

# FOREST NEWS

The Newsletter of Forest Service Employees For Environmental Ethics

Winter 2017

## This Land is Your Land?

*Our public lands face  
an uncertain future as a  
new administration and  
Congress take the reins.*



*Inside*

Restoration Contractor Sued / Throwing Money at Fire / FSEEE Victory for Alaska Wilderness





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# Welcome to the New Era



*The American public owns 640 million acres of land. That includes world-renowned national parks like Yosemite and Yellowstone. It encompasses great swaths of truly wild lands in Alaska. And it comprises countless trails, camping areas, wildlife sanctuaries and backcountry lands that may not be world famous, but are critical pieces of our public estate.*

*So what does it mean when one of the first acts undertaken by the new Congress makes it easier to transfer federal lands to state and private interests? What threats to our public lands may the new Congress and administration pose?*

*In the early days of the era of Trump, uncertainty reigns supreme. In his very first days in office, President Trump signed an executive order implementing a hiring freeze in the federal government. With a workforce already at the lowest levels since 1966, the impacts on our public lands and public servants could be widespread.*

*What is certain are the intentions of congressional and state politicians, many of whom have been vocal in their support of the notion that federal lands should be transferred to state or private control. By the end of January, legislation had been introduced to “dispose” of certain lands and to transfer law enforcement on public lands from federal to state agencies. The extent to which Congress and the administration are able to gut environmental laws and agency budgets remains to be seen.*

*In this issue of Forest News, we explore the new political topography and ask: What threats may our public lands face in the next four years?*

*Sincerely,*

Andy Stahl  
Executive Director

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# Featured Forest

## Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, Utah

The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest (decades of consolidations have produced an abundance of hyphenated forests) serves as a playground for more than two million residents of Salt Lake City and surrounding towns. Roughly 80 percent of Utah residents live at the foot of the Wasatch Range. The wall of peaks forms an abrupt and dramatic boundary between the developed and the wild. Behind the Wasatch Front, more than three thousand square miles of national forest beckon.

All those residents leave a mark on the forest, which is one of the most visited in the United States. Many come for the renowned winter powder—the forest is home to five ski resorts. Others come for the hiking, the biking, the fishing and boating as well as more intrusive pursuits such as snowmobiling and off-road vehicle riding. Each fall, thousands drive scenic byways, soaking in vistas of fall foliage that rival the autumnal splendor of New England.

Despite the throngs, there is plenty of solitude to be had. Nine wilderness areas lie within the forest's boundaries. That includes four in the Wasatch Range, their western borders just a mile or so from city streets.

The national forest shares a true wilderness jewel with the adjacent Ashley National Forest. The High Uintas Wilderness, established by Congress in 1984, harbors one of the most unique and visually striking mountain ranges in the nation. Running east to west for nearly 60 miles, the Uinta Mountains contain the largest uninterrupted expanse of alpine in the Intermountain West, offering rich habitat for a wide variety of wildlife.

Away from the yellow glow of the Wasatch Front's city lights, high-altitude stretches of the forest offer superb opportunities to gaze at the unfiltered night sky. The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache may be an urban forest, but you wouldn't know it camped high on a ridge, the Milky Way splashed across the firmament. **FN**





## In Depth

# Whither Public Lands?

In the early days of the Trump administration, much remains to be seen about what policies the new president will pursue when it comes to managing national forests and other public lands.

Conservationists have been quick to condemn Trump's cabinet appointments, saying many of the individuals, plucked from corporate boardrooms, hold views antithetical to the notion of environmental protection. Trump himself, throughout his campaign and during the presidential transition, railed against environmental regulations that he said stifled industrial development and quashed jobs.

Among the key unknowns is what approach the Trump administration will take regarding the long-standing push to hand over control of federal lands to state and private interests—an initiative that has gained momentum in recent years.

During the campaign, Trump said he opposed turning over control of federal lands to the states. Last June, in an interview with *Field & Stream* magazine, he criticized the notion.

"I don't like the idea because I want to keep the lands great, and you don't know what the state is going to do," Trump said. "I mean, are they going to sell if they get into a little bit of trouble?"

One person who by all accounts has the president's ear is his son, Donald Jr. An avid hunter, the younger Trump expressed his support for keeping public lands public during an interview last September with a Colorado television station.

