Southern Forest Lookout

Newsletter of the Southern Forest Service Retirees Association

Volume 55, Issue 2 **July 2025**

A kayaker runs the Rock-in-the-Hole-in-the-Wall rapids on the Chattooga River, one of the stretches braved by Charlie Huppuch in an Air Force raft in 1965. Read about his river running adventure on page 20 (Photo from https://shanesliquidlogic.blogspot.com/)

Association News

SFSRA Hosts First Virtual Gathering 11

Summer Luncheon Held ... 11

New Members! 12

Recruitment for Board Vacancies 12

Features

Return of the King!
By Les Burril w/ Bill McMillan ... 12

Outlaws on the Yellowpine
By Keith Utz 17

Exploring the Chattooga River
By Charlie Huppuch 20

We Remember...

Dick Cox 22

Randy Fowler 24

Barney Parker 25

Local Group News

Meetings and Contacts 26

Southern Forest Lookout is published by the Southern Forest Service Retirees Association
in March, July, and November each year.
Annual dues of $25.00 are payable by March 31.
Make checks payable to SFSRA. Mailing address: Dick Rightmyer, 405 Christopher Drive, Gainesville GA 30501-2220.
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.

Board Members

President:	Tim Mersmann
Vice President:	Margrett "Gretta" Boley
Treasurer:	Dick Rightmyer
Secretary	Vanessa Hampton
Director:	Thomas Anderson
Director:	Marisue Hilliard
Director:	Steve Weaver
Past President:	Tom Darden

Appointees

Newsletter Editor:	Mary Dahl
Newsletter Team Members:	Debbie Caffin, John Caffin
Membership Committee Chair:	Laura Vann
Database Manager:	David Meriwether
Web Master:	Eric Schmeckpeper
Obituaries:	Mary Dahl
Event Planner:	Vacant
Representative to National Association of Forest Service Retirees:	Marisue Hilliard
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/

Message From Tim Mersmann, Association President

Hello Retirees! I hope the summer finds you and all of your loved ones well. In my last message in the March 2025 newsletter, I pointed to an early action of the new administration to dismiss thousands of probationary employees from the Forest Service. Since then, additional actions targeting the Forest Service have been initiated that could significantly change the agency and its mission as we have known it. The unprecedented nature of these actions is reflected in an opinion piece written by six previous Chiefs of the Forest Service, which we reprint for you on the next page. Our retirees' association will remain strictly nonpartisan on these matters; however, we believe it is important for retirees to understand potential impacts to the Forest Service from these pending actions.

It is difficult for any of us to keep up with the rapidly changing status of administration activities and related court cases, and impossible for our association to keep you informed of these changes in a timely manner. In addition, information coming directly from the Forest Service is very limited. Fortunately, the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) is monitoring the situation closely and regularly posting important information on their website at https://nafsr.org/ . I strongly encourage you to visit this website frequently to stay updated and to learn ways you can act in support of the Forest Service and its employees. Better yet, go ahead and join NAFSR to get their regular email updates and support their work. In addition, if your "do" Facebook, joining these Facebook groups can help you stay informed: *US Forest Service Employees* and *USDA Forest Service Employees and Friends*.

In brief, three major current threats could severely impact the Forest Service and its mission:

1. **Loss of Employees and Funding:** In addition to the 3,400 probationary employees initially slated for removal (currently stayed by the courts), about 4,000 employees have chosen deferred resignation or early retirement after receiving emails threatening elimination of their positions. These losses would represent more than 20% of agency staffing, but do not include additional Reduction in Force (RIF) plans that are yet to be released pending court cases. The President's Proposed Budget for 2026 eliminates all funding for both Forest Service Research and State and Private Forestry and transfers all funding for wildland firefighting to the Department of Interior; remaining programs have funding reduced by 21% to 48%. Overall, proposed Forest Service funding would be cut 65%. The Forest Service has been through downsizing and budget cuts before, but nothing this extreme.
2. **Transfer of Wildland Firefighting to USDI:** Administration-supported legislation would consolidate all wildland firefighting resources under one agency in the Department of Interior. Besides losing critical funding and employees, the Forest Service would lose significant capacity to deliver integrated management of national forests. It is unclear how essential prescribed fire capacity would be maintained if this legislation is passed.
3. **Sale or Transfer of Federal Public Lands:** Some in Congress and the administration are intent on selling federal public lands for revenue or opportunities for development, or transferring federal lands to states to reduce federal management costs. An initial proposal to sell 2-3 million acres of Forest Service and BLM lands was withdrawn from the "Big Beautiful Bill" Act recently passed by Congress due to procedural constraints and bipartisan pushback from some congressional members and the public. However, efforts and intent to sell or transfer lands remain strong and warrants our vigilance.

