

# FOREST NEWS

The Newsletter of Forest Service Employees For Environmental Ethics

Fall 2020

## Are public lands too dangerous to visit?



### Inside

**COST VS. BENEFIT OF AERIAL FIREFIGHTING / NEPA RULES ROLLBACK  
GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT / COVID CROWDS ON PUBLIC LANDS  
A HAWAIIAN NATIONAL FOREST?**

# Is Aerial Firefighting Cost-Effective?

by Randal O'Toole

I recently watched four large air tankers drop tens of thousands of gallons of fire retardant on the Green Ridge Fire, which is burning within sight of my backyard. The air tankers included two twin-jet MD-87s, a DC-7 and a CV-580.

Between them, the four planes are capable of dumping more than 11,000 gallons of retardant, and they each made several passes at the fire. A west wind was pushing most of the fire to the east, but there was also some push to the south. The tankers were painting a wide swath of forest red south of the burning area to try to slow or halt the southerly expansion of the fire.

The next morning revealed that the fire had crossed over the retardant-drenched area and was continuing to burn south. This naturally raises the question of whether aerial firefighting is worth the cost.

With the tankers costing thousands of dollars an hour to operate and the retardant costing at least \$2 a gallon, the Forest Service spent more than \$500 million on aerial firefighting in 2017. It may end up spending even more this year as the pandemic has led firefighting agencies to rely more on aerial attacks and less on ground forces.

Dollars aren't the only cost. So far this year, at least four pilots have lost their lives due to crashes of firefighting tankers and helicopters — a helicopter pilot in Arizona, another in California and two airplane pilots whose planes collided in Nevada. That's after zero aircraft fatalities in 2019.

The Forest Service spent the last eight years writing a report addressing the question of the effectiveness of aerial firefighting. Although the report is dated March

2020, it wasn't released to the public until August. It's quite possible that the delay was because the Forest Service didn't want to admit how poorly it makes aerial firefighting appear.

On one hand, the report makes it appear that most aerial drops of water or retardant were effective at something. But the report also makes it clear that most weren't effective at doing very much. Only about 10 percent actually halted the spread of fire, while another 20-30 percent slowed it down. The remaining "success" was from "reducing the intensity of fire," but that doesn't mean much if the fire continues to spread (and become more intense) beyond the drop area.

The report also indicated that helicopters tend to be more successful than air tankers. One reason is speed. It takes seven minutes or more to fill the 3,000-gallon-tank on an MD-87, and it can only be done at an airport with a runway that is at least 6,000 feet long. That means they can only do four or five runs per hour. In contrast, some helicopters can carry more than 2,500 gallons of liquid, and they can dip down to a creek or lake that is close to the fire and fill their tank in less than 45 seconds. That means they can do 10 runs dumping a total of 25,000 gallons of water on the fire per hour.

A second issue is the difference between water and retardant. Water douses or at least cools the fire; retardant is only expected to slow its spread. While helicopters were dumping water right on the Green Ridge fire, the tankers were dropping the retardant next to the fire. If it is windy or the retardant fails to completely drench the ground cover, the fire can leap over or pass through the retardant-covered area.

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Retardant is also environmentally controversial. While air tankers can carry water as well as retardant, why bother with the high cost of an air tanker when helicopters can drop more per hour?

The Forest Service report also found that aerial actions were much more likely to be successful if they were providing support for on-the-ground firefighters rather than working alone. The report indicates that retardant drops were twice as likely to halt the spread of fire and significantly more likely to delay the spread of fire if ground forces were also present. On the Green Ridge Fire, nearly all of the ground forces were working on the east side of the ridge, where the wind was pushing the fire, while the west side was defended mainly by the helicopters and air tankers.

My friend Andy Stahl, executive director of FSEEE, is critical of the methodology used by the Forest Service. Before the recent report came out, he noted that incident commanders — the people who lead the fights against wildfires — tended to judge success by whether retardant drops hit their targets, not whether they helped to suppress the fire. That's

“like measuring a vaccine’s effectiveness on how well needles hit arms, not whether disease is prevented,” he told a reporter with E&E News.