"(W)e want to make sure that that land, public land, stays public," Trump Jr. said. "That's one of the places that we've really broken away from the conservative dogma."

The new president, however, has shown a remarkable



inclination to change his position on any number of subjects, often based on whom he has spoken with most recently. In August, according to *High Country News*, Trump had a ten-minute face-to-face meeting with Elko County, Nev., Commissioner Demar Dahl, a leader in the campaign for state control of public lands. “He said, ‘I’m with you,’” Dahl said, summarizing Trump’s response to Dahl’s pleas to transfer public lands.

Early indications, however, suggest that public lands policies are far down the new president’s list of priorities. Trump waited until the day before taking the oath of office before filling his final cabinet vacancy, the Secretary of Agriculture, which oversees the Forest Service. His pick, former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue, lacks a clear track record on issues affecting national forests.

Trump’s choice of Secretary of Interior, former Montana Representative Ryan Zinke, says he is against transferring federal lands to the states. During his confirmation hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Zinke said, “I am absolutely against transfer or sale of public lands. I can’t be more clear.”

Concerns remain, however, that such unequivocal statements may matter little if land-transfer schemes get tied to larger pieces of legislation. If his boss changes his mind on the issue, Zinke, like other Trump underlings, may be expected to do the same.

On the first day of the new congressional session, Zinke, who holds a 3 percent approval rating from the League of Conservation Voters, cast a vote in favor of a new rule designed to facilitate the transfer of federal land to state and local control.

The rule would obviate the requirement that the Congressional Budget Office calculate the cost to the U.S. Treasury before Congress could transfer federal lands. As U.S. Rep. Raul Grijalva, an Arizona Democrat, put it, the change would let Congress “give away every single piece of property we own, for free, and pretend we have lost nothing of any value.”

Over the past two years, the notion of transferring federal lands has gained momentum. The U.S. Senate passed an amendment during the last congressional session in support of transferring control of federal lands to states. The measure passed 51-49, with all Democrats voting against it and all but three Republicans voting for it.

Last summer, Republicans adopted a platform that called for transferring federal lands to states. The language included in the platform captures well the sentiments underpinning the transfer movement:

“Congress shall immediately pass universal legislation providing for a timely and orderly mechanism requiring the federal government to convey certain federally controlled public lands to states. We call upon all national and state leaders and

representatives to exert their utmost power and influence to urge the transfer of these lands . . . to all willing states for the benefit of the states and the nation as a whole. The residents of state and local communities know best how to protect the land where they work and live.”

(Zinke, for one, resigned as a delegate to his party’s convention after Republicans adopted the position.)

The most straightforward method of transferring federal land to states would, of course, be for both chambers of Congress to pass a bill stipulating as much and President Trump signing it into law. The prospects for passing such legislation seem fairly good in the House of Representatives. Utah Republican Rob Bishop, chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, has galvanized significant support in that chamber.

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- *Republican Platform 2016*

Prospects for a lands-transfer bill in the Senate, however, seem dimmer, despite the previous vote. And there was no evidence in the early days of the Trump administration that the new president has changed his views on the issue.

A more likely scenario would be for land-transfer language to be attached to must-pass legislation such as a defense appropriations bill.

Even if no land-transfer legislation makes it out of Congress, the principle of common ownership of national forests and other federal lands seems certain to remain under attack in the months to come.

Trump, and many of his cabinet appointees and close advisers, are in lockstep agreement with the assertions of land-transfer proponents that “local interests” should have more say over the management of federal lands.

That sentiment was reflected in Zinke’s opening statement at his confirmation hearing. He said that his first immediate task “is to restore trust, and working with rather than against local communities and states. I fully recognize that there is distrust, anger and even hatred against some federal management policies. Being a listener, and a listening advocate, rather than a deaf adversary, is a good start.”



Such anger and hatred has led to an increasing number of threats to federal land managers and to direct actions including last year's armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

Opportunities to undercut the ability of federal land managers to maintain control of on-the-ground decisions are myriad. They are likely to include pressure, both explicit and implicit, for the Forest Service and other land-management agencies to make decisions that conform to the desires of local interests. They likely will also include efforts to rescind executive actions taken by Obama to protect public lands.