These threats are largely pending at the time of this writing, so opportunity may still exist for affecting final outcomes by the time you read this. Some believe these actions are designed to cripple the Forest Service's ability to meet its mission, providing incentive to transfer national forest lands to states or the private sector.

Current employees report that morale is very low due to disrespectful messages from the administration, threats of job loss, and actual loss of so many coworkers who take with them long friendships and needed expertise and capacity. Leadership's ability to speak candidly about the situation is tightly constrained—once again, we are without a message from the Regional Forester for this issue. Nevertheless, one current Forest Service employee told me, "We're facing these challenges as you might expect we would—like we always have. We're being professional and accountable while trying to find approaches that reflect both our mission and the administration's priorities."

We are grateful for the service of those Forest Service employees who are leaving the agency at this difficult time, and we welcome them to join us in SFSRA. I've provided Retirees Association recruitment material to the Southern Region Administrative Officer to distribute to these leaving employees. I ask you to reach out to any of these individuals you know and invite them to join us. We can help keep these good people stay connected with friends and coworkers through this chaotic time.

For those Forest Service employees remaining at their posts, we are grateful they are still there! We can imagine how difficult and challenging work conditions are at this time. Change can be for good or ill and is usually a mix of the two. It is rarely painless. Making the best of this situation requires difficult work by those remaining. It is they who will help define the future Forest Service that emerges following these stresses. Please reach out to those people you know who are still working to offer your support and encouragement.

Appropriately, our feature articles in this issue tell of Forest Service employees who met the challenge of situations that seemed a bit crazy in their times. "Return of the King!" (page 12) is the story of efforts by law enforcement officers to recover a Forest Service aircraft stolen from Peachtree-Dekalb airport. In "Outlaws on the Yellowpine" (page 17), Keith Utz tells of his skillful work dealing with lawless constituents on the Sabine National Forest in the 1960s. And Charlie Huppach describes early efforts to explore recreational suitability of the upper reaches of the Chattooga River on page 20. We hope you enjoy these true tales of Forest Service employees who persevered to meet the daunting challenges of their times and places.

Until next time, please do what you can to support the good employees of the Forest Service and the mission to which we dedicated our careers.

We served national forests under both parties, and know today our public lands are in danger

(Opinion) April 13, 2025

The six authors of this column served as U.S. Forest Service Chiefs between 1997 and 2025: Mike Dombeck (1997-2001), Dale Bosworth (2001-2007), Gail Kimbell (2007-2009), Tom Tidwell (2009-2017, Vicki Christiansen (2018-2021), and Randy Moore (2021-2025).

Collectively, we have over 200 years of experience in public land management and have served as U.S. Forest Service Chiefs under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

We are adamant that divesting our public lands from public ownership would be a grievous error. We encourage all Americans to support the public servants who work for you and, most importantly, the public lands that belong to all of us and define us as Americans.

This year started with the catastrophic fires in southern California. It is now only spring, and already we have an active fire season across parts of the southeast. Is this a time to dismiss thousands of trained firefighters? Most U.S. Forest Service employees have collateral firefighting jobs and are called on as fire season escalates. We believe that the current administration's abusive description of career federal employees is an unforced

and, frankly, unforgettable error. These fired employees, we know from experience, represent the best of America. Many gave up other potentially financially lucrative jobs to serve the public interest, many were military veterans. To see them treated the way they have been over the past few months is incompetence at best and mean-spirited at worst.

There was the random firing of some 3,400 probationary Forest Service employees, some with years of experience as seasonal firefighters, others with jobs ranging from managing prescribed fire and fuel reduction, timber sale layout, fish and wildlife habitat improvement to campground maintenance. This was followed by a court order to reinstate the fired employees, who were only soon to be fired again. Additionally, there was the buyout and retirement incentives of another 3,000 employees.

While the exact numbers are changing daily, the chaotic approach resulted in many of the top leaders, including the Forest Service chief and another dozen top agency leaders to leave or be demoted. Further, major reductions in the workforce are expected. The administration has asked USDA to significantly cut more funding and people.

This is occurring while a recent Executive Order calls for the immediate expansion of timber harvest from the National Forests and other federal public lands.

If the White House continues to dismiss the employees who manage the campgrounds, visitor information centers, trails systems for hiking, biking, horseback riding and motorized uses, facilities will have to be closed. The summer vacation season is just around the corner. Permit holders for animal grazing, oil and gas leases, logging and mining activities will also be affected. It appears the intent is to create a number of crises for the millions of Americans who use the national forests and grasslands for their livelihoods and for their recreation. Rural economies are intertwined with the uses on these lands, bringing millions of dollars to local economies.

