# Southern Forest Lookout

Newsletter of the Southern Forest Service Retirees Association

**Volume 56, Issue 3** **November 2026**





*Chiricahua Mountains, Coronado National Forest, Arizona, where Association President Gretta Boley began her Forest Service career. Read all about it on page 11.* (photo by Michael Jacobi at arizonabirdingtrail.com)

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Or register and pay online at https://www.southernforestretirees.org

**The mission of the Southern Forest Service Retirees Association** is to create and maintain an active network of retirees who are connected in some way with USDA Forest Service in the South, for the purpose of sustaining relationships, providing opportunities for fun and fellowship, and sharing information that promotes preservation of Forest Service history and awareness of and involvement in current natural resource issues.

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| Southern Director, National Museum of Forest Service History: | Jeff Owenby |

Please submit your articles, news, obituaries, and personal updates for the newsletter to Editor Mary Dahl at marydahl46@gmail.com.

Please notify us of any changes to your contact information for the Membership Directory using the "Contact Us" button on our website at https://www.southernforestretirees.org/.

**Are Your Dues Paid and Up-to-Date?**
**Check the year you are paid through on your address label or as posted on our website.**
**To renew your membership, use the form on the back page or renew online at**
**https://www.southernforestretirees.org/**

The front-page banner features Fryingpan Lookout Tower, located on Fryingpan Mountain near Mt. Pisgah in the Pisgah National Forest. It was built in 1941 and at 70 feet is the tallest USFS fire tower in North Carolina. It was used as a lookout into the early 1990's and is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

# Message From Gretta Boley, Association President



Welcome to the Fall edition of the Southern Forest Service Lookout! This issue features stories that focus on "How I Started My Forest Service Career," celebrating the many different paths that bring people to their Forest Service journey. I hope you find the stories enjoyable and that they might reconnect your thoughts to memories of places, friends, and colleagues you've known over the years.

We have a special journey to recognize at this time. We send congratulations to Ken Arney, Regional Forester for the Southern and Eastern Regions of the Forest Service, at his retirement after 53 years of dedication to conservation. His steady leadership and commitment to building relationships have been central to his success story and to the agency. Ken, we salute you and wish all the best for you in retirement. You have more than earned this retirement and we hope you enjoy each and every moment!

It doesn't matter where you started your career, there may be some shared and familiar experiences: moving across this big country with everything you owned packed in the back of your car or pickup. Having very little money, but possibly a shoebox or bag filled with food lovingly prepared by a parent or family member to help you along on your journey. In my case, the shoebox held fried chicken and homemade poundcake and other goodies that were supposed to last until I made it to my destination (unfortunately, they didn't).

I remember driving west to my first duty station in New Mexico, when coming into the area of Midland, Odessa, and Big Springs, Texas, I started to see these huge structures rising up from the Earth's floor. I didn't know what I was seeing! I grew up in Louisiana where it's very flat – I had never seen a mountain. Once I realized these were the mountains of West Texas, I stopped in amazement! The sun was just beginning to set around them, filling the sky with shades of purple, red, blue, and orange. It was spectacular!

Another common thread of such journeys is the excitement and uncertainty of starting your first real job with the Forest Service. Would I be accepted? Would I be able to do what was expected of me? Would I build relationships or have a team that supported me?

The stories of how we began our Forest Service careers are as diverse as the people who tell them – that's what makes them so enjoyable to read. Everyone has their story. What is yours? Please consider sharing the story of how you got started with the Forest Service. It doesn't need to be long or earth-shaking, just yours, with the places and people that got you started, which may just happen to be connected with the stories of others. Contact Mary Dahl and our newsletter team and they'll help you get your story into form.

Along that line, I'd like to give a huge shout-out to our awesome newsletter team for the time and care they put into creating amazing content for each issue. I encourage you to read the newsletter from beginning to end – you'll find engaging articles, great photos and stories worth sharing.

Until next time, I wish you a wonderful holiday season and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year!

*Gretta*

***P.S. Hey, we need your help!*** **We must fill our critical leadership vacancies in the Association for 2027!** (see article on page 10). If you or anyone you know would consider serving in the role of Vice President, Secretary, or Director, please contact us. The work is light, time commitment is not a heavy burden, and we have lots of fun. If you have even a little interest but some concerns, give us a shout, we'll be happy to discuss.

# Message from Ken Arney
# Regional Forester, Southern and Eastern Regions
## A Legacy of Partnership



This year has asked a lot of us, with difficult weather, extreme fire danger, and long days of active management and habitat restoration on national forests. At the same time, private forestlands and all public forestlands are challenged with weak and shifting timber markets that limit management options. Forest health is forefront in the East as well, with tree species being lost to insects and disease and non-native plants and animals igniting more challenges than can be addressed at scale. In addition, private forests are being converted at an alarming rate.

Even as our capacity shifted, the work continued. That's because of the steady courage of people who showed up for the land and for each other. I'm deeply proud of what we accomplished together with all our partners.

Through it all, we kept safety first and took care of one another, on the line, in the office, and on the drive home. I'm grateful for the mentors who shared their wisdom and the new leaders who stepped up—proof that our future is in good hands.

After 54 years of dedicated service in conservation, I will retire effective November 1, 2026.

As I reflect on my career—from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and Tennessee State Forester to Deputy Regional Forester for State & Private Forestry, and now Regional Forester—I've tried to bring people to the same table: Share the best science available, align funding, and above all, build trust. There are many examples that come to mind but the landscape initiatives with longleaf pine, shortleaf pine, and white oak stand out as initiatives that accomplished more collectively than any one entity could alone.

One principle has guided me more than any other: Build relationships before you need them and follow through with polite persistence.

In the South, our forests are a mosaic of national forests woven together with millions of acres of private lands. Our strong partnerships are the way we turn good intentions into acres restored, habitat improved, and communities strengthened.

Our mission matters. Every day, our work helps protect communities, supports local jobs and small businesses operating on national forests and grasslands, helps provide clean drinking water to tens of millions of Americans, and stewards the land responsibly. None of that happens without employee dedication and the hearts that stay with the work when it's difficult.

The best part of this job has always been the people—landowners, burn bosses, foresters, biologists, planners, finance and grants staff, and community leaders—who show up year after year. They taught me that big results grow from small, consistent acts.

**Looking Ahead**

We are on the cusp of change. We have said goodbye to colleagues who have contributed greatly to our mission. In the end, the Forest Service will continue to adapt, help our partners across boundaries, and keep our focus on delivering for the public we serve.

My advice is simple: Keep checking in with one another. This is long-haul work, and we will need new champions as healthy forests for today and tomorrow have never been more important.

As I close, I'm grateful for what we've built together. Our work reaches beyond the forest edge; it supports local communities and the American people. Thank you for your commitment to the land and to each other.



# An Interview with Tara Keyser
# Acting Director, Southern Research Station

**What is your favorite tree?**
*My favorite tree is the bald cypress (kind of odd coming from a silviculturist who specializes in hardwood systems). I find them fascinating because they can live in flooded conditions and they can live as a street tree in Asheville. I find the ability to tolerate extremes ecologically fascinating.*

**Why do you like trees?**
*I like trees because they record history. Think about it. You take a walk in woods and come across a rare 200- to 300-year-old white oak tree. It's recorded fire – probably multiple fires at that site. It has recorded aspects of our climate. And, we have methods available to us to extract some of that history and use it to help us better understand how our current forests may respond to future disturbance and climate. How cool is that? I think about what the tree has been through and not just ecologically. But, that 200-year-old white oak has recorded bits and pieces of our own history, witnessing battles from the Civil War or the exploitive logging that occurred in the Appalachians, which I still can't wrap my head around as I look at the forested landscape surrounding Asheville. I don't know – to be anchored at a site and hold a record of events that occurred at that site; I guess it's like they are historians in some ways.*

**Where did you grow up and did you have any childhood experiences that influenced your career choice?**
*I grew up in Waterloo, WI, which is southern Wisconsin between Madison and Milwaukee — 100% dairy farm world. I did not have any childhood experiences that would like lead me to "I want to be a forester" besides the normal camping and enjoying being outdoors. I didn't know that was even a career until I got to college.*

**Where did you go to college and what were some influences?**
*I went to the University of Wisconsin—Madison and I started out as a biochemistry major with the plan to go to medical school. I had a rough first semester, as many people do. I decided that the C in general chemistry was not a good sign to continue in biochemistry or increase the odds of getting into medical school. During winter break I was flipping through the paper catalog thinking, "I've got to find a new major," and there was a PBS documentary on the National Park Service playing on the TV. Like any non-informed person, I didn't know there was a difference between the National Park Service and the National Forest Service. I thought, I want to do that! And that was riding on a horse out in the West with the hat, doing Park Ranger things. I said, "Wow, Madison has a forestry program. I'm going to go into forestry." Not knowing that you don't really get a degree in forestry and just go into the Park Service. There are different missions. I got my degree and learned the difference between the Park Service and the Forest Service and really latched onto the conservation ethic.*

**Do you have any mentors or people in your life who helped you in your career?**
*David Loftis was the person who hired me into my Research Forester position with the Southern Research Station. What can I say about David? He was (and still is) one of the most knowledgeable silviculturists I know and a genuinely kind person. David gave me the space to develop my research program, which as a new scientist I truly appreciated. Although he gave me that autonomy, he also challenged me and asked why. And, not why from a science perspective because that's often easy to answer. But, why from an applied and management-focused perspective. David was focused on science delivery — transferring the science to the people who were actually going to do the management and work on the ground. That remains at the forefront of the research I initiate. I ask: Is this going to be useful? And even if I know it is going to be useful, I ask — how do I talk about it in a way that anyone can understand and that they ultimately use it to make decisions on the ground or to implement during management activities? David knew that focusing on the technology transfer of the science was not likely to lead him to that step up in the panel process, but he knew it needed to be done. Otherwise, why are we doing the work — if nobody's able to apply it?*

**What scientific projects do you have going on right now?**
*The Femelschlag (expanding gap silviculture project), which is a large study on the Pisgah National Forest. It was co-developed with District and Forest-level staff and is getting ready to have its first expansion harvest. We harvested gaps to mimic wind-throw and natural disturbance. We have this beautiful oak regeneration that has responded to edge and now we're going back after eight years and harvest around those gaps to release this oak regeneration so it can continue to recruit into the canopy.*