The Trump administration may seek to expand programs that allow non-federal entities to undertake projects on federal lands. Work is already conducted through programs such as the Good Neighbor Authority, passed by Congress in 2014, which allows the Forest Service to forge cooperative agreements and contracts with states "to perform watershed restoration and forest management services" on national forests. The administration may also seek to hand over even more responsibilities for daily management of public lands to private concessionaires. (The reach of concessionaires is already significant. To cite one example, more than half of campgrounds on national forests are run by for-profit entities.)

Currently, all such projects must abide by landmark environmental protection laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Air Act. In a December hearing, Rep. Bishop said he "would be happy to invalidate the Endangered Species Act."

If Bishop and his supporters find they have an ally in President Trump in weakening or rescinding those laws, the question of who owns the land may not matter nearly as much as it does now. **FN**

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## Monuments: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?



**T**hroughout his presidency, Barack Obama favored a single mechanism for protecting public lands—the 1906 Antiquities Act. Obama used his authority under that act to designate as much as 533 million acres of land and water as national monuments, more than any other president.

Some of those designations were bitterly opposed by local residents. Those include two monuments created by Obama during the final days of his presidency—the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah and the Gold Butte National Monument in Nevada.

Opponents of those designations hope they can be rescinded, wholly or in part, by the Trump administration. But the legal path for doing so is murky; no national monument declaration has ever been reversed.

After Trump took office, Utah's congressional delegation issued

a statement condemning the creation of the Bears Ears National Monument, which includes 1.35 million acres in southeast Utah considered sacred by Native American tribes.

"We will work with the Trump administration to re-examine Bears Ears National Monument," the statement said, "as well as other ill-advised unilateral executive designations across the country. What is done through executive action can be undone through executive action."

In late December, Obama designated 300,000 acres in southern Nevada as the Gold Butte National Monument. That area includes land near the ranch owned by Cliven Bundy. In 2014, Bundy led an armed standoff against federal agents who were attempting to confiscate his cattle, which he has allowed to graze on public land despite having no permit to do so.

Bundy's sons led an armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon early last year to protest what they claimed was heavy-handed land management by the federal government.

Each of the new national monuments contains spectacular desert landscapes, important wildlife habitat and a wealth of culturally significant sites. The Utah designation includes the creation of a Bears Ears Tribal Commission to provide input about how that national monument is managed.

"The land has always been a place of sacredness and fortitude for our people," Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye said. "Now it will be preserved for all future generations." **FN**



## Badger-Two Medicine Protected From Drilling

A wide, wild swath of land in Montana sacred to the Blackfeet Nation gained protection from oil and gas drilling late last year when Department of Interior officials canceled 15 energy exploration leases. The Badger-Two Medicine area spans 132,000 acres on the Lewis and Clark National Forest, adjacent to Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the Blackfeet Reservation. It is home to a wide variety of wildlife and is the locus of the Blackfeet's creation story.

"It should not have been leased to begin with," former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said. "This sets the right tone for how business should be done in the future." Interior officials said the original leases were signed without proper environmental review and without sufficient consultation with the Blackfeet.

Oklahoma-based Devon Energy owned the leases that were canceled. The company's president, David Hager, called terminating the leases "the right thing to do."

Harry Barnes, chairman of the Blackfeet Nation, praised the action. "Our pursuit to protect the Badger-Two Medicine has lasted more than three decades, and it will continue until all the illegal oil and gas leases are canceled and the area is permanently protected," Barnes said.



## Shooting Range Leaves Lead Legacy

A project to remove lead from an abandoned shooting range on Arizona's Prescott National Forest has generated criticism from some who say the recreational shooters who left behind the mess should pay to clean it up. The site served as a shooting range for 57 years under the terms of special use permits issued by the Forest Service. The last permit expired a little more than a year ago.

The range, which is located near private residences, contains high levels of lead from spent ammunition. Forest Service officials will pay a contractor at least \$667,000 to remove the lead and restore the site by removing berms and contaminated soil, and planting native vegetation.

Conservationists cosigned a letter to the Forest Service last August expressing concerns about the project. The letter urged the agency to take steps to ensure that recreational shooters clean up after themselves when shooting on national forests and require those who run shooting ranges on public lands to follow lead management practices.