Are these drastic actions the first steps toward crippling the agencies so they cannot carry out their Congressionally mandated mission? If so, they portend a cynical effort to divest and transfer federal public lands to the States and private interests.

The national forests are public lands that are owned collectively by all U.S. Citizens and managed under the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act and a host of other laws. These laws allow for responsibly managed oil and gas development, mining, timber harvest, as well as recreation development, untouched wilderness, and many other uses. Most importantly, they are the backyard of families that camp, hike, bike, cut firewood, ski, float rivers, hunt or fish on their public lands without “no trespassing” signs.

More than 60 million Americans get their drinking water from streams that flow from the 193 million acres of national forests. Truly, we have a federal public land system in the U.S. that serves us daily and is the envy of natural resource professionals around the world for the benefits realized by our citizens daily. Divestiture of these precious lands, that belong to all citizens rich and poor, would be an irreparable tragedy.

The first Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot famously wrote, “Where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question shall always be answered from the standpoint of the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run.” We believe the greatest good is keeping the National Forests and all federal public lands in the hands of all citizens for future generations.

Beaver Creek Wilderness, Daniel Boone National Forest *USDA Forest Service Photo*

Message from Rick Cooksey, Acting Director, Southern Research Station

Greetings, retirees. Here at the Southern Research Station, work continues on our priorities of markets for wood products, fire, water, and forest health and restoration. Part of what propels this work forward is our network of experimental forests. There are 19 experimental forests in the South, with most of them located on national forests. These sites have historical significance and are important places for research outputs and data archives. Most experimental forests were established decades ago to solve specific problems and today they are part of a network for research that spans the South.

Last fall, Hurricane Helene damaged projects on four different experimental forests in North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, and Florida, as well as infrastructure at the Station headquarters in Asheville, North Carolina.

We are supporting recovery efforts by providing science-based information to restore forests and to help rebuild local and regional economies and communities. For example, we are using tools such as *HiForm* to provide information to the Southern Region and other partners regarding the vast scale of damage – 30,000 acres in western North Carolina were severely impacted and another 400,000 to 500,000 acres were impacted to a lesser degree. The tremendous increase in fuels has major consequences for wildfire risk and we are continuing to monitor these landscapes and support fuel management efforts including prescribed fire and salvage logging.

We are also assessing the economic impacts of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Both hurricanes affected timber markets and the outdoor recreation economy. Our assessment will provide comprehensive information on these impacts, as well as impacts on timber prices, landowner finances, rebuilding efforts, and how future preparedness can be supported through salvage efforts, forest management responses, and forest product innovation.

I would also like to share an example of forest product innovation. We are using an air curtain burner machine, called a *CharBoss*, to create biochar out of woody biomass including storm debris from Hurricane Helene. This machine, which we acquired thanks to the Southern Region and the Washington Office of the Forest Service, can consume one ton of woody biomass per hour and produce around 350 pounds of biochar in that time. The project is exploring multiple uses of biochar for forest restoration and remediation and as a potentially valuable source of income for forest landowners.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge that there has been a significant amount of change within the Forest Service. However, one constant is our service to the land and people, and we know we will continue to fulfill the mission of sustaining forests and grasslands for present and future generations. Thank you, retirees, for your service to the agency.

Update from The National Museum of Forest Service History

by Andy Mason

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

My Oh My! – Walls Are Flying!....Tree-rific Columns Going Up!

The cross-laminated timber wall panels are "flying" as our beautiful National Conservation Legacy Center (NCLC) in Missoula, Montana, starts to look like the artist's rendering. Another milestone was reached in late April as Museum Board member **Brian Leisz** and his company (Fall Creek Timber Frames, Inc., Troy, MT), milled two of sixteen donated timbers (hickory and sugar maple) and brought the rough-cut lumber to Hamilton, MT. There, another Museum partner, Mark Gantt and his company (Timber Builders), precisely milled the lumber, preparing it for assembly and installation at the building site. View more photos at **https://photos.app.goo.gl/hpoUc4ioRd4hjL5x5**

Mass Timber design of the National Conservation Legacy Center is beginning to take shape! *Wood is gaining recognition world-wide as the preferred, sustainable building material.*

The fabrication, assembly, and installation of the 16 tree-like columns is made possible by our partners: ***Brian Leisz, Fall Creek Timber Frames, Inc.*** *(Troy, MT), and* ***Mark Gantt, Timber Builders*** *(Hamilton, MT)*