*We continue working on a biochar project that started in response to our pulp and paper mill closing in 2023 and the need to find a use for low grade hardwood often left after harvests. We were looking at alternative pathways to get rid of the pulpwood because removing these species, which can interfere with achieving the desired ecological conditions, is a key component of oak silviculture. Then Hurricane Helene hit and now we not only had residual pulpwood from active forest management activities to deal with, but also hurricane debris. I look at biochar as a forest restoration tool — how can we use this back in the woods to benefit forest restoration? For example: Can it be used to improve artificial regeneration outcomes because it can increase soil moisture? Can it be used to increase soil carbon storage? Will changes in soil nutrient dynamics increase the competitiveness of oak relative to species like poplar and maple? Helene brought more partners such as Soil and Water Conservation districts, NRCS, and ARS with ideas to use biochar in agricultural rehabilitation and to expand the scope and scale of biochar in western North Carolina.*

*We are working on a landscape-level hardwood regeneration prioritization model. This project will identify areas of the landscape at a small scale that have high likelihood of success for oak regeneration and, therefore, inform where and what type of management activities could be used to benefit the long-term sustainability of the oak resource. I could give you six more, but let's leave it there.*

**Why did you want to become the station director or how did it happen?**
*Can I say it wasn't on my Bingo card? Ok, so how did it happen? I went to the National Forests in North Carolina as the Forest Silviculturist and I was there for three months before I was offered a detail as National Program Lead for Silviculture back in R&D. I was involved in the Futuring Effort for the Forest and Range Management Program Area. Then things snowballed from there. Rick Cooksey, the previous acting station director, knew he was going to be retiring and asked if I'd come back to the station first as a Center Director and Assistant Director and then Acting Station Director.*

**How do you think you can benefit our National Forests and Forest Service Research by being the director of SRS?**
*I've been with the Southern Research Station my whole Forest Service career – 19 years. I know the Station, I know the people, and I know the research. I hope that in this role I can advocate for all the good work that we do. Because, while we are one of the smaller stations staff-wise and in percentage of national forest land, compared to the rest of the country,* ***our impact goes beyond those National Forest System lands****. I worry that sometimes that part of the story gets lost, so I want to advocate for all the good work we do on the lands, both public and private, across the Southern States.*



**What is your favorite part of working for the Southern Research Station?**
*The people. Yeah, the people! The teams I have had and the teams I have now — they're just the most dedicated, hard-working people you will ever find. They are good people and they make me laugh when I need a laugh. A little levity in the job is a good thing.*

**If you weren't working for the Forest Service, what would you be doing?**
*I would be a dive master somewhere in the Caribbean — perhaps Belize. So not terrestrial. I would be in the water. Maybe that's why I like Bald Cypress so much, because they thrive in water.*

# Update from

# The National Museum of Forest Service History

***Sharing the rich history and stories of America's conservation legacy***

## National Conservation Legacy Center Opens in Missoula



The National Museum of Forest Service History celebrated the grand opening of the new National Conservation Legacy Center on July 17, 2026, marking a major milestone for conservation education in Montana and across the country. More than 1200 visitors attended the ribbon cutting ceremony.

A video (of the ribbon cutting ceremony (1 hour 40 min in length) can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7QCvRhUwNo

An excellent video featuring the mass timber design and construction of the Center (6 minutes, 40 seconds) can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cv53W6gId-U

The Southern Forest Service Retirees Association (SFSRA) was represented at the Grand Opening by Museum Board Liaison for the South, Charlie Richmond, and Southern Museum Director, Jeff Owenby, along with other Southern retirees, including Southern Regional Forester and Museum Board Member, Liz Agpaoa. [add bob Joslin]A portion of the Southern Region contingent is shown below, along with "Honorary Southerner," Chief Dale Bosworth.

Support of the National Museum by Southern Forest Service Retirees was also present in the form of a commemorative paver purchased by SFSRA.




**Front: Dan Nolan, Liz Agpaoa, Dale Bosworth, Jeff Owenby; Back: Charlie Richmond, Bob Joslin**




**Since the Grand Opening, the Center has been busy!** In September alone, the Center hosted the Surveyors Historical Society Reunion Banquet, a Memorial Service and USFS Groups touring the Museum, University of Montana Forestry Club, Northwest Chapter American Association of Airline Executives, and the USFS Region 1 Leadership Team. **Visitors:** 1,203 visitors from Aug 31 to Sept 25 -; **Admissions:** 511 admissions sold (25 Children's, 221 Adult, 470 Senior, 69 Veteran) for a revenue of $10,474. **Donations:** $486 in donations at the registers and deposited from the donations box. **Museum Store Sales:** $8,819.45 **Museum memberships:** 15 new memberships purchased at the Center.

**Lisa Tate,** Museum Executive Director, is pleased to announce new programs and staff. Recently joining the staff are **Maddy Gilbert**, events & rentals manager, and **Jacob Stropshire,** collections manager (vice **Dave Stack)**. **Amanda Wickel** now serves as the Director of Campus Operations, and **Tom Petersen,** following the completion of the Capital Campaign, is once again taking on the full realm of fundraising as the Museum's Director of Development. **James Wall** continues to implement the Oral History Program to its full extent. **Kim Richardson,** who once worked seasonally, now is the full-time manager of the Museum store. Also moving from a volunteer basis to full-time grounds and building maintenance is **JJ Walker**, following his recent retirement from the University of Montana. The Museum has added part-time guest service attendants **Kristin Mortenson, Darlene Stratford, and Sara Raffel** and depends on volunteers and docents to assist visitors on campus.

**Andy Mason,** president, and **Rich Stem**, vice-president of the Museum Board, have commissioned two new committees:.

- **Saving History Committee:** Saving historical items at US Forest Service offices scheduled for closure, and connecting with other museums and individuals regarding their collections will now take a more formal and consistent effort through this committee chaired by Board member, **Jim Caswell,** with representation from coast to coast, including the Museum's regional directors.
- **The Museum's Exhibition Committee** is chaired by Board member, **Charlie Richmond,** and includes *Dave Stack, Tom Thompson, John Steffenson, Mary Mitsos, Phil Aune, Lynn Sprague, Barb Tormoehlen, and Dave Steinke*. It will work with members and others regarding our exhibits, both in the Center and throughout the Museum's campus;

## A Call to Action: Preserve Forest Service History!

The National Museum of Forest Service History (NMFSH) was founded in 1988 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to collecting, preserving, and interpreting the history of the US Forest Service. Today, in these turbulent times of agency transition and office relocation, there is a renewed emphasis on making sure important historical items and documents are not lost. Many of our workplaces had cubbyholes or stash spots where these important items were kept. In worst case scenarios, newer office occupants may simply not have known the true value and saw those items as unnecessary clutter that just needed to go away. As retirees we no longer sit in these offices, but we often have remained in contact with those who do and can point them to places, hopefully, like the NMFSH where our agency history may not be lost or tossed.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a state-of-the-art repository in the new Conservation Legacy Center. In addition to the interpretive exhibits open to the public, a large portion of the facility is dedicated to professional storage of historic items. The Museum currently manages a collection of over 55,000 objects including, photography, books, and research reports. Its climate-controlled environment and top-notch archival organization create a protection level far superior to the office cubbyholes that many of us remember. NMFSH has a national agreement with the Forest Service ensuring items are properly cared for and remain publicly accessible. **If anyone is aware of items that may need to be preserved and could be at risk of getting tossed in the urgency of reorganization/relocation, please let me know.** In some cases, the Museum may already have duplicate items preserved, but for some items you might be helping to protect a part of our shared legacy. Thank you.

**Jeff Owenby, Southern Director of the National Museum of Forest Service History**

### The Museum always welcomes your donations!

**As always, if you have donation/fundraising questions, or any other questions about the Museum and our programs and activities, please contact:**

- Lisa Tate, lisa.tate@forestservicemuseum.org, or
- Tom Petersen, tom.petersen@forestservicemuseum
- Call the Museum at (406) 541-6374. OR call Lisa at (208) 484-6667 (mobile)

**Your Southern Regional Museum key contacts:**

**Jeff Owenby,** Southern Museum Director, jajowenby@gmail.com (828) 388-0401
**Charlie Richmond,** Board Liaison to the South, csrichmond60@gmail.com (970) 210-6034

**THANK YOU AGAIN, Southern Forest Service Retirees,**
**for your support of the Museum!**

# Association News

## Southern Retirees Association Meets for Fall Picnic

Forest Service retirees gathered for a Fall potluck picnic at Unicoi State Park outside Helen, Georgia, on October 8, 2026. Twenty-six attendees enjoyed cool weather and the first hints of fall color, along with grilled hamburgers and hotdogs, tasty potluck offerings, and time-rooted fellowship. Much thanks to Jim Wentworth for leading the grilling. Dick Rightmyer shared with the group the history of Helen, Georgia, which was a timber railroad town that has reinvented itself as an Alpine village tourist attraction. A good time was had by all.



*Front: Mary Dahl, Kathy Andregg, Tim Mersmann, Tom Darden, John Caffin, Wes Nettleton; Back: Weeta Baldwin, Gretta Boley, Ray Johnston, Lori Johnston, Jack Holcomb, Jim Wentworth, Debbie Caffin, Bill Elliot, Renee Bishop, Lynne Howard, Dick Rightmyer, Larry Bishop, Becky Vaughters, Alan Pigg, Kay Pigg; not pictured: Bruce Baldwin, Pete Lashoto, Wayne and Wanda Miller, Lucy Nettleton.*

## Winter Luncheon and Annual Business Meeting Set for December 10

At their October 14 meeting, the SFSRA Board set the date for the Winter Luncheon and Annual Business Meeting for December 10, 2026, at the Lawrenceville Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall. Please mark your calendars and look for more details in a forthcoming email invitation to members.

## SFSRA Board Proposes Lifetime Membership Dues Option

The SFSRA Board seeks your input on a proposal to add a lifetime dues option for membership. Some members have asked for this option, which is available for membership in other regional and the national retirees associations. Give us your thoughts on this proposal through the Contact Us button online at https://www.southernforestretirees.org/ or reply to a recent email to members on this subject. Feedback is requested by November 30, 2026. The Board expects to make a decision on this proposal by early December, so it will be available to those renewing membership at the end of this year. Here is the proposal for your review:

*Those eligible to be Members or Associate Members in SFSRA* may become Lifetime Members for a one-time dues payment of $250. This option eliminates need for payment of annual dues and provides full membership benefits to the member until their death. Lifetime membership is not transferrable to the member's spouse or others. Previously paid annual dues, even if paid in advance, will not be credited to lifetime membership dues. This option and dues rate will be available to members immediately following formal adoption by the SFSRA Board.*

**as described in Article IV of the SFSRA Constitution*

## Welcome New Members!

Tammy Freeman Brown, Pike Road, AL
Sherry Reaves, Cartersville, GA
Mary Morris, Fayetteville, GA

# Association Leadership Reaches A Crisis!

The Association is looking for candidates to fill key positions on our Board for 2027, without which the future of our Association is in doubt. Some of these positions have been vacant throughout 2026. Volunteerism is in decline these days and lack of volunteer leadership is causing many organizations to wither, including some other regional retirees associations. Don't let that be us! Please consider volunteering or encouraging others to serve. No geographic requirements!