District Ranger Sarah Tomsy said the last club to hold a permit for the range lacked sufficient funds to clean up the site. "It's in the interest of public safety, since we have the funds available, to clean up the hazardous material," she said.



## Wayne Opened to Oil & Gas Exploration

Despite wide public opposition, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in December opened sections of Ohio's Wayne National Forest to potential oil and gas drilling. The agency offered 17 parcels on the national forest covering more than 700 acres. A total of 22 companies bid on the leases, offering more than \$1.7 million for the right to explore for oil and gas on the national forest.

Many local residents and conservation groups have criticized the leases, saying that oil and gas development will harm the environment, accelerate climate change and interfere with the public's ability to use the Wayne National Forest for recreation. "This is Ohio's only national forest," Heather Taylor-Miesle, executive director of the Ohio Environmental Council, said in a prepared statement. "We need to do all we can to protect it."

Federal land managers have undertaken a broader review of potential oil and gas development on the forest, identifying as many as 40,000 acres that could be opened. This latest action does not allow companies to undertake drilling. Site-specific analyses would be required before drilling could begin. BLM officials said they received nearly 15,000 public comments about the leasing proposal, most of which were critical of the plans.



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## Contractor of Largest Restoration Project Settles Suit

**T**he main contractor for the largest forest restoration project ever attempted on national forests will pay a former partner more than \$1.2 million to settle a lawsuit alleging fraud and breach of contract.

Good Earth Power holds a contract with the U.S. Forest Service that calls for thinning and restoring 300,000 acres in northern Arizona that land managers say have grown unnaturally dense due to decades of fire suppression and overgrazing.

The acreage is part of the 2.4-million-acre Four Forest Restoration Initiative, or 4FRI, which aims to restore forests in the region to a closer approximation of their historical conditions.

Good Earth Power took over the 4FRI contract in September, 2013, after the initial contract holder, Montana-based Pioneer Associates, failed to secure financing for the project. Shortly thereafter, the company forged an agreement with Portland-based Campbell Global, a timber-management firm. That contract called for Campbell Global to coordinate much of the on-the-ground forest restoration work for Good Earth Power.

Campbell Global officials terminated the contract in June 2015. They then sued Good Earth Power, alleging the company owed them more than \$3 million in unpaid fees.

Last November, lawyers for the two firms held a settlement conference before U.S. District Judge Michael Mosman in Portland. The two sides informed the judge that Good Earth Power would pay Campbell Global \$1,275,000 to settle the case, spread over four payments that will conclude in May of 2018. Mosman had previously ordered Good Earth Power to pay Campbell Global \$525,000, saying that amount was “undisputed.”

The first phase of the 4FRI project is the culmination of a years-long effort by Forest Service officials, industry representatives, conservationists and others to develop a plan for widespread forest restoration work

in northern Arizona that is to be conducted in ways designed to protect wildlife and fragile ecosystems.

Underpinning the 4FRI effort is the assumption that private industry can develop methods to make money from the small-diameter logs, branches and debris gathered during the thinning and restoration work.

So far, however, Good Earth Power has thinned just a fraction of the acreage that the Forest Service has made available to the company.

As of November, according to Forest Service statistics, just 8,332 acres had been treated under the Phase 1 4FRI contract—the one held by Good Earth Power. That’s just over 14 percent of the acreage that the Forest Service has made available to the company, and less than 3 percent of the overall acreage included in the contract. The terms of that contract call for Good Earth Power to restore all 300,000 acres within 10 years.

In addition to hundreds of pages of court records generated during the litigation between Campbell Global and Good Earth Power, FSEEE has obtained tens of thousands of pages of documents and internal and external correspondences that Good Earth Power released to Campbell Global during the case’s discovery process.



Those documents offer a detailed look into the inner workings of Good Earth Power as company officials struggled to find ways to implement the 4FRI vision and turn a profit in the year-and-a-half after the Forest Service awarded it the contract.

The documents reveal that Good Earth Power is just one part of a complicated global organization with ties to the ruling family of the Sultanate of Oman, on the Arabian Peninsula. At least some of the organization's financing is located in the British Virgin Islands, a small Caribbean territory widely considered one of the world's foremost corporate tax havens with a notoriously opaque banking system.