We still are short ~ $1 million to cover the exhibition, Center furnishings, building design changes, and inflation adjustments. Many efforts are underway to close the gap (e.g., volunteers making furniture, portions of exhibits, and of course our fundraising efforts). Our Capital Campaign efforts have now been consolidated:

- The Capital Campaign Committee of 15 members (CCC), is co-led by **Rich Stem and Andy Mason.**
- Bi-weekly CCC meetings are led by Board member **Nancy Gibson**. The focus of these meetings is to review and identify actions regarding donor prospects identified previously by our 14 sector teams and any new prospects.
- **Lynn Sprague** continues to lead our fundraising efforts for Minerals & Energy and Fire & Aviation.

Rendering of the National Conservation Legacy Center highlighting the 16 tree-like columns. Each column is made from a different species from across America's incredibly diverse forests. Sponsorship of "available" tree-like columns is welcome and encouraged!

As always, if you have questions, thoughts or ideas about prospective corporate or individual donors – *and connections you have or people you know that do* – please contact Lisa Tate, lisa.tate@forestservicemuseum.org, or **Tom Petersen**, tom.petersen@forestservicemuseum, or call the Museum at (406) 541-6374. You may also call Lisa at (208) 484-6667 (mobile).

2025 Saving History Online Auction Was a Success -- $30,000 Raised

A BIG THANKS to the *Southern FS Retirees and friends* for donating four State gift baskets from Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas; several hand-crafted wood mosaic pieces; a hand-knit shawl; and an 8-volume set of books authored by Dan Kincaid. AND, thank you for your generous donations to the general and lawnmower funds. If you participated in the auction, please also consider completing our post-auction survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NM7NXX7. For questions, please contact Mandy at the Museum: amanda.wickel@forestservicemuseum.org; or call 406-541-6374.

Help Safeguard Forest Service History

Do you know of items in Forest Service offices – Regional, Forest, District, and Station – that have been tucked away for "safe-keeping", that might be vulnerable, as the Forest Service implements reorganization and offices are realigned? With all the best intention, they have stayed local, but this might be the right time to secure these artifacts and historic documents by transferring them to the Forest Service's repository at the Museum in Missoula, to be housed in 2026 at the National Conservation Legacy Center. If you know of any items of historical interest, please contact the Museum's curator, **Dave Stack** at dave.stack@forestservicemuseum.org or call 406-541-6374.

Join us in Missoula for the 2025 USFS National Reunion

It's getting close! The 10th USFS Retiree Reunion (September 22-26) is in the final stages of preparation. Registration is $350 ($70/day).
Register and learn more details here: https://2025usfsreunion.org/
The Missoula Hilton Garden Inn will be Reunion Headquarters, and we have reserved the entire hotel for our event. There are only a handful of rooms left so get yours now. Alternate hotels will be made available when all rooms are filled. The program is an exciting collection of agency news, educational presentations and excursions. Great food, music and fantastic camaraderie will flow throughout the week. Make plans to meet your friends and colleagues for this momentous event. The Reunion website has all the information you should need to plan your week, including descriptions of five optional excursions on Sept. 24 & 25. The program is nearing completion and is continuously updated. Check out the website…there is more.

How Can the Museum help USFS employees who have lost their jobs?

We are all aware and probably know people in the agency who have been impacted by the 2025 workforce reductions. At the Museum, we've had some discussion about this. What can we do? What should we do?

We are taking these two actions:

1) **Provide a complimentary 3-year Museum membership (electronic newsletter) to all USFS employees who have lost their jobs due to the Presidential directed workforce reductions.** We will promote this offer through Museum social media and e-news channels with an invitation letter by President Tom Thompson.

2) **We are modifying portions of the 2025 USFS Reunion agenda so it is more relevant to these turbulent times and to help attendees reflect on what it means to be part of the USFS family.**

Your Southern Forest Service Museum key contacts:

- **Jeff Owenby,** Director, jajowenby@gmail.com
- **Charlie Richmond,** Board Liaison, csrichmond60@gmail.com

THANKS AGAIN Southern FS Retirees for your support of the Museum!!

ASSOCIATION NEWS

SFSRA Hosts First Virtual Gathering

SFSRA held the first virtual gathering of members on Zoom on April 29, 2025. More than 30 members joined the Zoom session to hear an entertaining and informative program and have chance to engage each other in a little catch-up conversation. The gathering was ably moderated by Nancy Walters, retiree of the Southern Research Station in Asheville, who has worked as a meeting and process facilitator since her retirement. She was skillfully supported behind the scenes by Stephanie Johnson and Eric Schmeckpeper.