- **Vice President/President Elect**: We are looking for a leader who will bring ideas, fun, energy, and vision to the Board to replace Gretta Boley, who became our Association President in January 2026. The term is for two years, followed by two years as President. If you want to help guide the future of the Association and be in the middle of action, this position is for you!
- **Secretary:** This role is primarily responsible for keeping meeting minutes for four quarterly Board meetings. It is a very manageable time commitment for a minimum two-year term.
- **Director:** This role involves prestige with minimal duties—what could be better?! Directors serve a 3-year term, providing their wise perspectives to the President and voting on decisions before the Board.

If you are interested in serving with a fun group in these or other roles, please contact us through our website or call Gretta Boley at 318-623-1911 or Tim Mersmann at 770-539-5060.

## How Did Your Career with the Forest Service Begin?

This issue of the newsletter features stories of how people got started in the Forest Service. How did your career get started? Share your story with us! We'd like to make these stories a regular feature in the newsletter. Send your stories to Mary Dahl at marydahl46@gmail.com .

## NAFSR Pilots New Program for Retirees to Mentor

Under a new Memorandum of Understanding between National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) and the Forest Service, NAFSR members have opportunity to mentor current Forest Service employees who are enrolled in New Supervisor Training. This new *Knowledge Transfer Program* will facilitate connection and the transfer of institutional knowledge between retirees and current Forest Service employees.

New Supervisor Training is mandatory for all newly hired or newly promoted permanent, full-time supervisors. This training provides instruction on the technical aspects of supervision, including attendance and leave management, conflict management, conduct, team building, hiring practices, onboarding, performance management, employee development, and mentoring/coaching. Retirees will supplement this instruction by sharing best practices and experience learned during their careers one-on-one with a matched new supervisor. Each pair will meet virtually on a regular basis over the course of several months, using suggested topics and discussion guides to support each session.

The pilot for this program is occurring this Fall through Spring 2027. Application for retiree involvement in this pilot session closed in early October, but additional sign-ups are expected in the future. For more info, please contact our SFSRA Representative to NAFSR, Marisue Hilliard, marisuehilliard@gmail.com .



# FEATURES

## In the Saddle: How My Forest Service Career Began

### An Oral History with Gretta Boley

*On May 29, 2026, Gretta Boley sat with Debbie and John Caffin and Tim Mersmann to share memories of her first job with the Forest Service in which she learned to ride a horse. Debbie and John are experienced horse owners and riders. This article is from a transcript of that conversation, edited for length and clarity.*

**Tim:** Gretta, what path led to you being hired by the Forest Service?

**Gretta:** I graduated from Southern University (Baton Rouge, Louisiana) in 1977 at the ripe old age of 19. I got a job with the Soil Conservation Service [now the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)] while I was still in college. They wanted me to report to New Mexico upon graduation. However, my mother, whom I affectionately call "Granny" because I was the youngest of 13 children, and there was a big age difference from my oldest sibling to me, many of my nieces and nephews were much older than me, they called my mom Grandma or Granny and I started calling her Granny and it stuck. Granny informed the hiring team that "My baby will not be going anywhere right now. She's going to stay at home with me." And, so, they agreed to delay my start date. I graduated in May, and they allowed me to work in the local USDA office in my little hometown of Winnsboro, Louisiana, until September. I don't know if that coincided with the fact that I would be turning 20 years old in September, or if they just didn't want to be bothered with this lady who insisted that I stay at home with her. I reflect on that because now they'd probably not be as flexible and want to get someone a little more eager to come to work (and didn't have such a bossy mother).

I enjoyed a wonderful summer with my Granny. When September came, I headed west in my brand new 1977 Thunderbird with a box of fried chicken, cake, and other goodies my Granny packed for me, These were supposed to last until I got to Silver City, New Mexico. I made it there in one piece and the team waiting for me there said, "Your mom has been calling and calling, and you need to call her right now before you do anything else." So, I did. She was relieved that I had made it there safe and sound.

I worked there as a soils trainee with my supervisor, Tommy Parham, who was just one of two African American families in the whole town. Then I came and that made three. It was a good time and I learned a lot. I spent a week with each one of the disciplines learning more about natural resources. I met many great people. They took me under their wing. We shared a federal building that had the Soil Conservation Service, Forest Service, and one other USDA agency. Everybody was right there in that small building, so it was like a family. Our administrative assistant, Ms. Mickey, was so wonderful and kind. She took good care of all the trainees. We didn't have much of anything so she would cook dinner for us often. Her husband worked for the Forest Service. I believe he let Forest Service staff in Tucson know I was a new trainee in the office. I wasn't privy to the conversations they had, but I started receiving calls from Tucson offering me a trainee position on the Coronado National Forest. I said, "Well…do you guys have a mall?" And they said, "Yeah, we have a mall." I said, "Okay, when do I start?" To this day, I haven't visited a town with a mall I didn't like.




So, in the Spring of 1978, I headed a little further west to Tucson, Arizona, to work on the Coronado National Forest. Once there and all situated, I was assigned to work in planning. I thought, "Oh wow, this is so not for me! I don't get this!" I didn't have enough background to really feel like I was adding value, even though they didn't expect much because I was new to planning, new to the Forest Service, and new to government service. I didn't really understand the processes, and they were so busy trying to build their first Forest Plan—after all, the NFMA legislation had just passed in 1976—they didn't really have time to invest in my development. I was on my own, which I'd

find was often the case.

I decided I wanted to go back to the field. That is when all the fun started. I asked to be moved from planning into the soils shop where I knew a little bit and felt like I could be more valuable. This was Spring 1979. That was the year the Sony Walkman came out in case you remember that. That was a big deal. Rocky II was playing at the theaters.

I was reassigned to the Soils, Watershed, and Range staff. There were two soil scientists and a party leader. I learned that we would be going out and staying in the field for weeks at a time, mapping soils. But little did I know that this would involve horseback riding all day, every day. Noone ever taught me about horseback riding, how to saddle a horse or what I needed to do to ride and care for a horse. I had no horsemanship training until I had already survived the first six months. I was there, but…let me just put it this way: it seemed they would have rather seen anybody else there other than me. There were no other females and certainly no other females of color.

They told me, "Pack your bag, you'll be gone for a week." Monday morning arrived and we headed out. We drove and drove and drove. I was like, "Where are we going?" I learned we were going to the Chiricahua Mountains to map soils there. I didn't know anything about these mountains. I had just gotten there. I wasn't familiar with the landscape. I wasn't familiar with the geology.



*Trail in the Chiricahua Mountains, Coronado National Forest, Arizona.* (photo from https://stavislost.com/hikes/trail/silver-peak-chiricahua-mountains/

We finally got to where we would stage the vehicle and the horse trailer on the first day. We had a trailer with three horses and all the accompanying gear. They said, "Gretta, this is your horse right here. By the way, he's crazy. His name is Deacon, and he's got all kinds of issues going on." I thought, "Hmm…how did I get so lucky to get Deacon as *my* horse?" But I just said, "Okay…"

We saddled up. I just tried to mimic what they were doing because no one took the time to show me what to do. I saw how they cinched the saddles and thought "Lord, I hope this is the right thing to do." Apparently, I did it right — good enough, anyway. So, we got on the horses and rode into the mountains. We were in some *really* steep country. I mean extremely steep country. The Chiricahua is primarily volcanic rock, extremely steep and rocky, and the trails were very narrow. Deacon would stumble quite a bit. You could look down from the trail we were on and see a ponderosa pine downslope near a creek, and it looked like a toy, even though it was over 100 ft tall when you got closer. The trails were super narrow and very curvy and rocky. I don't know how many times my horse stumbled and my life flashed before me. I was so scared. I said Lord forgive me 'cause I'm 'bout to come see you! The project leader mapped from horseback, but when we got to an area that needed a closer look we could dismount for a while. We finally got a break and got off the horses to have lunch. After a long day, we were coming back to where you could see the truck and the trailer in the distance. Deacon broke into a full gallop toward the truck and trailer that he could see in the distance. The team had said earlier that Deacon had all kinds of issues, but I'd say his eyesight was superior! I had not even noticed the truck and trailer, but he did, and a-way we go!! He was ready to go home, and here I was hanging on for dear life. I had both the reins pulled back and I'm thinking "Oh my God, I'm about to kick the bucket!" When we all finally got to the trailer, they said "Oh, we forgot to tell you. When Deacon sees the trailer he knows it's time to go home and so he makes a break for it." Okay. All right. Well. I made it…but I was screaming. They thought it was hilarious!

**John:** Were they laughing at you?

**Gretta:** They were. They thought that was so funny.

**John:** You didn't fall off, did you?

**Gretta:** No, I didn't. Deb you would have been proud of me. I hung on for dear life.

**Deb:** Heck, yeah.

**Gretta:** If I was going down that horse was going down too.

**Deb:** Did you and Deacon eventually come to an

understanding after your time together?

**Gretta:** We did. I learned the things he was going to do. I'd pet him and we became friends by the end of the project. We were good.

Deacon did a lot of stumbling, much more than the other horses. They said, "Oh, we got him from the Midwest, and he's not used to mountains." What? That's all we're doing is riding the mountains! I learned to stop screaming every time he stumbled. I don't know what Deacon's problem was, but he had issues. I thought, "Well, we're just right for each other," because I had issues too. We worked it out together.

**Deb:** Typically, as you become a more confident rider, you become more of a leader for the horse and that's how the relationship builds. You quit just being a passenger. Horses are herd animals. They like having leaders. I'm sure that that was part of your development too.

**Gretta:** It was.

**John:** Were you camping when you went out like this?

**Gretta:** We would go back to Douglas or Wilcox, Arizona, at the end of the day, whichever was closest. At least we got to stay in a hotel every night. We often got back late and had to take care of the horses--take the saddles off, clean them up, brush them down, make sure they were fed and watered. That's still a part of your day. Often we'd get in and it'd be 9:00 at night. It was rough. But I didn't complain. The only thing I did do was sometimes, because the vehicle ride was so long, I'd nod off in the morning time. The party leader would give me a hard time about napping in the truck on the way to the field. He fussed at me. He said it was like I wasn't interested. Oooh…but, you know…



Archival photo believed to be Gretta and her horse Deacon in 1979… (Picture from Etsy)

I remember one night it was really cold. One of the guys got a little too far away to get back at the designated time--that was one of the few times that we separated. The party leader said he would go and look for him and we were to stay there. Somehow, I ended up going to the house of some people who lived way up in the mountains and they fixed dinner for me. A husband and wife put steaks on the grill. It took a long time for the team to come find me. So, I had eaten dinner by the time they showed up. I thought, "Hey this is not a bad gig right here." It was way cool. I don't remember how Deacon and I ended up at those people's place, but they were very kind.