The Forest Service report responds by providing some measures of effectiveness: halting the fire, reducing the rate of spread, reducing the intensity of the fire. The real question shouldn't be whether aerial firefighting is effective but whether it is cost-effective, that is, is it doing as good a job as if the same amount of money were put into on-the-ground forces.

There is a way of answering this question, Stahl points out. About half the requests by incident commanders for retardant drops aren't fulfilled. “Looks like the makings of a natural experiment with 50 percent controls and 50 percent treated,” he said. “So compare the two datasets as to measurable parameters.” But the Forest Service refused to do this in its report, saying that there were too many variables. But if that's true, Stahl concludes, how can any conclusions made by the report be considered meaningful?

While Stahl is particularly skeptical about large-scale use of retardants due to their environmental costs and effects on

human health, he is also dubious about dropping water on fires. “What doesn't evaporate before it hits the ground will do so shortly thereafter,” he said. “Twenty minutes later, nothing will have changed.” This is especially true if the aerial work is done in place of, rather than in support of, on-the-ground firefighters.

The hard reality is that the Forest Service has virtually unlimited money to spend on firefighting. If money is unlimited, then it doesn't matter whether retardant drops from expensive air tankers are effective or not. In fact, it's better to make ineffective drops than to have the fire get away when it appears the agency is doing nothing to prevent it.

Fifty years ago when I was in forestry school, some of my professors admitted that aerial firefighting was done solely for show. If it wasn't done, they said, reporters would ask why and demand that it be done. Supposedly, the technology has improved since then. But it seems that much of it is still for show.

*Randal O'Toole is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and author of “Reforming the Forest Service.”*



*The day after an aerial attack, the fire may have been slowed in the area painted red with retardant, but it easily bypassed that area and continued moving south.*



*A DC-7 dumps 3,000 gallons of retardant on an area already painted red with the stuff to try to keep the fire on the left from moving to the right (south) overnight.*



# Featured Forest

*The multi-colored leaves of fall hint at the biodiversity of Cherokee National Forest as seen from the Cherohala Skyway (Mark Norton).*

## Cherokee National Forest

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**C**herokee National Forest bookends Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee, following the spine of the Appalachian Mountains along the Tennessee-North Carolina state line. The southern section of the forest extends to Georgia while the northern section reaches to Virginia.

The misty mountains of this National Forest harbor one of the most biodiverse regions in the temperate world, with nearly 10,000 known plant and animal species and more still being discovered. Eight wilderness areas lie within Cherokee National Forest as well as parts of three others.

The Appalachian Trail traverses the northern section of the Cherokee, including the Roan Highlands with its high-elevation meadows and hollows famous for prolific rhododendron blooms. In the southern part of this National Forest, rivers like the Ocoee and Tellico offer renowned whitewater boating opportunities.

Throughout the Cherokee, an abundance of waterfalls and azaleas, including unique hybridizing “flame” azaleas, also draw hikers. Birdwatchers and wildlife viewers come to see black bears, whitetail deer, eagles, hawks and elk, which have expanded their range since being reintroduced into Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

As summer turns to fall, the scenery in and around the National Forest transitions from lush green to a full palette of color. The changing leaves make the Forest’s two scenic byways — the Ocoee Scenic Byway and the Cherohala Skyway — especially attractive. Both roads cross the southern portion of the National Forest, while the northern section contributes to the views from the Blue Ridge Parkway. Fall is also a popular time for backpacking and hunting in Cherokee National Forest.



*Dead and dying trees line the shore of North Fork Reservoir in Colorado's San Isabel National Forest following a spruce beetle outbreak. The Forest Service has closed the adjacent campground and parking area, citing the risk of dead trees blowing down (Joe Stone).*

## In Depth

### Are public lands too dangerous to visit?

**W**arm, sunny days and cool, starry nights make summers in the Colorado high country hard to beat, and given the current COVID crisis, outdoor recreation is just what the doctor ordered. North Fork Reservoir Campground in the San Isabel National Forest is the type of escape people are seeking — remote location, nine physically-distanced campsites, an alpine lake — but the campground is closed.

