NAFSR member to participate as a mentor.
- What levels will the group of 35 be? Don't know yet. Will be quite a range.
- Shortage of technical expertise in current employees.
- Remember we may get negative feedback from our members.

Communications Strategy – Debbie Hollen

- Debbie provided a handout to the Board before today's meeting.
- Sections 1 and 2 cover overall strategy and workflow. Section 3 is the operational implementation plan focused on social media.
- There are three communication categories: routine, position-based, and emerging/time sensitive, with a workflow chart showing how content moves through each category.
- The Communications Committee amplifies content developed by other committees rather than generating content itself.
- The Communications Strategy was approved by the Board with a few amendments including addition of advocacy as a strategic focus, addition of testimony and official letters to the tools list, and improved chart connections for emerging issues.

- A volunteer is needed to join the committee to replace Nora Rasure.

Legislative Report – Doug Crandall

- Key numbers – 77 days until midterms, 16 voting days left in the House before midterms, and 43 days until a potential government shutdown or Continuing Resolution (CR) passage.
- The Senate is out until September 25. The House is back in 2 weeks.
- Possibly a lame-duck Omnibus Bill around December 11 including the Farm Bill, NDAA, Fix Our Forest Act (FOFA) and America the Beautiful Act.
- Both the House and Senate have passed CR versions. The preferred is the Senate version which includes an ACES extension, flexible suppression funding and a firefighter pay cap fix.
- The House is currently 218 Republican and 212 Democrats. Senate is 53-47 Republican. Betting markets give D's 88% change of taking House and 50/50 on the Senate.
- A record number of Senators (14) and House members (58) are not running for re-election. 10 House incumbents have already lost in primaries.
- NAFSR led a quick response to Senator Sheehy's letter which proposed using emergency authority to move the FS fire organization to DOI. Sheehy's office began backpedaling and the letter is dead for now (but the underlying threat of executive action remains).
- Bill Avey felt the collective response as a demonstration of NAFSR's alignment with former Chiefs and its credibility on the Hill and in the media.

Fire Season & Fire Transfer Study – Mike Dudley

- Currently 2 big fires in NW. Unprecedented fire season. Continued warm and dry. Only the NW is PL5 at this time. 200 personnel from NZ/Australia working in U.S.
- The Cedar City, UT Air Tanker Base has pumped over 2.4 million gallons of retardant so far this year.
- We have not run out of overhead teams.
- The investigation of the 4 fatalities on the Knowles fire in Colorado is being done jointly by FS and DOI.
- The helicopter fatality on the Wide Mouth 2 Fire in Utah is under investigation by NTSB. It will probably take a year for the final report.
- Teresa Benson shared a personal tribute to helicopter pilot Miles Elliott from Porterville, CA. He was one of 2 pilots killed on the Wide Mouth 2 fire in Utah. He left behind a 9-year-old son, and his death had a major impact on her small community of Porterville.

- On August 11 the Chief delegated all fire and aviation authorities to Sarah Fisher as Deputy Chief of Fire and Aviation, implementing Executive Order 14308. Geographical Area fire directors now report directly to Sarah. The authority of Forest Supervisors does not change.
- Tension exists between Wildland Fire Service (WFS) fire-only decision making and the FS continued use of agency administrators.
- Colorado Senator Bennett sent a letter to the two Secretaries (Ag and DOI) asking whether WFS's mandate to suppress all fires is endangering firefighters and pilots. He suggested reframing the question around the lack of line officer involvement in WFS initial attack decisions.
- On August 4, RTI was awarded a \$1.1 million contract to conduct a feasibility study on consolidating the DOI and FS wildland fire management.

5-Minute Updates

Vicki Christiansen –

- The retired Chiefs group is now known as the Stewardship Cabinet. It now includes Lynn Scarlet and Sally Jewell from DOI.
- The Cabinet is receiving significant media and Congressional inquiries.
- The Cabinet is focused on two priorities –
 - Modernizing wildfire management with a policy paper planned ahead of the RTI study.
 - Building workforce capacity. TNC is funding research through the Met Group on workforce reduction impacts.

R-1 – Cheryl Probert

- The Region currently has an acting RF along with R-2. State Director announcement coming soon. Idaho forests will shift to a different state director (than Montana).
- Testing new NEPA authorities.
- Student Congress will be held in Missoula in October 2027. The theme is recreation – new technology, tools, user groups.

R-2 – Frank Beum – not present

R-3 Jerry Perez

- Spoke to the DRF in R-3.
- R-3 and R-4 held a joint RLT meeting.
- GS-14/15 assignments to be announced August 20.

- How are folks doing? Down 50% of employees in RO. Tough time for everyone.

R-4 – Paul Ries – not present

R-5 – Teresa Benson

- Oddly quiet from fire standpoint.

R-6 – Debbie Hollen

- Fire season very active.
- GS-14/15 – assignments are expected soon, but job descriptions are vague.
- Forests are not hiring anyone
- Lack of leadership in the RO's means remaining staff are confused about priorities and work assignments.

R-10 – Earl Stewart

- Actings upon actings.
- Tongass has the forest supervisor job open for the third time in two years.

R-8 Marisue Hilliard

Nothing.

R-9 – Don Howlett

Nothing.

R and D – Alex Friend and Ralph Crawford

- Station leaders are stable.
- Can't fill any positions although funding is available.
- R and D is down to 310 scientists and 1,000 total employees with 30% retirement eligible.
- Universities are receiving congressionally directed funding and university deans are advocating for FS research.
- Ralph mentioned that Rich Guldin had sent a message about the climate working group being renamed the Forest Policy Working Group. He asked to meet with Bill A. and Alex regarding science integration into NAFSR policy work.

Recognitions Committee – Tim DeCoster

- Ready to accept nominations this Fall.
- Need help from Board on nominees.

- Sue Spear will join Recognition committee.

Kevin – AWCP

- Met in Cody earlier this month.
- Wildlife for the 21st Century document update. Section on Public Lands – concern about employees.
- Shared info about FS and reorganization.
- Chief reached out to some orgs about concerns that the FS is focused only on Fire. MOU is being prepared to focus on recreation.

Contact with Tom Clifford - Bill Avey

- Montana Discovery Foundation works on conservation education/outreach. I would like the Board to start thinking about working with local forests on a similar approach as the opportunity arises in the future.

PLF (Public Lands Foundation) Update – Ed Shepard – not present

Unpaid Dues - Johnny Hodges

- Still a substantial number of members with unpaid dues.
- Asking for regional reps to contact delinquent members in their region. Also ask other Board members to contact anyone on the list that they may know. Johnny will send list of delinquent members to the Board. Anyone remaining with unpaid dues will have their membership suspended in September.

Close-out - Becki and Bill

- Next BOD meeting is November 17. Frank and Debbie will organize and run the next meeting.
- Nora will join us in November to say goodbye.
- Becki - ACES is a hot mess.
- Bill A. – call with Ralph and Alex.
- Good feedback from FS employees on the work we are doing.

Notes by Johnny Hodges

Edited 8/27/2026

Final edits 8/30/2026