A document hand-written by Good Earth Power CEO Jason Rosamond last April as part of a court proceeding indicates the company is 100 percent owned by an entity called ZR Energies Ltd. That firm, in turn, is 90 percent owned by another entity called ZR Holdings Intl. Ltd. Rosamond's diagram indicates that firm is 99 percent owned by Alawi Zawawi, who is chairman of the Zawawi Group, which describes itself as "the Omani family conglomerate." Rosamond owns the other 1 percent, according to the document.

On September 10, 2014, Good Earth Power Managing Director Darren Gurner sent an email to an Arizona accounting firm saying, in response to a question about Good Earth Power's corporate structure, that "ZR Energies Ltd. is the parent of Good Earth Power Ltd." Other documents identify "ZR FEC Limited" as the parent company of Good Earth Power.

The discovery documents show that Good Earth Power officials in 2014 were negotiating a joint venture agreement with GRO-WELL Brands, which produces organic lawn and garden products and has corporate headquarters in Tempe.

A draft copy of the agreement shows that Good Earth Power was negotiating on behalf of "ZR FEC Limited," which is incorporated and registered in the British Virgin Islands. The draft agreement lists a post office box in Oman as the company's "contact address."

The discovery documents show that Good Earth Power officials were concerned about how the company's corporate structure might be perceived by the public.

On December 18, 2014, Rosamond sent an email to company officials regarding the wording of a press release about expan-

sion plans at a mill it operates in Heber, Arizona, called the Lumberjack Mill.

"I have made an important change in the 3rd paragraph," Rosamond wrote. "GEP-PAZ (Good Earth Power Arizona) did not buy Lumberjack. The parent company of GEP-PAZ bought Lumberjack. As that company is a foreign company, I don't want to introduce that into the article so I have just changed it to 'GEP-PAZ began working with Lumberjack ...'"

The discovery documents also show that Rosamond and other company officials were scrambling in the months following Good Earth Power's acquisition of the 4FRI contract to pay workers, partners and subcontractors, including Campbell Global.

"I feel like a circus clown," Rosamond emailed Gurner on September 3, 2014. "Juggle juggle."

## FOREST SERVICE REBUKED FOR HELICOPTERS IN WILDERNESS

A federal judge delivered a stinging rebuke to the Forest Service, ruling the agency violated the Wilderness Act by sanctioning the use of helicopters in Idaho's Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness last year.

U.S. District Court Judge B. Lynn Winmill determined that the Forest Service broke the law when it permitted Idaho Fish and Game workers to land helicopters in the wilderness area so they could put radio collars on elk. State officials said they wanted to understand how wolves in the wilderness affect elk populations.

Within three days of the agency's decision in January 2016, state wildlife workers had collared 57 elk. They also placed collars on four wolves—an action that the Forest Service had not authorized.

In his 24-page decision, issued on Jan. 19, Winmill called the action a "rare or extreme" case, and ordered Fish and Game officials to destroy the data they have collected from the radio collars. He determined that state wildlife officials would likely use the data to seek permission to conduct further helicopter operations in the wilderness area.

"The only remedy that will directly address the ongoing harm is an order requiring destruction of the data," Winmill wrote.

A trio of environmental groups sued the Forest Service after the agency approved the helicopter landings. The groups included Western Watersheds Project, Friends of the Clearwater and Wilderness Watch.

The conservationists contended that Idaho Fish and Game officials hoped to use the data to gain permission to cull wolf populations. Doing so would allow elk populations to expand beyond natural levels, they said, to the benefit of hunters and outfitters.

"Capturing elk with net guns from helicopters is heavy-handed manipulation and denigrates the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Area," said Gary Macfarlane of Friends of the Clearwater.

An estimated 700 wolves live in the wilderness area, which at 2.4 million acres is the largest contiguous wilderness in the Lower 48 states. **FN**





## Fire Truth: What 2016 Teaches Us About Wildfire

On September 17, 2016, six fires sparked along a remote road on the Modoc National Forest in California—the presumed work of an arsonist.

As is the case with 98 percent of wildfires, four of the fires were contained within just a few hours, each burning less than half an acre. Firefighters contained the fifth fire after a couple of days; it burned less than 300 acres.