The Forest Service closure order states that the closure is “to protect public safety due to standing dead trees within and adjacent to the campground and parking area as a result of Spruce Bark Beetle mortality.”

We asked Forest Service

officials what was the rationale for closure and why they think the trees are dangerous. Their initial response was to send a copy of the 2017 Forest Service “Guide to Hazard Tree Management” for the Rocky Mountain Region. The guide stresses the importance of “documenting hazard tree program protocols and inspections” and calls for implementing “a hazard tree management program” to provide “a systematic approach for mitigating tree hazards.”

When asked about a hazard tree program and associated documentation, Forest Service Public Affairs Specialist Crystal Young responded, “The Forest Service commonly relies on the expertise and experience of

our forest service staff to make informed recommendations regarding forest health.” She continued, “To ensure the safety of the public, the (Salida) district ranger (Jim Pitts) recommended closing the campground” because of beetle-killed trees with “the characteristics of a failure.”

Like the closure order, Young’s response fails to cite any data to establish the risk of tree “failure” at the campground. Her response also avoids answering our straightforward questions, citing staff “expertise and experience” instead of data or even the protocols and documentation called for in the agency’s own “Guide to Hazard Tree Management.” Since the closure



Trees killed by the Eagle Creek Fire in Mount Hood National Forest stand along Interstate 84 near Cascade Locks, Oregon. A post-fire closure order for the burned area cites “safety” to justify closing the area to dispersed recreation, and the Forest Service Burned Area Report claims “a high risk to safety within the burn area from hazard trees” (Margalob, Wikimedia Commons).

order includes the North Fork parking area, it also limits access to dispersed recreation, including alpine lakes and the Colorado Trail.

Andy Lerch, lead forester with the Colorado-based Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative, told us, “I don’t have any firm data on the risks of backcountry travel through burned or beetle-killed forests.

... Any backcountry travel in a forested environment carries some level of risk from falling trees or limbs, even in green forests, where there are still snags, broken limbs, and trees with rot that may pose a risk of falling.”

In fact, no empirical data exist to provide a scientific basis for closure orders due to the risk from dead trees, i.e., snags. A U.S. study conducted in 2014 identified a total of 212 backcountry deaths and attributed two of those deaths to falling trees. Multi-year studies in New Hampshire and Washington (Wilderness and Environmental Medicine) and Arizona (Annals of Emergency Medicine) attribute

zero backcountry deaths to falling trees.

According to the 2014 study, just over 39 percent of backcountry deaths are caused by humans falling, which is more than 40 times as many deaths as are caused by trees falling. According to the data from all four studies, hiking leads to more deaths and injuries in the backcountry than any other activity, but the Forest Service has not proposed banning hiking due to the inherent risk. Speaking of risk, North Fork Campground sits 11,000 feet above sea level, almost 3,000 feet higher than the elevation at which healthy individuals are at risk of pulmonary and cerebral edema. So even the risk posed by traveling to locations above 8,200 feet is greater than the risk from dead trees.

Of course, the Forest Service can close National Forest lands for any reason under the 1897 Organic Act. Closure orders increasingly cite the threat to public safety from standing dead trees, and

these orders increasingly apply to dispersed recreation, especially after forest fires. Examples include the post-fire Eagle Creek closure in Oregon’s Mount Hood National Forest, which prompted a letter from FSEEE petitioning the Forest Service to rescind the closure. As our letter states,

*National Forest lands are open to dispersed recreation unless an affirmative decision is made to close particular areas to such use. This “open-unless-closed” policy harkens back to the forest reserves’ earliest days, as indicated in “Forest Reserve Manual for the Information and Use of Forest Officers”: “All law-abiding people are permitted to travel in forest reserves ... for pleasure or recreation” (April 12, 1902, USDI/GLO).*

Additionally, the Wilderness Act does not authorize closing wilderness lands to dispersed recreation on the grounds that the natural, wild state of those lands is unsafe. Since dead trees are natural features of forest ecosystems, their presence does not provide a legitimate basis for issuing closure orders. That basis loses even more legitimacy in light of the lack of supporting evidence.