Rex Mann and his ongoing work to restore American chestnut was the headliner. Rex was interviewed on his work by Jim McCoy, current Area Supervisor on Land Between the Lakes, who has worked with Rex on chestnut restoration. A recording of this interview is available on our website at https://www.southernforestretirees.org/.

Rex Mann discussed his work on American chestnut restoration at the first virtual gathering of SFSRA members on April 29, 2025

Rex was followed by Frank Beum, Board Member of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR), who provided attendees an update on NAFSR efforts to monitor workforce status and support the Forest Service and its employees during the challenging transition to the new administration. Frank answered questions from members to the extent possible, although information was (and still is) hard to come by and rapidly changing. Frank served as Deputy Regional Forester for the Southern Region and Forest Supervisor on the Daniel Boone National Forest (among many other roles in the South) before retiring as Regional Forester of the Rocky Mountain Region in 2024. His extensive experience and connections provided valuable insights to members eager to understand what is happening in the Forest Service.

Following Frank's insights, attending members had opportunity to say hello to the group and share their favorite things about retirement. Attendees were given a survey to gather their feedback on the session to help guide possible future sessions. Response rate was great and feedback was very positive. Attendees liked the format, chance to network, scheduled time (late afternoon on a weekday), and they want to hear more about current status of the Forest Service. Given the positive response, future sessions are likely, however, no specific plans have been made at this time.

This first virtual gathering was made possible through the excellent planning and coordination of a small team that included Tom Darden, Marisue Hilliard, Stephanie Johnson, Lewis Kearney, Tim Mersmann, Eric Schmeckpeper, and Nancy Walters. Many thanks to them for their efforts to successfully develop and test a new way to keep us all connected. Many thanks also to all those members who participated, without whom the gathering would not have been a gathering!

As this issue was going to print, we learned that Rex Mann passed away on July 2 after complications from his third battle with cancer. We are so sad to share this news but very grateful to have had this recent "virtual" time with Rex. More info on services will be shared with members by email, with a full obituary in the next issue.

SFSRA Summer Luncheon Held in Watkinsville, GA

More than 20 SFSRA members and guests gathered on June 12, 2025, for the annual Summer Luncheon at Chops and Hops restaurant in Watkinsville, Georgia. The meeting included limited Association business, focused mainly on discussion of potential impacts of recent administration actions on the future of the Forest Service. Dr. Mac Callaham of the Southern Research Station presented an overview of current research at the Athens Prescribed Fire Science Lab located nearby on the University of Georgia campus in Athens. He was joined by colleague Dr. Lima Lucardi who shared her work on prevention,

Dr. Mac Callaham

Dr. Lima Lucardi

early detection, and rapid response to invasive species, including efforts to develop species-specific herbicides to combat cogon grass. The food was excellent and plentiful, and topped off by dessert goodies prepared by Martha Rightmeyer. Good fellowship was had by all. This was the first SFSRA luncheon held at this venue in an effort to try something new and to help attendees avoid Atlanta traffic.

Back Row: John Lamb, Lynn Prince, Rima Lucardi, Tom Darden, Shirley Mathis, Wes Nettleton, Eric Schmeckpeper, Ray Johnston, Tim Mersmann, Gretta Boley, Debbie Caffin, John Caffin. Front Row: Vanessa Hampton, Stephanie Johnson, Marisue Hilliard, Jack Holcomb, Dick Rightmyer, Mac Callaham. Not pictured: Lucy Nettleton, Martha Rightmyer, Wayne and Wanda Miller.

Welcome New Members!

Claudette Bryant, Columbia, SC
Jack Holcomb, Athens, GA
Gary Jarvis, Lucedale, MS
Ebeth McMullen, Atlanta, GA
Lynn Prince, Jefferson, GA
Debra Sheriff, Madison, MS

Opportunities for Serving with the Association Board

This Fall we'll be electing new people to serve on the SFSRA Board as existing Board members complete their terms. Maybe that is you! or someone you know who you can encourage to step up. 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 will become our Association President in January 2026. The term is for 2 years, followed by 2 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!
- **Director**: We'll be replacing one of three Directors on the Board. Directors are Board members with limited official duties other than bringing their wisdom and perspectives to deliberations of the Board and pitching in where their hearts and skills lead them. The term is for three years.

Beyond elected Board positions, we are still looking for help in these roles:

- **Events Coordinator:** Arrange logistics of summer and winter luncheons and other gatherings. This position is for someone who would like a limited and well-defined role.
- **Newsletter Team**: Help us generate content and put together our highly-valued newsletter.