The sixth fire, which the Forest Service called “Soup 2” (the fires were in the vicinity of the Soup Springs campground) escaped firefighters’ initial attack. Winds from the west pushed the flames uphill, into the South Warner Wilderness Area. Over the course of the next week, Soup 2 burned about 2,200 acres.

According to the Forest Service, the fire threatened one “uninhabited structure.” Rain and snow were in the forecast. The fire was destined to put itself out.

On the second day of the blaze, the Forest Service assigned more than 900 firefighters to battle Soup 2. On Day 3, the agency spent \$909,655 on the fire. The final tally for fighting Soup 2, a fire that burned harmlessly into a wilderness area, was \$5.4 million.

Rain and snow weren’t the only things looming as the Forest Service fought Soup 2. So was the end of the fiscal year, and the money was there to be spent.

Last year was fairly average in terms of wildfires on national forests, but it was a whopper when it comes to money spent fighting those fires. In 2016, the Forest Service spent about \$1.6 billion fighting wildfires across the country, just a skosh less than 2015’s record total of \$1.7 billion.

The agency’s overseers and members of Congress made the case time after time: More fires are raging through our national forests and they’re getting bigger and more expensive to fight. Fire years like 2015 and 2016 represent a “new normal.” Those same leaders pleaded for the government to shovel more money to the Forest Service to fight those fires and to make forests more “resilient” by, among other things, logging them.



But there’s a problem here. Cold statistics belie the flaming rhetoric.

Let’s crunch some numbers.

It’s true that in 2015, a record number of acres across the United States burned in wildfires—more than 10 million. But more than half of that was in remote areas of Alaska, where little was done to stop them. Fewer than 2 million acres—less than 20 percent of the total—burned on national forests.

In 2016, about 5.5 million acres burned nationwide, according to the National Interagency Fire Center, which is less than the 10-year average of just over 7 million acres. Again, most of that area was on land other than national forests. About 1.25 million acres burned last year on land managed by the Forest Service.

More than 1.5 million acres of the total burned in the South last year. That included the devastating November blaze that tore through the town of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, killing 14 people and destroying thousands of homes and businesses. But only about 130,000 acres in the region burned on national forests.

Now let’s look at the past two years by considering another statistic—the total number of wildfires. In 2015, there were 7,040 fires on land managed by the Forest Service, a number that’s close to the 10-year average. In 2016, according to the National Interagency Fire Center, there were 5,855 fires on Forest Service-managed land.

Those numbers are in keeping with a broader trend: The total number of fires on national forests has been decreasing in recent years. From 1994 to 2002, there were an average of 10,398 fires on national forests each year. Since then, the average number of fires on Forest Service-managed land has been 6,858.

Most of the decline is attributable to a decrease in human-caused fires. Logging levels have dropped by about 80 percent over the past quarter century on national forests. Fewer loggers out in the woods mean fewer opportunities for accidental ignitions. Another factor is the decline of smoking—fewer smolder-

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ing cigarette butts and matches are being dropped in the woods.

Finally, let's consider one more statistic.

In 2015—that record year for wildfires—the Forest Service spent an average of about \$887 for each acre burned on land it manages. It spent about \$241,000 for each fire on its land. Last year, those numbers rose to \$1,284 per acre and \$273,000 per fire.

Why would those numbers go up? Maybe it has something to do with the fact that Congress allotted the agency an extra \$600 million for firefighting for fiscal year 2016.

Twenty years ago, firefighting accounted for about 16 percent of the Forest Service's budget. Now it's more than 50 percent. The agency estimates that number will rise to 67 percent by 2025 if Congress doesn't act. During the Obama administration, Forest Service brass and their Department of Agriculture overseers pushed for opening up Federal Emergency Management Agency funds to pay for fighting the largest wildfires.

Forest Service officials point to climate change and an increase in the number of people living near national forests as the two

primary reasons for exploding fire costs. There's certainly some truth to both. But there's something else at work here.

In the decades before 1991, when a judge ordered a halt to national forest logging in the Pacific Northwest to protect the spotted owl and other rare creatures, the Forest Service had a clear mission—get out the cut.