Nonetheless, a closure order for dispersed recreation “implemented for the safety of the public” remains in effect following the 2017 Jones Fire in Oregon’s Willamette National Forest. When asked about the rationale for the closure, Forest Service Public Affairs Specialist Chiara Cipriano responded, “The Jones Fire Closure includes areas that have dead and dying trees that pose a serious or deadly risk to

campers and recreationalists (sic) in the area.” Again, no evidence-based risk criteria were cited to justify the closure.

In response to the question of why the Forest Service thinks these trees are dangerous, Cipriano cited two Forest Service documents: “Field Guide for Danger-Tree Identification and Response Along Forest Roads and Work Sites in Oregon and Washington” and “Field Guide for Hazard-Tree Identification and Mitigation on Developed Sites in Oregon and Washington Forests.” Neither document cites empirical data to quantify the risk from snags. As the titles indicate, neither document addresses dispersed recreation, yet these guides are cited to justify prohibition of dispersed recreation.

Furthermore, the two guides misapply federal regulations, specifically, 29 CFR 1960.8, an OSHA workplace rule. The OSHA rule requires agencies to provide a place of employment “free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or physical harm.” However, this rule applies only to workplaces “owned” by the employer, and the Forest Service does not own these public lands. Also, no law requires the Forest Service to keep National Forests safe for public use, and the Federal Tort Claims Act ensures Forest Service immunity from liability unless it violates its own regulations.

As the North Fork closure order suggests, the greatest likelihood of dead trees falling occurs during windstorms, but the Forest Service does not close National Forests during windstorms. The Columbus Day Storm brought down tens of millions of trees in the Pacific

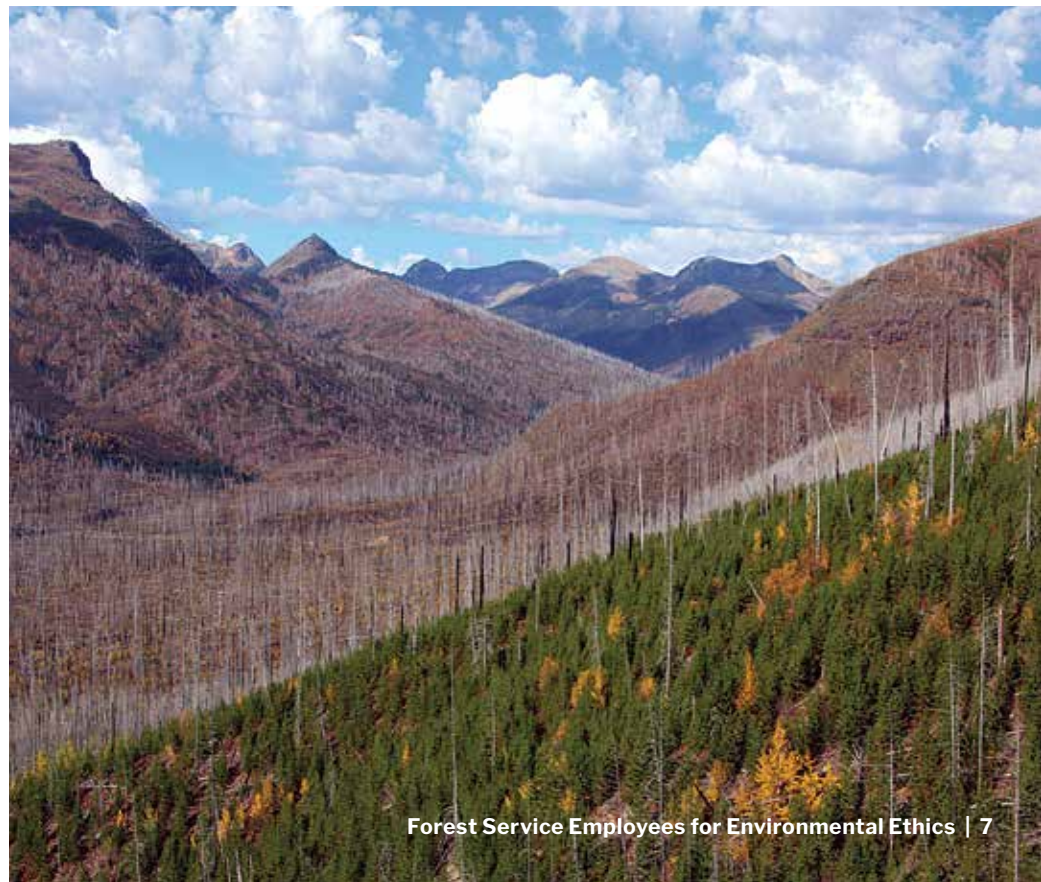
Northwest, and the Forest Service did not close National Forests during that storm. Every winter, high winds topple live and dead trees throughout the National Forests, yet the Forest Service does not issue closure orders in response to National Weather Service wind alerts.