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

Update from the
National Association of Forest Service Employees

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) has been quite active lately, focusing on both advocacy and support for its members and current Forest Service employees in light of changes being pushed by the new administration. Here's a snapshot of recent efforts:

- **Retiree Benefits Update:** NAFSR provided updates on benefits and resources available to retirees, ensuring members stay informed about changes that could affect their well-being.
- **Workforce and Employee Care Initiatives:** NAFSR created several postings about workforce challenges, including guidance on wildfire support and resources for employees facing job uncertainty, such as reductions in force or early retirement.
- **Advocacy on Forest Policy:** NAFSR has provided official testimony and cosigned advocacy letters regarding a number of recent issues facing the Forest Service. Additionally, NAFSR launched an Advocacy Toolkit for all members. The kit contains templates, scripts and images that can be used for writing letters, making phone calls or posting across social media platforms. Topics include opposing wildland fire consolidation, keeping public lands public, and saving Job Corps centers.

To see letters, testimony, and the Advocacy Toolkit, visit the NAFSR website at https://nafsr.org/ . If you have questions, please contact Marisue Hilliard, SFSRA's representative on the NAFSR Board.

Share Your Stories!

The Southern Forest Lookout needs you! Please share your reminiscences of life in the Forest Service with fellow retirees by submitting your stories/memories to the newsletter. Whether momentous for the agency or personal moments that were meaningful to you, your experiences are of interest to others and can help make our newsletter a joy to read. Current happenings in your life as a retiree are also of interest. A big trip? Service activities? Awards? Brag a little! Any topic is of interest. We'd like to focus future issues on law enforcement, admin support, recreation, and fisheries. Whaddya got? Write it up in a paragraph or pages and send to Editor Mary Dahl at marydahl46@gmail.com.

New Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz recently visited the Southern Region. Here he meets with employees of the Kisatchie National Forest in Louisiana on April 2, 2025. Regional Forester Ken Arney is first on left. Chief Schultz is the first Forest Service Chief to have not previously served in the Forest Service. Read his introductory letter at https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/meet-tom-schultz-21st-chief-forest-service

Return of the King!

By Les Burril, US Forest Service Special Agent, Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forests—Retired

with Bill McMillan, US Forest Service Regional Aviation Safety Officer—Retired

This is the story of dedicated Forest Service personnel who righted a wrong through their persistence and bravado. It is the account of the disappearance and return of Forest Service Aircraft N182Z.

King Air N182Z

Bill McMillan begins the story:

On April 1st, 1992, Bill Allison, our Regional Aviation Officer, asked me to go fuel the King Air for a trip. I was the Regional Aviation Safety Officer, stationed at Peachtree Dekalb Airport (PDK) in Atlanta. This is where we kept the Forest Service aircraft, a King Air 200 airplane, registration number N182Z. Bill Allison was my supervisor and had left the plane in front of Eppes Aviation. I went to fuel it up but found it missing. Eppes Aviation sometimes moved our aircraft to one of their vacant hangars, so I pursued that possibility. I searched along with Eppes personnel, but the aircraft was nowhere to be found. I called Bill Allison and told him the news only to be told by him, "Ok, enough, April Fool's joke, right? I get it." It was April 1st, but I wasn't joking. I said, "No, you had better come out here. The King Air is not on the airport property, anywhere." Wow! Our aircraft had been stolen!

Here, **Les Burril** takes over the story:

Regional Special Agent Wayne Miller called me and asked me to go down to the airport and investigate the stolen airplane. I was Special Agent on the Chattahoochee/Oconee in Georgia and it happened in Georgia so I went. But it was an airplane theft. I'm like, "Hey, what do you want me to do?" He said, "Write up an incident report. That's about all you can do." I thought "Man, we can do more than that!" I drove to PDK and got with airport security, the local Chamblee Police Department, and the FBI. The plane left from PDK, so we needed to figure out where it went. This was the beginning of what would be a multi-year investigation.

I was not a private pilot back then, but I grew up in an aviation family, so I wasn't stuck like a cow looking at a new gate or something. At PDK, the tower chief had put in place a noise abatement protocol. Part of the protocol was that after 11 PM when they closed the tower, there was a recorder to document noise levels in case they got a complaint. The tower was closed at the time the aircraft was stolen. There was a party going on directly across the tarmac at one of the big hangars that was in view of our airplane. The thief had waited until the party died out, about 1 o'clock, and then cranked up the plane and took off. The noise abatement recorder picked up the noise of the airplane when it took off. Radar tracked the flight to Sebastian, Florida.