After six months, I finally took the horsemanship training, which most employees receive as part of orientation when they first start in the jobs that required horseback riding. It covered all the stuff that I had already learned through OJT [on-job training], including how to take good care of your horse. I thought, "Now isn't that something—they teach you how to take care of the horse and don't say anything about how to take care of yourself." There was no safety message. Shout out to the Safety Journey! There was no "what hazards you might encounter." All I can say is my Granny was praying that I would survive.

The party leader was very ambitious. A project that would normally take nine months was completed in six months. Our team was recognized by the Forest Supervisor and Regional Forester. It was a big deal with a big celebration afterwards.

**Tim:** Gretta, how much did you feel that you were on a great adventure being a cowgirl out west versus just trying to survive? Did you get excited by the adventure of it?

**Gretta:** I did eventually, Tim. At first I was just so scared. I just wanted it to be over. And, like I said, Deacon and I got to be buddies. Once I learned the ropes, I became more confident in the role. Part of the apprehension and unrest was not knowing any of these things. Nothing like experience to teach you. Even though they didn't bother to share a lot of information with me, I observed and figured things out. So that's how that worked out. I was proud of myself, of what I accomplished. But yes, Tim, I did become a cow "girl" complete with horse and cowboy boots and the whole nine. I was tough. Yeah, so at the end of the story, I became quite the cowgirl and horse person.

**Deb:** That's awesome. As a horseback rider, I can imagine, once you got comfortable with it, there'd be some pretty cool days and beautiful scenery there.

**Gretta:** Oh, my goodness, it was just absolutely gorgeous. It seems like you're at the top of the world. You can look out and you see all these rock formations, all these beautiful trees--huge, gigantic

pine and spruce. It was beautiful. And, you know I learned a lot in the midst of all that. I think I added some value to the work we were doing.

**John:** I can hear in my mind all the things Deb would have told you if you just came to ride for the day on our two great horses, how many things she would tell you to prepare and to know, what to do and what not to do. The fact that they put you on a horse without any of that is awful really. You were tenacious. It almost is like they wanted you to quit and leave.

**Gretta:** I think so, and I wasn't going to do that. I wasn't going to give them the satisfaction of me just throwing up my hands and leaving. After a while you learn the routine, you know those guys' personalities, and you adjust. You know, I needed that job. I look back and I think about that and…I'm just grateful. Believe it or not, I'm grateful for the experience even though it was hard and it wasn't right. I could have been a whole lot more effective if they had just taken the first day and taught me the ropes on what to expect, how to deal with the animals, and they did not. You know, that's how that works. Surprise! I made it and I was a stronger person as a result!

That is my story of learning to horseback ride. Of course, I've never really shared my experience with anybody. It was just some of the things you dealt with especially if you wanted to keep your job. I'm just glad I lived to tell the story. I definitely did not tell my Granny because it would have worried her too much. I didn't tell her I was a firefighter for the longest time until I got another job. She'd say, "You mean to tell me I sent you to school all that long time and you're out there fighting fire?" What most don't realize is that serving as a firefighter taught me a lot about leadership and teamwork. I also gained a greater respect for the mission of the Forest Service. I shared with her my firefighting stories much later in my career when I was the Forest Supervisor in Louisiana, once I was no longer involved directly in that work..

**John:** That sounds like another story we need to get one day…

*Gretta Boley served as Forest Supervisor on the Kisatchie National Forest and on National Forests in Mississippi before retiring in 2022 as Director of Biological and Physical Resources in the Southern Regional Office. She currently lives in Smyrna, Georgia, and serves as President of the Southern Forest Service Retirees Association.*

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# How I Began with the Forest Service…
## By Charlie Richmond

*Adapted from an oral history interview of Charlie Richmond by James Wall, National Museum of Forest Service History, conducted on November 7, 2023, in Fountain Inn, South Carolina.*



I was born in 1955 in Asheville, North Carolina. I grew up in Cherokee, North Carolina. My parents were Steve and Margaret Richmond.

My mom taught high school in Swain County. She taught English and Latin. She was probably one of the last high school Latin teachers. When I began studying forestry, my mom would often offer her opinions on the meaning of the Latin scientific names.

My dad was a cabinet maker and was hired by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to teach cabinet making in the Indian schools. When I was four months old, we moved to the Cherokee reservation, and he taught high school students how to make furniture. An unfortunate thing about living there at that time was, if you were not a member of the tribe, you could not go to the Indian school. So, I had to be bused off of the reservation to Swain County schools. Because I lived on the reservation, a lot of my friends were Cherokee. I've still got a lot of friends there.

I grew up fishing and hunting, and getting into trouble. My friends and I were outside constantly. I also learned a lot from the forestry and fisheries personnel on the reservation. These programs were run by the BIA, with trained wildlife biologists and foresters from other places. That's changed a lot now. Cherokees have gone to school and come back to run their own departments, but at that time, it was non-tribal members running those departments for the BIA. Because there were so many BIA employees there, it was almost like the Forest Service family. I got to know a lot of those people, and that's what got me interested in both forestry and range management.

In high school, I knew I wanted to work in natural

resources. I originally wanted to be a wildlife biologist. That's what any kid who grows up hunting and fishing wants to do, right? A friend of my dad who ran the fisheries program on the reservation talked me out of that. He says, "Charlie, would you like law enforcement, checking licenses, and writing tickets?" I said, "Ah, I'm not too anxious to do that." He said, "Well, you don't want be a game warden or a wildlife biologist then." He had gone to Colorado State University and convinced me to go into forestry there. He suggested that I go into a program at Colorado State called Range/Forest Management, where you could qualify for a professional Forester or Range Conservationist after graduation. Because it was essentially a dual-degree program, I took very few electives with mostly natural resource courses the entire four years.

When it was time for college, I was ready to go. Swain County was the poorest county in North Carolina because it had no tax base from the Cherokee Indian Reservation, nor from the Nantahala National Forest. Over 50% of the county was either reservation or federally managed. There was not a whole lot of opportunity there, so I was ready to leave. Going out West was an adventure. I loaded up my pickup and went. My mom and dad didn't go with me. They just sent me on my way at 18 years old. I was fortunate that the university assigned me three roommates that I just hit it off with. They weren't in natural resources—two were in business, and one was in ag econ. We lived together the whole time we were in college. We explored Colorado and the West together. We still get together at least once a year to relive those old college days.

When I was in college, I worked in the summers for the Forest Service on the Beaverhead National Forest in Montana. The first week on the job my supervisor asked me to go out and survey range improvements on an 86,000-acre area (range allotment). He gave me forms to fill out for each improvement. Back then you didn't have GPS, so you had to find everything with a map and compass. Every pipeline, fence, water development, water tank, etc., needed to be located, the condition assessed, and a determination made if it needed to be repaired or replaced. He told me it should take about a month to do this 86,000-acre area. The first week I was out there, I was sitting on a bank by a water tank, filling the forms out, and I heard something behind me. I turned around, and there were four cowboys riding horses up behind me. Old, weathered guys. It looked like they'd been out in the woods for a long time! And here I was, with a Southern accent and long hair, a product of the '70s. I was scared, to be honest with you. The oldest gentleman got down off of his horse, walked over to me with his chaps and spurs jingling. He looked at me, and said, "Son, what are you doing?" He could see my Forest Service truck. I told him I was surveying range improvements. He smiled and said, "You know, there's a better way to do this." I said, "No, what do you think?" And he said, "Be at my house in the morning at 7:00," and he told me where he lived. Next day I went to his house and his wife had breakfast ready. He said, "You know, I'm a second-generation rancher on this place. I'm going with you." So, we spent the next week together. He knew where all the water developments, pipelines, stock tanks, and fences were. I finished a month's job in a week. And, I developed a relationship with him and the other ranchers there. He could have very easily taken the attitude, "What's the Forest Service doing hiring this guy that can't even speak proper English and knows little of western ranching traditions?" Some ranchers would have done that. But he decided that's not the way he was going to treat people. That made a big impression on me, to always give people an opportunity, to always value diversity. And, it also set me up to really love the ranching community. Even in retirement, I visit often with some of the rancher friends I made over the years.

I graduated from Colorado State in 1978. I wanted to work for the Forest Service. I didn't know whether I would be able to get a permanent job. A lot of the seasonals that worked for the Forest Service, especially in forestry, worked years as seasonals before they ever got a permanent job. When I graduated, I returned to Montana as a seasonal knowing that when winter came, I would be laid off. I was fortunate that the Forest Service was hiring quite a few range graduates. By the time winter arrived in Montana, the Forest Service offered me a permanent job in Colorado, on the Rio Grande National Forest. I was a seasonal after graduation for just a few months.

I was a Range Conservationist on the Conejos Peak District in La Jara, Colorado. I worked for a district ranger there named John McLemore. He was from Hot Springs, Arkansas. He was laid back, a people person, and wanted everybody to work as a team.

I got married during that time. My wife, Debbie, is also from Cherokee. She stayed in the east, attending Western Carolina University while I went to school in Colorado. We stayed together that whole time, even though we didn't see each other much. She moved out to La Jara with me when I got the job there. She was fortunate to quickly find a job managing a women's clothing store there in town, that she really liked.

After about 15 years working in range management and few years as a District Ranger, I returned to the South as a Forest Supervisor in 1998. Elizabeth Estill

came to the Forest Service from the TVA as Regional Forester for Region 2—the first woman Regioanl Forester in the agency—when I was the Regional Range Program Manager there in Denver. There were some high-profile range-related issues in the Region soon after she came on board. I think she relied upon me for advice on working with the ranching community on issues she wasn't as familiar with. Elizabeth left Denver and went to Atlanta as the Southern Regional Forester. She called me up and said, "I've got a couple of forest supervisor jobs open." One was on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests in Arkansas. I applied and was selected for the Supervisor position. That's how I became forest supervisor and returned to the South. My selection, I believe, had a lot to do with my working relationship with Elizabeth.



*Elizabeth Estill served as Southern Regional Forester from 1997 to 2001.*

However, I knew little about the Southern Region. I'd never worked here. Even though I grew up here, I left when I was 18, so I knew nothing about the Forest Service or how it operated in the South. The first week I was there, I attended a Southern Region orientation program for new forest supervisors in Atlanta. They took us around, introduced us to all of the regional directors who discussed their programs. I went through that orientation with Jerome Thomas, who was starting as the forest supervisor in South Carolina. We became really good friends. He is just a fantastic, smart, a really good guy. We routinely used each other to share ideas.

After serving as Forest Supervisor on the Ozark, I went back west as the Forest Supervisor for the Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest for 7 years. I retired in 2014 as the national Director for Rangeland Management and Vegetation Ecology in the Washington Office.