As Lerch indicated, trees fall in all forests, with or without fire or beetle outbreaks. In fact, forestry studies demonstrate that 85 percent of a forest’s trees will fall as the forest matures, but the Forest Service does not close its unburned forestland due to safety concerns stemming from the fact that all trees die and eventually fall. Visitors to national forests assume the risk that at any time, without any warning, a tree may fall on them. Although trees do occasionally kill people when they fall, there is no evidence that they do so at higher rates after a forest

fire. Studies of snag persistence following forest fires show that the vast majority of fire-killed trees remain standing for years after they die.

The lack of evidence and the absence of a liability issue would seem to validate the traditional “enter wild lands at your own risk” ethos. Yet closure orders based on unsubstantiated claims of increased risk from dead trees suggest the Forest Service has followed the lead of other federal agencies in creating a nanny state bent on relegating the once-celebrated “Freedom of the Hills” to the dusty pages of history. At its heart, the issue is whether National Forests should be Disneyland-like playgrounds that are safe for children or wild landscapes where visitors enter at their own risk. The law says the second, but the Forest Service seems to want the first.

*Following a forest fire in Glacier National Park, thousands of dead trees remain standing. The Forest Service increasingly closes public lands to dispersed recreation after forest fires, citing the danger posed by standing dead trees (artiste9999, istockphoto.com).*



# Briefly

## *Great American Outdoors Act*

The recently enacted Great American Outdoors Act provides \$900 million a year for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Created in 1964, the LWCF has never before been fully funded, leaving it subject to congressional appropriations whims.

The act also provides \$9.5 billion to begin to address a \$20 billion backlog of deferred maintenance on public lands. Most of that money will go to national parks, but about \$1.4 billion is slated for National Forests. A coalition of conservation advocates, outdoor recreation industry representatives, hunters and anglers worked for years to pass this legislation.

Jesse Prentice-Dunn, policy director for the Center

for Western Priorities, said the president “tried for years to eviscerate the Land and Water Conservation Fund” and only signed this landmark conservation bill thanks to “public demand” and “veto-proof bipartisan majorities.”

*A bison grazes in Yellowstone National Park, which will benefit from funding authorized by the Great American Outdoors Act (Joe Stone).*



## *Reprieve for the Appalachian Trail*

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline survived a procession of legal challenges and setbacks that ended in June with a victory in the U.S. Supreme Court. However, 20 days after the high court’s decision, the pipeline developers canceled the \$8 billion natural gas project.

The pipeline would have passed underneath the Appalachian Trail in George Washington National Forest in Virginia. The Forest Service granted a permit to the energy companies, but because the Appalachian Trail is a unit of the National Park System, environmental groups argued that the rules governing national park lands should apply.

The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the

environmental groups. The pipeline company appealed and won in the Supreme Court. Justice Clarence Thomas authored the majority opinion, stating that the National Park Service holds an easement for the Appalachian Trail and that the U.S. Forest Service can grant the right-of-way.