With the help of Miami Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), we learned the airplane had circled at Sebastian, landed, and was back in the air in about 20 minutes. I flew to Sebastion the next day to interview people on what they might have seen. I eventually found a guy who was working at four o'clock that morning. He had seen a guy in a pickup truck, that had a fuel bladder in the bed, go to a running aircraft and fuel it. The plane took off again right away.

From Sebastian, FAA radar tracked the airplane until just about 10 miles south of the Bahamas. South Florida at that time had these Aerostat cabled balloons with radar at 10,000 feet looking for drug runners.

Miami FAA used that radar to see the plane depart from the Bahamas and head to Colombia, South America. I got this info from a Technician at the Miami FAA. Man, that guy was moving about a half-step at a time while I'm all over this thing as I wanted to see where that aircraft went. I also wanted to be sure the radar track was preserved and delivered to us as evidence. The technology at the time was on a big reel-to-reel tape. He said they'd hold it for 30 days. I told him I was going to send a letter to be sure we got it. He said don't worry about it. "Well, OK," I said. I'm sitting on go, ready for him to pull up the final track and tell me where the aircraft went. But he left to go watch his son play soccer rather than sending a printout to me. Then, he didn't answer the phone when I called and I couldn't get anybody else. So, I ended up calling the Director of the FAA in Florida. This is like calling the Regional Forester. The Director asked what happened and I told him. He said, "Let me call you back." That boy in Miami called me in about 10 minutes, asking "Why did you call the head guy?" I said, "Why did you leave me hanging?" The bottom line is they lost the end of the airplane's track in Colombia when the plane went below radar coverage. The FAA Technician failed to save that tape, which was erased, so I never got it for evidence.

Now we were stuck. I contacted the U.S. Embassy in Colombia and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) as they were heavy into investigations in Colombia and surrounding countries. I worked with a DEA Agent in the U.S. all the time on drug eradication on national forests. He knew a lot of the guys in Colombia, so he hooked me up with them. We put out posters at all the airports in Colombia with a $10,000 reward listed for any information regarding the aircraft. We set up a process with the DEA and the Colombian government to be notified if there was a King Air 200 involved in a crash or anything else unusual anywhere in the world.

Over the next couple of years, the Embassy, mainly DEA folks, sent me news. If there was an incident involving a King Air 200 anywhere, I got a notification. You wouldn't believe how many crashed King Air notifications came to me. We'd investigate each to ensure it wasn't our plane. One of those that crashed was in Mexico. I got with a reporter with CNN in Mexico City who reported on this crash. She sent me videotape from the scene and the airplane serial number, so I was able to eliminate it as our aircraft.

You must have a flight plan to legally fly aircraft in Colombia. There isn't much general aviation there to speak of—most of it is commercial to and from a few airports. The military is always on the lookout for drug runners who generally land on dirt strips in remote areas. One day, Colombian military fighter jets found a King Air 200 that was trying to evade them. They couldn't convince the pilot of the plane to land until they fired their guns and put some holes in the aircraft. At that point the aircraft landed, and the Colombian government took possession of the aircraft. It was loaded with chemicals used to extract cocaine from coca leaves but had no actual drugs aboard. This load was headed to the drug smugglers' lab in the jungle, which the military eventually found and destroyed. The Colombian government took the confiscated aircraft to their capital, Bogota, bullet holes and all.

Stolen aircraft taken out of the U.S. are generally written off by insurance companies. They wouldn't go get one even if it were found because they're betting it's too big of a liability to go and deal with corrupt politicians and, besides, the aircraft was probably treated very poorly. Plus, once the local government confiscates a plane, they usually aren't too happy to give it up. If you want to get an airplane back from Colombia, you have to take them to court to prove it is yours, which can drag on for years. In this case, the confiscated aircraft was made airworthy and assigned to the Governor of the Magdalena District for his use. The capital of this District is Santa Marta, on the coast of Colombia near Barranquilla, a resort area.

Eventually, this aircraft was reported to the Embassy, and to us, as being in this Governor's use. The Embassy reported that the serial number did not match our aircraft. Interestingly, however, the number they reported matched the one we had been told had crashed in Mexico, the one the CNN person had sent me. This raised our suspicions despite us being told by the Colombian police that this was not our aircraft.

I got a call from a DEA agent I knew whose specialty was stolen aircraft used for smuggling. He asked, "Did you hear about the King Air confiscated in Colombia?" I said, "Yeah, I heard that it is not ours." He said, "Hey man, you need to go look at that airplane as soon as possible." I said, "But the police down there are telling me it's not our King Air." He said, "Can I make it any clearer for you? You need to go look at that aircraft! You need to ask for State Department approval to travel and go look at that airplane."