In the years since, the agency has struggled to forge a new mission. Fighting wildfires, and thinning forests to make them more “resilient,” seems to be that new mission. (The efficacy of both efforts is dubious at best, but that's a subject for another day.)

The Forest Service is correct in asserting that a century of fire suppression has left many of our public forests overcrowded with underbrush and dense stands of relatively young trees.

Those stands will be thinned, in one of two ways—by fire and other natural processes, or by mechanical thinning. Letting more fires burn on national forests, including ones like Soup 2, doesn't just make fiscal sense. It would also represent a big step toward allowing our public forests to return to a more natural state. **FN**

## Outside In

By Jennifer Fairbrother, FSEEE Public Lands Advocate & Development Director



We parked just as dark closed in around us. Leaping out of the truck, I sank to my thighs in the deep snow. The frigid air bit my cheeks and swelled my lungs. It was Christmas Eve, and we were two miles and two thousand feet below our winter camp in a remote corner of northeast Oregon. We were fortunate the truck, with chains on all four tires, had made it this far.

The three of us assessed our supplies. We had assumed we would be able to drive all the way to the tent my father-and-law had erected a month earlier. Now, we would only be able to bring what we could pack and carry. Heavy items like the canned chili lost out to Top Ramen. Essentials like sleeping bags, survival gear and Almond Roca were divvied up among the packs.

We set off up the steep, snowed-in road and soon passed a national forest boundary marker. The sparkling snow was blinding in the light of my headlamp, and as the night was clear, I quickly turned it off and let my eyes adjust. The sky was moonless, but awash with stars. I had to stop often as the ascent and elevation made breathing difficult. The forest was still and silent under the heavy blanket of snow. We paused for a break and I noticed large, fresh cougar tracks crossing my path. Wolves have returned to this part of Oregon; I wondered if this would be the year I might hear them howl.

Puffing into camp, we quickly organized our gear and snuggled into sleeping bags. We awoke before dawn. A fire in the old wood stove warmed the ten-by-twelve-foot space. Gobbling down a breakfast of instant oatmeal and donning our layers, we left camp as night gave way to dawn. We climbed the ridgeline above our camp, reaching the top as the sky began to turn rosy and violet. Large, concrete blocks protruded through the snow, marking the location of a fire lookout. I imagined what it must have been like to spend six months living here, scanning the landscape for wisps of smoke, the view stretching across a hundred miles of rolling grasslands to the east, into deep canyons to the west, and to the jagged, granite peaks of the Eagle Cap Mountains to the south.

Below us, we spotted a herd of elk grazing across the steep hillside. My husband's family has been coming here, on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, for many years to hunt cow elk for subsistence, a practice and tradition they have taught and passed on to me.

The snowy world around us was suddenly set aglow as the sun peeked over the horizon. I wondered what the coming year, with all the unpredictability and unknowns, has in store for this place that I treasure. In the quite stillness of daybreak, a sense of calm and certainty settled within me. A certitude that these lands—rustic, majestic, wild—have endured and will endure. So will we. **FN**



## Field Notes

### FSEEE Files Objection to Military Proposal

A project approved by Olympic National Forest officials this winter would permit the U.S. Navy to conduct electronic warfare exercises on the forest. FSEEE contested the decision in January. FSEEE's complaint contends that the Forest Service lacks the statutory authority to approve the project and that the Forest Service failed to comply with the National Forest Management Act.

### Victory! Proposed Airport in Wilderness Rejected

The Federal Aviation Administration has decided to locate a proposed airport outside the boundaries of the Kootznoowoo Wilderness. The state of Alaska advocated for siting the airport in the wilderness area, which encompasses almost one million acres of land on Alaska's Admiralty Island. FSEEE staff and supporters advocated against the proposal, including submitting formal comments during the environmental review of the project.

### NW Forest Plan Revision Kicks Off with "Science Synthesis"

The Forest Service provided a public preview of its science synthesis last December. The document is intended to inform the revision of the forest plan that directs management for 24 million acres of national forests in Washington, Oregon and Northern California. FSEEE determined that the document ignores key scientific findings about the need for extensive old-growth forests as habitat for young spotted owls. **FN**



FSEEE's board and staff met last fall on the Oregon coast to plan strategies for the coming year.