*The sun sets on a scenic view from the Appalachian Trail in Virginia (Adobe Stock).*



## *NEPA Rules Rollback*

Speaking of pipelines, the Trump administration has made no secret that the recent overhaul of rules implementing the National Environmental Policy Act is intended to make it easier to construct pipelines and other major projects.

In announcing the new rules, Trump complained about “mountains and mountains of bureaucratic red tape” that hampered his efforts as a New York developer. Since Trump’s ascension to the White House, NEPA regulations have played a key role in limiting the environmental damage of his domestic agenda.

The new rules will reduce the types and number of projects that are subject to environmental review, shorten the timeline for reviews, and drop

the requirement to consider cumulative environmental effects, including climate-change impacts.

Sharon Buccino, senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, sees the new NEPA rules as Trump’s attempt at “really gutting” the landmark environmental law that helps to protect our public lands.

*President Richard Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act into law Jan. 1, 1970 (public domain).*





# Dispatch

## A National Forest in Hawaii?

No state other than Hawaii can claim tropical forest. The territory of Puerto Rico can. Puerto Rico can also claim a National Forest but Hawaii cannot.

Hawaii's two congressional representatives, Ed Case and Tulsi Gabbard, would like to see that change, so they introduced H.R. 7045 in May. If enacted, the bill would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct a study to identify Hawaiian lands that could be included in a National Forest.

"Hawaii is the most isolated island chain and one of the most ecologically diverse places in the world," said Case. "Within our constrained borders, we have 10 of the 13 world climate zones and ecosystems ranging from the

deserts to the tropics, where plants and animals that found their way to Hawaii evolved like nowhere else."

"Hawaii's forests are critical parts of our island ecosystems," said Gabbard. "Our forests protect us from runoff, recharge our aquifers, provide habitat for native species. ... We must explore every avenue to protect them."

The two members of Congress are promoting the legislation as a step toward protecting Hawaii's 10,000 plant and animal species, which have lost almost half of their native forest ecosystems. The Hawaii representatives say their legislation is needed to help determine how best to conserve and expand Hawaii's native kōa,

'ohi'a and sandalwood forests and lay the groundwork for a National Forest designation.

The legislation follows a measure that the two representatives introduced in April calling on the U.S. Department of Interior to pursue another first for the state: the designation of a National Heritage Area. Both say Ka'ena Point, Oahu, is the perfect candidate for Hawaii's first National Heritage Area, which would make it a natural candidate for inclusion in Hawaii's first National Forest.

*The tropical forest of the Na Pali Coast is part of a state wilderness park on the island of Kauai, but none of Hawaii's forests are protected as National Forests (Adobe Stock).*

## COVID crowds on Public Lands

Forest Service officials across the country are reporting negative impacts from increased visitation linked to COVID-19 as people flock to public lands.

In California, Los Padres National Forest officials closed Santa Paula Canyon trails and campgrounds in response to crowds, parking issues, graffiti, litter, toilet paper and other human

waste. Officials also cited a lack of physical distancing, and with the closure set to expire July 31, Forest Supervisor Kevin Elliott extended the closure through Sept. 30.

Lawrence Lujan, press officer for the U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region, reported similar problems in Colorado's National Forests. "People aren't taking their trash with them,



they're not obeying the pack-it-in/pack-it-out principle. Where there are dumpsters, they are filling quite quickly. People are going into crowded parking lots, trying to park off-road on the grass, which is troublesome. Your undercarriage could light the grass on fire if it's a hot, dry day."

Lujan said visitors have been dumping trash into vault toilets, which interferes with processing the waste when it is hauled to sewage treatment

plants. In addition to trash and sanitation issues, National Forests are experiencing overcrowding, increased user conflicts, and illegal or abandoned campfires.

"We're finding that there are a lot of first-time forest public-lands visitors," Lujan said. "We've been experiencing these recreation pressures for quite some time. Now they've skyrocketed because of the number of people who are visiting."

"It's certainly a national issue," said Ben Lawhon, education

director for the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics. "Much of the impact we see in the outdoors can be categorized as people who are either unskilled, uninformed or under-informed," Lawhon said. "Or they are just careless."