If I had to do it over again 100 times, I'd do it. I wouldn't change anything. People ask about my favorite projects in my career, and I can tell you about a bunch of them. But the most important one is raising my family. Working for the Forest Service, you've got to treat your family as the most critical job. It was not easy raising a family during the time I worked. With constant moves, young children, and a wife that also needed to find work, we always made our family the priority. Debbie was always the strong one for our family. She was a saint, willing to go anywhere, and do anything, and we lived in some remote small towns. Keeping our family together through all of the adventures—it's the thing I'm most proud of.

There are so many stories about Forest Service careers that are interesting. That is the primary reason I volunteer to help with the National Museum of Forest Service History. It is so fulfilling to honor all the dedicated past employees that have done so much for the National Forests and Grasslands in America.

*Charlie Richmond currently lives with his wife Debbie in Simpsonville, South Carolina, where he serves as Southern Liaison on the Board of the National Museum of Forest Service History.*

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# How I Started with the Forest Service...

## By Mike Sparks



I first came to know about the Piney Ranger District of the Ozark National Forest while in high school in 1963. My father was the chef for more than thirty years at the Eureka Restaurant in Russellville, Arkansas, next door to the Piney Ranger District office. Everyone in town knew my father and loved him, including the personnel who worked at the ranger district. There was Bill Bodie, the District Ranger; Big John Cathey, Assistant Ranger; and Bob Riser, forester. On occasion when I helped my father prepare the noon meal in the kitchen, these guys would come into the restaurant through the back door, be seated at a booth, and order their morning coffee and treats.

I had always been intrigued about a potential career with the U.S. Forest Service. Earlier, I had ordered material from a magazine ad about a mail order course

in natural resource management, but alas, I did not have the funds to pay for the course.

So, I ventured forth one day to sit with these guys and learn from them about the Forest Service. They were ready and able to help me, but little did I know it would come at a cost. All my life, I had been plagued by something called "naïveté." I was always the target of malicious jokes and tricks, and another one was coming soon.

As time went by, I came to love these guys and learned a lot from them that summer about the Forest Service. John Cathey, who was called "Big John," had been raised in Rabun County, Georgia, and had no qualms about playing tricks on folks. That day, I was his target.

A waitress known only as "Big Red," because she had a lot of red hair, worked in the restaurant. She was not bashful at all and neither was Big John, so they bantered back and forth that summer. On that day, unfortunately for me, I was sitting with the guys when Big Red came to take our order. John began his bantering with her and said he knew a fellow who would like to date her. She raised her eyebrows with interest as she was a single lady. He began talking about a person I didn't know and when he finished, Red asked, "Well, who is this man?" Both Bodie and Riser knew what was coming when he pointed at me, a kid of 18, fresh out of high school. Bill told me later that my eyes got big and my face turned red as I began to deny all that John had said. Anyway, Big Red never forgot that discussion--she and the other waitresses would invite me on a date just to see my face turn red.

The next summer, I approached Bill about a summer job and he found one for me. I would be working on the "TSI crew,"—that's "timber stand improvement"—which, for me, meant using a tree injector to deaden undesirable trees in certain stands on the forest in the Ozark Mountains. Little did I know what hard work that would be. The tree injector wore me down in a short while. The injector consists of a metal tube about four inches in diameter and three feet long, with a cutting blade on the end. The tube was filled with herbicide and weighed about 12+ pounds. Now that doesn't sound like much but 8 hours of plunging it into the base of hickory, blackjack oak, black gum and other "undesirables," made my shoulders and back ache. After a month or so, I was as good as any of the crew, except maybe the Freeman brothers.

The members of the crew were all from the Ozark Mountain areas…all country guys. Some folks would call them hillbillies, but I called them friends. They were a unique breed. There were the Freeman brothers, who it was said could carry a 200-pound wild hog up the mountain on their shoulder after shooting it for food. After working with them, I never doubted that story.

The crew consisted of 10-12 men and a foreman (Dickey Athey). Dickey took me under his wing and that summer taught me how to really work.

I had a problem with stinging insects that summer. I was injecting a black gum tree about 6 inches in diameter at the stump when something started hitting my hard hat. I accused Leamon, the straw boss of the TSI crew, of throwing pea gravel at me but he hadn't. Suddenly, it felt as if someone had struck a kitchen match and applied it to my neck. Then more matches were lit about my face, arms and neck. I had disturbed a hornet's nest, and they didn't like that at all. So, I was in a world of hurt. The crew pulled me away and immediately started dismantling their snakebite kits to get the rubber suction cups in a kit loose. They wet the open end of the cups squeezed them and applied them to my stings which were many. I remember shaking and trembling from the venom. They applied cool water to my head and shoulders, and after a while, I was able to resume work.

Next day, when I showed up at the Piney Work Center, everyone, including the ranger was laughing and pointing at me. Seems the suction cups did their job and sucked out some of the venom, but my face was still swollen. However, that was not what they were laughing at; wherever one of the cups had been applied, there was a round red spot about an inch in diameter. Bill laughed and asked me, "Who did you go out with last night?" I just kept silent and went to work but I was more woods savvy after that and always looked for football-shaped objects in the trees.

I spent that summer working with those men, learning lots of wood lore and becoming a bit savvier. At the end of my tour, I could keep up with the best of them… it was a matter of survival!

Then I left for forestry school, at first Arkansas Polytechnic for 2-1/2 years then Arkansas A&M (now the University of Arkansas) to complete my Bachelor of Science degree in Forest Management in 1968. Bill was generous enough to give me a job during Christmas vacation from school to earn a bit of money, as he knew my dad had none and I was in college, which was expensive.

The next summer, I graduated to the timber marking crew. The crew consisted of Mickey Cochran and Doyne Curtis, two old mountain boomers. I learned to determine if a tree was sound (not hollow), how to apply marking paint to designate it to the loggers for cutting. Sometimes, we marked all merchantable trees to make a regeneration cut, other times it was a thinning. I got to keep the "tally book" which recorded the number of trees of each species and diameter class we marked for sale. I felt like I had arrived. That was a great job and I felt important.

I graduated from forestry school two years later and began my career working on the Ouachita National Forest at Mt. Ida, Arkansas, on the Womble Ranger District. My career for the next 34 years took me to the Sabine NF in east Texas; the Kisatchie NF in Louisiana; the Francis Marion and Sumter NFs in South Carolina, and finally to the Regional Office in Atlanta, Georgia, where I eventually occupied the position of Director of Forest Products. I retired in January 2000 in that position.

I always remember with fondness, my time working for Bill Bodie on the Piney Ranger District, the lessons I learned, and the friends I made there. I credit Bill for much of the success I had in my career.

*Mike Sparks retired in 2000 as Director of Forest Management for the Southern Region. He currently lives in Snellville, Georgia, outside of Atlanta with his wife Barbara.*

## Warsh Day
### By Mike Sparks

It's really strange how certain childhood memories return to us as we get older. One of my more vivid memories as a kid is "warsh day."

Now the word "warsh" is a mispronunciation of the word "wash," but it was commonly used by lots of folks I knew while growing up. There were many mispronunciations from years gone by, depending upon the locality and the origins of the folks talking. Another mispronunciation was the word fire…commonly referred to then as "far." We didn't "fight a fire," we "fit a far."



I was about three years old when I started noticing and now recall that Monday was "warsh day," the day when mama washed our clothes. It was a hard day for her, filled with drudgery, but for me it was another fun day. A little background is in order.

I often wondered at that time why mama would save all the bacon grease we had during the winter in an empty lard can. We didn't have margarine or polyunsaturated stuff to fry meat, mama used pure, unadulterated HOG LARD or bacon grease to fry meat or season vegetables. I recall that when mama cooked black-eyed peas and there were leftovers, they would be put into a bowl in an "ice box." As they were removed from the ice box the next day, there would be a layer of solid white fat on top of the peas in the bowl. At that time, you could buy lard at the grocery store in a one-gallon metal can with handles. When the lard was gone, the metal buckets could be used for many tasks such as picking blackberries in the springtime. But I digress.

Mama also saved the wood ashes from our wood-burning stove, and the rainfall runoff from the roof was saved in a big wooden barrel. On a nice warm day, when springtime arrived, she would start the process of making soap. She would place the wood ashes in a can and leach clean rainwater through the ashes. Then collect the runoff, which contained the 'magic' ingredient…LYE. Lye, Sodium Hydroxide, a common ingredient of soap in those days.

She started by putting the bacon grease in a huge ole black kettle, built a fire under it, and started it to cook. She then added the rainwater and some other ingredients I can't recall what, but when it came to a "bile" or boil, she would add the final ingredient….the LYE. I'll never forget the smell. It was kinda sweet but not pleasant. Sometimes folks added rosewater or perfume to make it smell better.

After the contents of the pot began to thicken, as the water evaporated, mama would "spoon" the thick mass into flat baking pans, filling them about two inches deep. She allowed the concoction to cool for a while until it hardened. She then cut it into squares, and we had bars of "lye soap."

Now friends, lye soap would get you clean….ever so clean. You've heard the term "squeaky clean?" Well…you were slippery and squeaky when you came out of the bathtub after a bath with lye soap. Babies had to be held very carefully or they might slip out of your hands.

Now back to "warsh day." As I said earlier, Monday was the day to clean clothes. All the clothes eventually went into the big black kettle which was already filled with water. It was my chore to place wood strips under the kettle and light the fire. What three-year-old kid would you trust today to start a fire?

Mama carried several gallons of the rainwater from the rain barrel and started it to "bilin" (boiling). Shavings of lye soap were added. Then, she put in the white clothes. Didn't want to add colored clothing to the wash or it might "bleed" into the white shirts. My job at that time was to take the wooden "stir pole" and keep the clothes moving in the kettle. I must have been a little older at that time, but I made a good "agitator" in those days. After a while, mama would use the pole to remove the clothes from the kettle. After dripping a bit, she would put them into another large tub with clean cold water and rinse the soap out of them.

For the white clothes, the tub of clean water had "bluing" added. The bluing was purchased at the grocery store and a few drops of it were all that was needed to turn the water blue. The white clothes seemed even whiter after immersing them in the blue water.

The process was repeated for the colored clothing items, except for the bluing. Then they were all hung onto the clothesline to drip dry. Now, hanging clothing on a line to dry was an art form. Different pieces of clothing had to be hung different ways. For example, pants were hung from the cuffs. Shirts were hung upside down. This ensured that ironing them would be a bit easier. "Unmentionables" were hung on the middle line of the clothes lines so as not to be visible to the neighbors. Each piece of clothing was placed on the line so that one clothespin could hold the side of an adjoining piece. Efficiency was important.