"We know our natural places are important, now more than ever," Lujan said. "We welcome people to come to our national forests and grasslands."

## Pristine Alaskan Lands Under Threat

The Bureau of Land Management and Army Corps of Engineers recently approved a private, 211-mile industrial road through a portion of Gates of the Arctic National Park in Alaska. The road will cross Native American lands and pristine rivers and streams to facilitate mining in the Ambler District on the southern slopes of Alaska's Brooks Range.

The road project also includes timber sales, a fiber-optic cable, 12 communications towers, five temporary construction camps, 1,800 acres of "materials sites" (gravel pits), and four permanent maintenance camps with airstrips. Both the permanent and temporary camps will include housing, generators, fuel tanks, and water and sewer systems.

The National Parks Conservation Association filed a lawsuit challenging the decision. The Northern Alaska Environmental Center, the Alaska Wildlife Alliance, the Center for Biological Diversity, Earthworks, the National Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, The Wilderness

Society, and Winter Wildlands Alliance joined the lawsuit.

The affected area provides important habitat for salmon and a critical migration corridor for Alaska's largest caribou herd. The court filing challenging the decision indicates the road would cross approximately 2,900 streams and 11 major rivers, including the Wild and Scenic Kobuk River, and would destroy over 2,000 acres of wetlands.

The lawsuit charges that the federal agencies "failed to comply with numerous federal statutes and regulations that impose important protections for the lands, wildlife, communities, and aquatic

resources of the region."

Alex Johnson, Alaska program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association, said, "Amid a global pandemic and economic crisis, the Trump administration has fast-tracked planning and disregarded the severe impacts that this billion-dollar private industrial mining road will have on national parklands, Alaska Native communities and one of our planet's last ecologically intact landscapes."

*The Ambler Road, with its airstrips and industrial traffic, will adversely affect the migration corridor for Alaska's largest caribou herd (Dean Biggins, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).*



# Book Reviews

by Andy Stahl, Executive Director, Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics

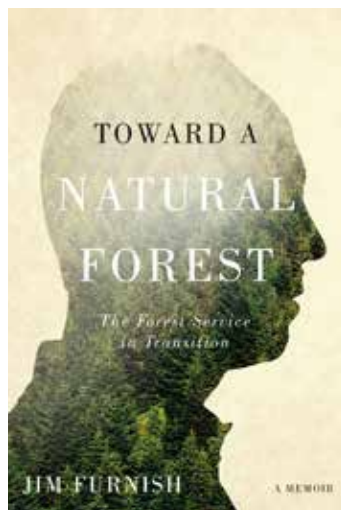
There must be something in the water. Oregon's Siuslaw National Forest has spawned two memoirs as rich and varied as its storied salmon. The authors' lenses could not be more different. Gloria Brown became the nation's first black woman forest supervisor, and Jim Furnish is a traditionally-trained timber beast whose story parallels an agency-wide environmental epiphany. Yet, stewardship of the public's forests unites these two very personal stories.

## 'Toward a Natural Forest'

Furnish's "Toward a Natural Forest" is a conversion memoir — of his own views toward nature and of the complementary reformation of an intransigent Forest Service bureaucracy. Furnish began his career in the traditional fashion, as a youngster learning outdoor skills from his geologist father, and then as a forester trained in the science of managing trees as crops. Along the way, however, he has an epiphany. When high-elevation clearcuts in Wyoming's Bighorn National Forest fail to regenerate, despite repeated and expensive reforestation attempts, Furnish begins to wonder whether the Forest Service's timber enterprise is sustainable.

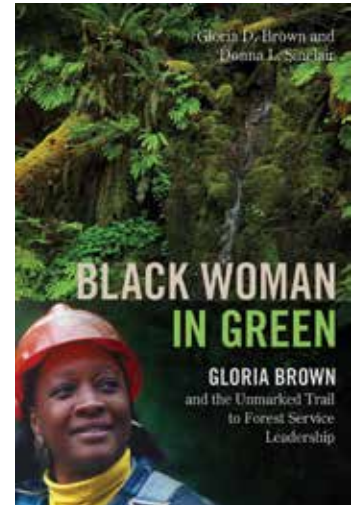
In the 1990s, Furnish arrives mid-career as supervisor of the Siuslaw National Forest, where lawsuits over landslides, owls and salmon have blockaded industrial-style logging. Furnish needs to chart a new course. With support from his elite staff, he pioneers new policies on decommissioning logging roads, using second-growth thinning receipts to restore streams, and sharing Forest Service authority with local conservation partners whom he empowers to do the on-the-ground work.

His Siuslaw renaissance earns him a dramatic (and internally controversial) promotion to deputy chief of the National Forest system. There, Furnish shepherds into law a federal regulation protecting roadless areas and helps to put an end to old-growth forest clearcut logging (except in Alaska).



## 'Black Woman in Green'

From its first pages, Gloria Brown's "Black Woman in Green" (co-authored with Donna Sinclair) hits readers in the gut. Losing her virginity to a childhood gang rape. Mother of three widowed at age 30 by a drunk driver. Brown's darker skin presumes her lesser status in white America; it also pushes her down Black America's finely calibrated racial scale. She learns to survive, which proves an essential skill when, motivated by the need to provide financially for her children, she adopts a second family — the white male Forest Service of the late 20th century.



Brown's Forest Service story begins as a below-stairs GS-4 public information clerk in the agency's D.C. headquarters. "Invisible" to the political royalty around her, she eavesdrops on their conversations to learn about far-off lands in Montana and Oregon: "Although I had been with the Forest Service for nearly ten years, I had never been in a national forest." Hers is an upside-down career ladder. She learns first the art of DC's sharp-knife politics, then moves down the organizational food chain to regional offices and, ultimately, becomes supervisor of two national forests.

Race is omnipresent. Being black in the white West frames Brown's every day. From overt racial taunting by passers-by to the grocery clerk's stares at checkout. For Brown's children, it is worse, as racism exposes itself through bullying and the indifferent hostility of Missoula public school officials.

Brown's escape from Missoula to the Portland regional office drops her into the pan where northern spotted owls are being fried. Her job includes telling office leadership that the public demands environmental change, a message that does not sit well. Moving to the timber-leading Willamette National Forest redoubles the dissonance as she responds deftly to an outspoken colleague who founds the revolutionary employees' group FSEEE.

Starting with an undergraduate degree in journalism (Brown returned to school mid-career to earn her forestry cred), she is regarded with suspicion by the agency's natural resource-trained workforce. Local timber-dominated political machines also view her skeptically. I saw those consequences first-hand when her forward-looking stances as Siuslaw supervisor earned her a quick ticket out of town to an urban (i.e., "POC") National Forest promotion she was told she couldn't turn down and from which she retired.



# FSEEE

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PERMIT NO. 679

**P.O. Box 11615**  
**Eugene, OR 97440**  
**541-484-2692**  
**fsee.org**

Forest News is a publication of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics. Our mission is to protect National Forests and to reform the U.S. Forest Service by advocating for environmental ethics, educating citizens and defending whistleblowers. FSEEE is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

*Forest News is printed on post-consumer, recycled paper with vegetable-based ink.*

## Take Action

*Mount Adams Wilderness, Washington (Josemaria Toscano).*

Please call both of your U.S. Senators today and urge them to support the Protecting America's Wilderness Act, HR 2546, which the House of Representatives has passed. This bill would add vital protections to old-growth forests and other special places at a time when longstanding environmental safeguards are being rolled back.

When contacting your senators, first tell them who you are and, "I support HR 2546 — the Protecting America's Wilderness Act." Mention two or three reasons why protecting wilderness is important. Examples include:

- Wilderness areas protect our sources of clean water.
- Wilderness sequesters carbon and protects against the effects of climate change.
- Wilderness promotes biodiversity.
- Wilderness reminds us that humans rely on the natural world for survival.

If you have a personal story that illustrates the value of wilderness, please also share it with your senators.

**The Congressional switchboard phone number is 202-224-3121, and it can connect you to your senators' offices. Thank you for helping us preserve our natural treasures!**