Mama had the desire to make sure the clothes were clean but we lived on a dirt road and when the occasional car or horse and wagon came by, they'd stir up dust to settle on her clean clothes, mama was not happy. Birds also aggravated mama when they soiled the drying clothing.

We call these "The Good Old Days" but they weren't necessarily good by today's standards. I remember how hard my parents worked just to keep us going. Our parents, of course, did not know of the luxuries we have today. They only knew hard work. They were part of the Greatest Generation. They survived the Great Depression and many of the men fought in WWII and then came home to help build a nation.

Today, we don't really know what it means to "work hard" but our parents did because they cared about us and they cared about our great Nation. We remember them with love and devotion. It was a time when people were honest, hardworking, and cared about others. If there had been a 6 o'clock news, it would tell how someone "got down" (became ill), and neighbors and friends dropped by to help harvest their crops. There would be no news about drugs, shootings, car wrecks, terrorism and the like. When Grandpa's barn burned down, all the neighborhood menfolk gathered on his farm and built a new barn for him. He just had to buy the materials. THE GOLDEN RULE was something we all learned at home and at school.

Sometimes, I wish I could go back to those days…

**Launch of the Wildland Fire Merit Badge** – **Scouting America** (formerly known as Boy Scouts of America) announced the official launch of the Wildland Fire Management merit badge at the 2026 National Jamboree, providing Scouts with the opportunity to explore wildfire prevention, fire ecology, land stewardship, emergency preparedness, and natural resource management. The new merit badge reflects the growing importance of understanding wildfire behavior and related topics. Developed in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and Society of American Foresters, the merit badge introduces Scouts to the science and management of wildland fire while highlighting the critical role that fire and emergency response professionals play in protecting communities, ecosystems, and public lands.

"As communities across the nation continue to face increasing wildfire challenges, it is more important than ever that young people understand both the risks and the ecological role of fire," said Michael Huneke, U.S. Forest Service and National Chair for Scouting America's Outdoor Ethics and Conservation Committee. "By learning about wildfire prevention, ecosystem management, and emergency response, Scouts can become informed stewards of the land and better prepared citizens while introducing them to rewarding careers in conservation and public service."

# We Remember….



**Judge Billy S. Ball** was born January 12, 1941, in Dallas, Texas, to the late Mapel Rosella (Brinkley) Ball and Donald William Ball. He passed away Tuesday, July 21, 2026, in a hospice facility near Lufkin, TX.

Judge Ball devoted his entire adult life to serving and protecting others. His distinguished career of public service began with the United States Navy, where he proudly served his country during the Vietnam War. He graduated from Sam Houston State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Law Enforcement and Police Science. He joined the Dallas Police Department in 1966, serving first as a patrolman before becoming an investigator assigned to the Narcotics Section of the Special Services Bureau. He later served on a Federal Drug Enforcement Task Force, working undercover throughout a multi-state region. During his law enforcement career, he received the Dallas Police Department's Meritorious Conduct Award - the department's second-highest honor - for bravery in saving the life of a fellow federal agent during an undercover operation. He was also recognized by the White House for his outstanding investigative work, drug seizures, and law enforcement achievements.

In 1974, Judge Ball moved his family to Lufkin, Texas, to begin his career with the United States Forest Service as the first Criminal Investigator assigned in Texas. Throughout his tenure, he served in numerous leadership positions, including Law Enforcement Staff Officer for the National Forests in Texas and later as Zone Supervisory Criminal Investigator, overseeing investigative and law enforcement operations across seven southern states and the Caribbean. His work earned numerous commendations for leadership, investigative excellence, and public safety, including being named the 1984 Conservation Officer of the Year for the State of Texas.

Following his federal service, Judge Ball continued his lifelong commitment to the people of Angelina County by serving more than two decades as Justice of the Peace for Precinct 1. Known for his fairness, compassion, and dedication to his community, he remained active in public service until declining health no longer allowed him to continue. Beyond the courtroom, he faithfully served his community through the Lufkin Lions Club, chaired the Texas State Forest Festival for twenty years, taught criminal justice courses at Angelina College, served on numerous civic and law enforcement organizations, and was instrumental in securing funding and equipment for law enforcement agencies throughout East Texas.

Above all, Judge Ball loved his family. He was a man of integrity, courage, and unwavering service whose impact on his community will continue to be felt for generations. He truly left this world a better place than he found it.

Memorial services with military honors for Judge Billy S. Ball, 85, of Lufkin were held Saturday, August 1, 2026, in the Carroway Funeral Home Chapel with Reverend Andrew Garrett and Sheriff Tom Selman officiating. Memorial contributions may be made to Hospice in the Pines, 1504 W. Frank Avenue, Lufkin, Texas 75904. Memories and condolences may be added at www.carrowayfuneralhome.com



**Everett "Bill" Cobb**, age 94, of Mount Ida, Arkansas, passed away August 16, 2026, in Mount Ida. He was born November 28, 1931, in Norman, Arkansas to Harvey and Inez (Gaston) Cobb.

Bill retired in 1985 after working 32 years for the U.S. Forest Service. He started his career as a Timber Marker on Womble District of the Ouachita National Forest and retired as a Timber Sale Administrator. Bill enjoyed time with his wife and family more than anything. He loved being in the outdoors, deer hunting, and gardening

He was preceded in death by his parents, stepmother, one sister, and two brothers. Bill is survived by his wife of 74 years-Wynemia (Hamilton) Cobb of Mount Ida, his three children, 4 grandchildren, 2 great-grandchildren, one sister, and many nieces, nephews, and other family.

A service was held at the Thornton Funeral Home Chapel on August 20, 2026, with Brother Don Vaughn officiating. Visit https://www.thorntonfh.com/obituaries/everett-cobb to offer memorial and view a photo gallery.



**David Cooper Combs**, of Carlton, Georgia, passed away peacefully on July 17, 2026, at the age of 73. He will be remembered as a dedicated forestry professional, a beloved family member, a devoted companion, and a friend whose intelligence, humor, curiosity, and kindness left a lasting impression on all who knew him.

David was born on March 3, 1953. He grew up in Burlington, North Carolina, where he developed an appreciation for the natural world that would become a defining part of both his personal life and professional career. Those early years also helped shape David's sharp wit and playful sense of humor, which his sister Sue knew well—often finding herself the good-natured recipient of his clever observations and playful jokes.

David devoted his professional life to the USDA Forest Service, working for Forest Inventory and Analysis where he was surrounded by friends who felt more like family. For almost a decade, he worked throughout the southeast US with this close-knit group of biologists. Oh, the stories they could tell. In fact, he served as best man when two of these friends got married. Even after 40+ years, they have stayed in touch, even having the privilege to celebrate the 90th birthday of one in 2025. He will be greatly missed by this dynamic group of friends/family.

David then began his work in research at the Southern Research Station. He built a distinguished career with and his work reflected a lifelong commitment to understanding, protecting, and sustaining America's forest resources. David contributed valuable knowledge to the field of forestry research and was a co-author of the publication Southern Pine Defoliation Growth Response Data, contributing to the scientific understanding of how southern pine forests respond to environmental challenges. His expertise, dedication, and commitment to research earned him the respect of colleagues throughout the forestry community.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, David was known for his sharp mind, quick wit, and playful sense of humor. He enjoyed making people laugh and was always ready with a clever remark or a good story. David jokingly claimed that he was the inventor of the selfie, long before it became a part of everyday life. That playful claim reflected his creativity, humor, and the joy he brought to those around him.

David enjoyed discovering new local restaurants and exploring the unique character of the places around him. He appreciated good food, new experiences, and the simple enjoyment of finding a new favorite spot. David had a genuine curiosity about the world and found joy in life's everyday moments. He had a special love for his cats, who were much more than pets—they were beloved companions and, in many ways, like his children. They brought him comfort, companionship, and endless happiness, and he took great pride in caring for them.

David was a proud American who loved his country and valued the principles of service, responsibility, and stewardship. His dedication to the United States Forest Service reflected that commitment, as he spent his career working to protect and preserve the nation's natural resources for future generations.

David shared his life with his fiancée, Barbara Mercer, who was a cherished and deeply important part of his journey. The two shared many years together, building a life filled with love, laughter, companionship, and countless memories. Their relationship began through their shared connection to the U.S. Forest Service, where they both worked and developed a bond rooted in their common dedication to public service. Over the years, David and Barbara enjoyed not only their time together but also the extended family and friendships they built along the way. Barbara was a constant source of love and companionship in David's life, and the memories they created together will continue to live on through her and all those who knew them.

David is survived by his fiancée, Barbara Mercer; his sister, Sue Harrod, and her family. He is also survived by Barbara's two sons, extended family, friends, and many colleagues  David was preceded in death by his parents, Sidney Combs and Heloise Combs. He leaves behind a legacy of family, friendship, laughter, service and scientific contribution. The forests he helped study, the family who loved him and the many lives he touched will continue to reflect the impact of a remarkable man who brought knowledge, humor, and humanity to everything he did.

A Graveside Service was held on Friday, August 7, 2026, at Alamance Memorial Park in Burlington, NC. Memorial contributions may be made to the Madison Oglethorpe Animal Shelter, 1888 Danielsville Rd., Danielsville, GA 30633 (https://www.moaspets.com/) reflecting David's lifelong dedication and love of animals.



**Commander Welch Calvin Fair, Jr**, of Decatur, Georgia), born on August 11, 1953, passed away on August 28, 2026 from a brief and sudden illness. He leaves behind his wife of 49 years, Yvonne Bernice Johnson. They were blessed with two sons, Jason Fair and Welch Fair III.

Welch's early education took place at elementary schools in Oahu, Hawaii; Killeen, Texas; and Atlanta, GA. He graduated with honors from Southwest High School in Atlanta in 1972, earning a full NROTC scholarship to Savannah State University from which Welch received a bachelor's degree in Electrical and Electronics Engineering Technology in 1976. Welch also received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and Management from LaRoche College and a Master of Arts in Business Management degree from Michigan University.

Welch gave his life to God at an early age and was baptized in Killeen, Texas. He continued to serve the Lord in his later years at First Unity Baptist Church where he was active as Chairman until his death.

Commander Fair served in and made a career in the United States Navy for 23 years. He was a highly decorated officer who left a lasting mark at every duty station. His honorees included the Navy Commendation Medal (fifth award), Navy Unit Commendation, Navy "E" Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Southwest Asia Service Medal, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (third award), and numerous letters of commendation.

Following his Navy career, he joined the Forest Service as a contract trainee in Procurement and Property in the Southern Regional Office, where he brought to the Forest Service the disciplined leadership, integrity, and devotion to duty he had learned in the Navy. For years after becoming a qualified Contracting Officer, he continued to say "I'm just a contract trainee" just to get a reaction from his coworkers.

Welch was a person of habit, reported to work same time, and ate chicken salad or tuna sandwich with a diet coke daily. Welch spoiled Regional Office employees by providing goodies which came in handy during the end of the fiscal year. Welch never met a stranger and enjoyed playing golf with Forest Service friends and others. He was a genuine man and a jokester, who loved entertaining and spreading laughter and joy.

Welch was preceded in death by father, Welch C. Fair, Sr., mother Ruthie Mae Fair, and brother, Jeffrey Fair. He leaves to cherish his memories his wife Yvonne Fair, his sons, Jason Fair (Jackie), and Welch C. Fair III (Stephanie), 11 grandchildren, 1 great granddaughter, 9 surviving siblings 2 sisters and 9 brothers and spouses, aunts, nieces, nephew, god-children, cousins, extended family members, and friends.

A Celebration of Life service was held at Cross Culture Church in Stonecrest, GA on September 12. Burial was in the Harpersville Memorial Gardens, Harpersville, AL, on September 14.



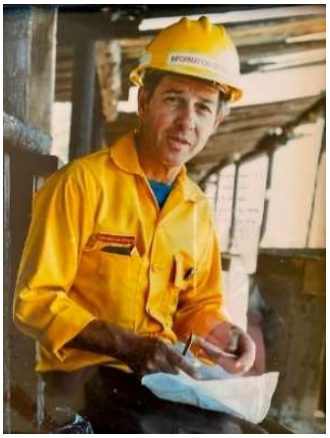
**Roger Dean Fryar**, a charismatic and compassionate soul, entered this world on September 21, 1951, in Paris, Texas. Roger touched the hearts of many with his laughter, empathy, and selfless acts of kindness. He was a beacon of light in the lives of those fortunate to have known him, radiating warmth, generosity, and faith. His life was a testament to the scripture from Matthew 5:16 - "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Roger touched the hearts of many with his laughter, empathy, and selfless acts of kindness.

Roger was a man of many talents. After a distinguished career as a Forester with the US Forest Service, he retired in 2009, only to channel his energy into a myriad of hobbies that reflected his zest for life. From fishing with his sons to beekeeping, from strumming the strings on his guitar, banjo, mandolin, and ukulele, to mastering foreign languages (Spanish and Italian), he lived each day with passion and purpose. Roger's extraordinary leadership skills were recognized in his roles as Disaster Relief Team Captain on US Forest Service Incident Command. His faith was profound, leading music for his Sunday school class at the First Baptist Church in Russellville, Arkansas, participating in foreign mission trips to Mexico, El Salvador, and Honduras, and leading a Disaster Relief Team out of the same church.

Roger is survived by his wife of 54 years, Janet Fryar, their four children, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and by his brother. His love for his family was a testament to his compassionate nature, and

what mattered most to him was his faith and family. Preceded in death by his parents, Jack and Bernice Fryar, Roger's legacy of love and faith continues to live on in the hearts of those he left behind.

A Celebration of Life Service was held on Saturday, September 12, 2026, at the First Baptist Church, 200 South Denver Avenue, Russellville, Arkansas. We invite you to share your fond memories of Roger and upload cherished photos to his memorial page. May these shared memories bring comfort and help us celebrate the remarkable life of Roger Dean Fryar. If you would like to make a memorial donation, Roger's passion and commitment to the following organizations would honor his memory: First Baptist Church Missions: https://www.fbcruss.org/give/, Arkansas Baptist Disaster Relief: https://abscdisasterrelief.org/



**Robert (Bobby) N. Kitchens**, age 87, of Andalusia, Alabama, formerly of Thomson, Georgia, went to be with his Lord on Sunday, October 11, 2026, at a hospital in Dothan, Alabama.

Bobby was a proud graduate of Thomson High School, GA, where he graduated with honors. He also achieved the distinguished rank of Eagle Scout, an accomplishment that reflected his dedication, leadership, and commitment to service. He continued his education at the University of Georgia, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry, followed by a Master's degree in Plant Genetics from North Carolina State University.

Bobby's commitment to service began early in life when he joined Army ROTC in high school and continued the program throughout college. Just two weeks after graduation, he was commissioned as a First Lieutenant, a distinction above the rank typically awarded to newly commissioned officers. He was later promoted to Captain and served in that capacity for an additional five years before joining the Army Reserves, where he served for another five years.

Bobby went on to build a passionate and distinguished career with the United States Forest Service. He devoted more than 33 years to the agency before retiring in 1994. His dedication to protecting the nation's forests did not end with retirement. He continued working with the Forest Service as an Incident Commander, traveling with teams across the country to assist with wildfire prevention and management.

Throughout his career, Bobby shared his extensive knowledge and experience by teaching wildfire management courses and providing safety training to personnel across the country. He also played an important role in public relations during numerous wildfire incidents throughout the United States, helping communicate critical information and support efforts surrounding these challenging events. His leadership, expertise, and commitment to public safety made him a valuable resource in the field of wildfire management.

Above all his professional accomplishments, Bobby deeply loved his wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. His family held a special place in his heart, and the love he shared with them was an important part of his life. Of course, Bobby also had a sense of humor about his demanding career. He often joked that important family events should never be planned during fire season! It was a fitting reminder of the dedication his work required and a bit of humor his loved ones will always remember.

Even after retirement, Bobby continued doing the work he loved, sharing his knowledge and experience with others and contributing to wildfire safety and management across the country. His years of service and dedication leave a lasting legacy in forestry and wildfire management.

Bobby will be remembered for his distinguished career, his devotion to his family, his sense of humor, and the meaningful contributions he made throughout his life. His legacy of love, service, and dedication will live on through the family he cherished and the many lives he touched.

Bobby is survived by his wife of 38 years Vickie Carter Kitchens, a sister, and five children. He is preceded in death by his parents and a son.

A service was held at Keahey Funeral Home with a burial service at Andalusia Memorial Cemetery on October 16, 2026.

**Judith "Judy"Ann Logan** passed away on August 14, 2026. She was an employee on the Ouachita National Forest in Arkansas before her retirement in 2020. Judy was a professional forester by training, and a long-time employee of the USDA Forest Service. She served as District Silviculturist for the Mena Ranger

District of the Ouachita NF, Forest NEPA Coordinator on the Ouachita, and finally, as Air Resource Specialist serving multiple National Forests in the Integrated Resource Management Staff Unit in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Arrangements by Arkansas Cremation, Little Rock, Arkansas. If you would like to leave a message of condolence to the family, you may do so using the Guestbook section at https://www.arkansascremation.com/obituaries/judith-logan .



**Douglas Earl Luepke**, 79, of Sandy Springs, Georgia, passed away peacefully on Monday, August 3, 2026. Born on January 18, 1947, in Chicago, Illinois, Douglas was the beloved son of the late Howard Reinhardt Luepke and Josephine Micek Luepke. He was raised in Rochester, New York, in a home rooted in faith and service, values that guided him throughout his entire life. A man of deep faith, he was a devoted, longtime member of St. Jude the Apostle Catholic Church.

Doug's lifelong love for nature began early. It led him to attend Paul Smith's College in the Adirondack Mountains, where he graduated with a degree in Forestry. Ready to serve his country, he joined the U.S. Army and was stationed in Germany. It was there that Janis Iodice left New York to join him, and the two were married in 1971, beginning a beautiful life together that spanned 55 years.

Following their move to the Atlanta area in 1975, Doug built a distinguished career as a Photogrammetrist and the Regional GPS Coordinator for the USDA Forest Service Southern Region. As a pioneer in satellite mapping, his technical evaluations helped shape modern forestry engineering protocols across 13 states. His expertise also took him internationally to Indonesia, the Philippines, Venezuela, and Italy, where he trained global colleagues in this emerging technology. Doug's unique skills were called upon during a moment of profound public need in 2002, when he provided critical satellite and forensic mapping assistance to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) during a major recovery operation in North Georgia, ultimately bringing closure to hundreds of families.

While his career was filled with milestone achievements, his greatest joy was his family. Together with Janis, he raised two sons, Reid and Todd. Doug was a deeply present father who never missed a chance to support his boys, enthusiastically coaching their youth soccer and baseball teams for many years.

In his well-deserved retirement, Doug was an avid golfer who could most often be found on the fairways. He was also an accomplished hunter and sportsman. Widely known as the ultimate handyman, Doug possessed an analytical mind and patient hands; he could truly fix absolutely anything around the home. He even single-handedly built an addition to the family home, a testament to his skill and devotion to his family. He will be remembered as a brilliant mind, a patient coach, and a fiercely devoted husband, father, and grandfather.

Doug is survived by his loving wife, Janis Luepke of Sandy Springs, his two sons, and four grandchildren. He is also survived by two sisters and one brother, as well as many nieces, nephews, extended family members, former colleagues, and close friends. He was preceded in death by his parents, Howard and Josephine Luepke.

A Funeral Mass was celebrated at St. Jude the Apostle Catholic Church, Sandy Springs, GA, on August 14, 2026. Following the Mass, a private burial for family took place at Arlington Memorial Park. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made in Douglas' name to St. Jude the Apostle Catholic Church.



**Lourdes Rosa-Aquino**, lovingly known as "Lou" or "Lulu," was born on April 7, 1968, in San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico, to Emilio Rosa and Carmen Figueroa, she passed away peacefully on September 17, 2026, in St. Augustine, Florida. Lourdes lived a life rooted in faith, family, service, and love.

Family was one of Lourdes' greatest blessings and joys. She shared a deep and enduring love with her husband, Joel, and found her greatest joy in being Alex's mother. He was the pride of her life, and she celebrated his accomplishments, supported his dreams, and loved him unconditionally. Her faith guided her daily, and she lived that faith through acts of kindness, generosity, and service to others.

She had a gift for making people feel welcome, appreciated, and cared for. Whether she was creating crafts, preserving cherished memories through scrapbooking, or bringing family and friends together, she found joy in making others happy. Her presence filled every room with warmth, laughter, and love, and her generous spirit touched countless lives.

Lourdes graduated from the University of Turabo and enjoyed a successful 20-year career with the U.S. Forest Service in Atlanta, Georgia, and Puerto Rico. As Regional Program Manager for the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) for the Southern Region, she was passionate about helping older adults gain valuable skills and meaningful employment opportunities. Her dedication and exceptional leadership were recognized by the Metropolitan Atlanta Federal Executive Board, which honored her with the Outstanding Professional Employee of the Year Award in 2007.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Lourdes devoted countless hours to serving others. She volunteered and worked for several years at St. Gerard Campus, a nonprofit maternity home, pregnancy resource center, and high school dedicated to empowering young parents. There, she lovingly cared for infants, mentored and counseled young women, taught Spanish, and assisted in grant-writing efforts. She approached every endeavor with compassion, enthusiasm, and a sincere desire to make a difference in the lives of others.

Lourdes will be remembered for her kindness, compassion, deep faith, and enduring devotion to her family and friends. Her legacy of love, generosity, and selfless service will continue to inspire all who were blessed to know her.

She was preceded in death by her paternal grandparents, Emilio and Cirila Rosa, and her maternal grandparents, Justino and Antonia Figueroa.

She is survived by her beloved husband, Joel Aquino; her cherished son, Alex Aquino; her parents, Emilio B. Rosa and Carmen Figueroa Zayas; her two sisters, and one brother, nephews and nieces; her godchildren; and numerous extended family members and dear friends.

Mass was celebrated on September 29, 2026, with inurnment at San Lorenzo Cemetery in St. Augustine. May her memory live on in the hearts of all who knew and loved her. Tributes may be viewed and added at: https://www.stjohnsfamilyfuneralhome.com/obituaries/lourdes-rosa-aquino/#!/TributeWall



**Charles "Charlie" Van Sickle** of Candler, North Carolina, passed away peacefully at home on September 12, 2026, at age 90. Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to Robert William and Ninabelle Ellen Van Sickle.

Charlie earned a Bachelor's degree in Forestry from the University of Michigan, and a Master's degree in Forestry Economics from Virginia Tech. He served in the U.S. Army during the Cold War. He spent most of his career with the U.S. Forest Service, ultimately serving as Assistant Director of the Southern Research Station in Asheville, NC.

He married Helen Ann Fasick on December 27, 1964. They shared 39 wonderful years together and raised two daughters, Page and Ruth. After Helen's passing in 2003, Charlie was fortunate to find love again with Annie James, whom he married before she passed away in 2021. He met Mitzi Oleinik in 2022 and they were devoted to each other until his death.

Charlie had a mind full of curiosity and loved learning, tinkering, and finding a good deal. He enjoyed shooting skeet, billiards, golf, bicycling, jogging, camping, and traveling. He collected clocks, pocket watches, fountain pens, and pocket knives.

He is survived by his daughters: Page Van Sickle and Ruth Van Sickle, grandchildren Devin, Sophie, and Helen, sister Janet, sons-in-law Eric and Bendik, and his beloved friend Mitzi.

Charlie was intelligent, kind, and thoughtful, deeply proud of his grandchildren, and truly one of a kind. He brought love, joy, and companionship to the lives of many. He was a very special man who will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved him.

A Celebration of Charlie's Life is scheduled for November 15, 2026, at 2:00 p.m. at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, 433 Bone Camp Road, Marshall, NC, 28753. It is scheduled to be streamed online. For more information and tributes to Charlie, go to: https://grocefuneralhome.com/obits/charles-charlie-van-sickle/

In lieu of flowers, the family kindly asks that you consider a donation to an organization close to Charlie's heart, such as The North Carolina Arboretum (https://ncarboretum.org/donate/) or the Arbor Day Foundation (https://www.arborday.org/).

# LOCAL GROUP NEWS

## Southern Forest Service Retirees Get Together

**National Forests in Alabama** – Retirees, spouses, and friends meet for lunch the first Wednesday in February, April, June, August, October, and December at 11:15 am, McAlister's Restaurant in Prattville. Contact: Bill Fadden, 334-285-0962.

**Chattahoochee-Oconee NF -** Retirees, spouses, and friends meet periodically in Gainesville and Blairsville for lunch. Contact for Gainesville is Dick Rightmyer, rightmyer3x@bellsouth.net , 678-936-5937. Contact for Blairsville is Frances Mason, rangerjr@windstream.net , 706-781-9723.

**Cherokee NF (South)** – Retirees, spouses, and friends meet for lunch at 11:30 am on the third Tuesday of each month in Cleveland, TN. Contact: Jack N. Callahan, Jackn1945@bellsouth.net . 423-284-7885. 3621 Crestwood Drive NW Cleveland, TN 37312.

**Cherokee NF (North) -** Retirees, spouses, and friends meet for lunch at 11:30 am on the first Tuesday of each month, Maple Grove Restaurant, in Unicoi, TN. Contact Gary Watson at 423 677 3108.

**National Forests in Florida** – Contact Terri McDonald 352-454-5385, tmcd1663@aol.com .

**Francis Marion & Sumter NF** - FM&S Retirees meet for lunch the second Tuesday of April and October at the Flight Deck. For further details, contact: Ed Hedgecock at ehedgecock@sc.rr.com .

**George Washington NF** - Retirees, spouses, and friends meet for breakfast at 9:00 am on the first Wednesday of even numbered months at the Village Inn Restaurant on US 11, a short distance off I-81 at Exit 240. Contact: Melonie Knicely, mdknicely@yahoo.com

**Jefferson & George Washington NF** – The group that previously met in Salem, VA, is no longer active. For more info or to express interest, contact Tom Poulin at 540-553-2217 or email to fay_p2000@yahoo.com .

**Kisatchie NF** – No contact information available.

**National Forests in Mississippi** – No contact information available.

**National Forests in North Carolina** – Retirees, spouses, and friends in the Franklin area meet at 11:30 am for lunch the last Wednesday of every month: contact George Lynch at georgelynch@verizon.net or 828-369-9722.

Retirees, spouses, and friends in the Robbinsville Area meet at 11:30 for lunch the 2nd Tuesday of every month: contact Joe Bonnette at jbbonnette@frontier.com.

**Ouachita NF** - Retirees, spouses, and friends meet for breakfast the third Tuesday of each month at 8:30 am at the Cracker Barrel Restaurant in the Cornerstone Shopping Center, Hot Springs, AR. Contact: Bill Pell, 501-282-4032, bpell@att.net.

**Ozark-St. Francis NFs** retirees meet for breakfast at 8:00 am on the last Friday of each month at the Old South Restaurant in Russellville, AR. Contact O.D. Smith at 479-968-3287 or dylesmith@suddenlink.net

**Regional Office, Northeast Atlanta** – Retirees, spouses, and friends meet for breakfast the last Tuesday of each month (except December) at the IHOP Restaurant, 4205 Stone Mountain Highway, Hwy 78, at 7:30 am. The restaurant is located in the Killian Hill Village Shopping Center.

**Regional Office, Cobb County** – Retirees, spouses, and friends meet the last Tuesday of the month at 9:00 am at the COME-N-GET IT Family Restaurant, 1409 Church St. Ext, Suite E, Marietta, GA 30060. Contact: Sonny Cudabac scudabac@mindspring.com .

**Southern Research Station, Athens, GA** – Retirees meet for breakfast the first Tuesday of the month at 9:00 am at the Cracker Barrel on Epps Bridge Road in Athens. For more info, contact Jim McMinn at jwmcminn@charter.net

**National Forests and Grasslands in Texas** – Retirees, spouses and friends meet for lunch the 4th Friday of each month at 11:15 am at Golden Corral, 2401 S. First St., Lufkin, TX. Contacts: Carolyn Hughes 936-875-3328 (hm) or cphughes@hotmail.com or Gay Ippolito 936-635-1998.

**Sam Houston National Forest** meets quarterly, the second Thursday of January, April, July and October at 10 AM for Brunch at the Black Walnut Cafe, 2971 Hawthorne Dr., in Conroe, TX. Contact Shelly Allen by text or call - 936-537-8898 email: sallen@eastex.net




*Sam Houston/National Forests and Grasslands in Texas retirees gathered in October in Conroe Texas. From left: Tim Bigler, Shelly Allen, Sandy Burleson, Duane Wiechman, Glen Elms, John Ippolito, Gay Ippolito, Craig Wheeler.*

## Judge Temporarily Halts Forest Service Reorganization

(Adapted from October 19 article in the Utah News Dispatch by Katie McKellar)

On October 13, 2026, a federal judge has issued a preliminary ruling blocking the Trump administration from moving the U.S. Forest Service's headquarters from Washington, D.C. to Salt Lake City while the rest of the lawsuit over the relocation plays out in court. The judge granted a stay on the move, writing in the order that Congress has put restrictions on USDA's "ability to reorganize without congressional buy-in" and "has almost certainly been violating those restrictions," adding that "preliminary relief is necessary to protect the congressional prerogative, prevent irreparable harm to federal employees, and vindicate the public interest."

A group of nonprofits, local governments and labor union organizations filed the lawsuit to block the plan as unlawful, calling it an "unprecedented reorganization" that would close offices across the country and force thousands of USDA employees to "choose between their families, communities, churches, and lives they have built, and their careers."

However, the judge also noted in his ruling that the "temporal scope of this relief could end up being quite short," so the situation may have changed by the time you get this newsletter. To stay updated weekly in your inbox on this and other matters affecting the Forest Service, join National Association of Forest Service Retirees at https://nafsr.org/

# Southern Forest Service Retirees Association
# Membership Registration Form

Please complete and include the following form when joining or renewing membership in the Association.

**Name:**_____

**Year of Retirement:** _____ **Spouse's Name (if applicable):**_____

**Physical Address:** _____

_____

**City, State, Zip Code:** _____

**Cell Phone:** _____ **Home Phone:** _____

**Email Address:** _____(required for electronic delivery of newsletter)

- ☐ I would like to join as a **new** member. I understand my first year of membership is FREE, and I will receive electronic copies of 3 issues of Association newsletter sent to my email inbox.

  Credit for my recruitment to join goes to: _____

- ☐ I would like to **renew** my membership. Enclosed is $_____ for ____ year(s) of membership at $25.00 per year.
  (Choose one option for distribution of the newsletter:)
  - ☐ I would like to receive the Association newsletter **electronically only**. I understand that choosing this option greatly lowers costs to the Association, reducing need for future dues increases.
  - ☐ I would like to receive **hard copies** of the Association newsletter delivered to my physical mailbox.

- ☐ I would like to make an additional donation to the Association. I am including $_____ in addition to any membership dues to help the Association cover costs.

  I am making my donation in honor of _____

**Please complete this form and submit any payment online at** https://www.southernforestretirees.org/ **,**
**or mail check payable to SFSRA to Dick Rightmyer, 405 Christopher Drive, Gainesville GA 30501-2220.**
**Please indicate on check memo line intended year(s) for dues and any portion for donation.**

**Member Benefits:**

- Stay in touch with old friends and co-workers; maintain old connections and make new ones.
- Receive 3 times a year the Association newsletter containing articles on Forest Service history, current events in the Southern Region and Southern Research Station, and updates on retirees.
- Keep your contacts updated with an annual membership directory.
- Stay informed on retiree news with email blasts.
- Enjoy online and in-person gatherings with fellow retirees and representatives of the Southern Region and Southern Research Station.

**Please Note: To be included in the yearly (published in March) membership directory, your new membership applications or updated current membership information must be received by February 5th.**

v. 2025/01/11