So, I did. I got with Alan Moye, Assistant US Attorney in the Northern District of Georgia and told him the story. We crafted a letter for the State Department. Within an hour of that letter being sent I was getting calls from Colombia asking, "Hey, what's the deal? We thought we told you that isn't your aircraft!" I said,

"Man, it don't matter! If we get approval we are coming down to take a look at it."

Recognize, that on aircraft there are serial numbers on metal plates like car VIN numbers, but there are also serial numbers in other places all over any aircraft. Many are very difficult to reach and therefore difficult to falsify. Our aircraft serial number was BB402. I remember it because it was very important to our success. BB402.

On June 1st, 1995, (with my wife very worried), I flew with Bill Allison and Special Agent David Ferrell to Barranquilla, Colombia. There we met Carlos Perez, who was the U.S. Department of Justice Judicial Attaché to the Embassy in Bogotá, and who is still a friend of mine. He's a good guy. If anybody facilitated our efforts to get this aircraft back it was Carlos. He held the line when it would've been easier to say we're never gonna get it, give up. But he's a fighter, man, and thank goodness for it, as he and the Embassy folks were constantly having to go to court down there to set up our visit and prove our case. Carlos joined the three of us in Barranquilla.

Huey helicopter flight from Barranquilla to Santa Marta, Colombia, to inspect the confiscated aircraft.

It was too dangerous a trip to drive from Barranquilla to Santa Marta where the plane was being kept. The government controlled the cities, but the insurgents controlled the countryside and would put up roadblocks and take you hostage or worse. The Colombian Federal Police appeared to be on our side, but you couldn't know for sure. It was clear the state police who worked for the governor were adversaries who did not want the plane to be confirmed as ours or see it leave. And, we just did not know which way the military folks would go.

The U.S. Embassy had lined up a helicopter flight to get us to Santa Marta. If you worked in aviation with the Forest Service, you know that Bill Allison, Regional Air Officer, would rake you over the coals or threaten you with jail if you got on a helicopter that hadn't been approved as safe. As Law Enforcement Officers, we did a lot of aerial drug detection on national forest lands. Bill and his folks would have to come out and inspect a state patrol or national guard helicopter before we were allowed to fly in one. Well, here we are, and the Embassy had lined up a Colombian National Police Huey and a Jet Ranger helicopter for us for the trip. I guarantee that Huey had spent a good bit of time in Vietnam. I'm looking at Bill and said, "Man, are you gonna inspect that thing?" He said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "We're getting ready to get on a helicopter and we can't do it unless it has passed inspection, so you guys go make sure it's all right." He looked over there for a little while and finally said, "It'll probably be OK."

We flew with the Federal Police in the Huey, accompanied by the local police in the Jet Ranger, to a military base in Santa Marta. (Note: the Jet Ranger helicopter we had been with crashed into the ocean a week after we left.) The next day we went to inspect the airplane. It was hotter than immortal holy hell in Santa Marta. We were literally only a foot above the ocean, it was hot and humid, and you know how hot an airplane gets sitting out on the ramp. We saw the metal plates with the same serial number of the aircraft that had crashed in Mexico installed on this airplane. The Colombian Federal police agreed immediately that those serial numbers had been altered. You could tell how the rivets were attached that these plates had been replaced. We started taking things apart to see what other serial numbers we could find.

When the aircraft was stolen, the logbooks were in our office and included serial numbers of the radios and other avionics on the plane. I opened up a front side panel to access the avionics bay. There, in an inch and a half space a foot or more below, I spotted with my flashlight a piece of masking tape with a number on it: "BB402." I called Bill over and said, "Look here." Bill did. He looked at me and said conspiratorially, "Good job." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I won't say a word." He thought I had put it there. To the day he died, I believe he thought I put that tape there, even though we found our serial number in two other

places—one above the pilot's seat and another in a bay under the floor panels.

We spent the entire day there. It was like a Bogart movie. The airport looked like something out of the Mediterranean and World War 2. There was no air-conditioning except for a 10 x 15 office for the airport manager. We were all jammed in there as Carlos argued in Spanish with a state police officer who was saying we couldn't take the aircraft. The Colombian Federal officials said we could move it but not leave the country with it: we could take possession of it within Colombia's airspace, but that was all. We had to stand in there while an obnoxious agreement was written using an old typewriter with carbon paper that said we can look after the plane inside the country while they filed an official objection. We spent 8 hours stuffed in that office because it was so damned hot outside.

The confiscated King Air aircraft is searched for hidden serial numbers.

We finally got the agreement signed and went to the airplane to take it to Bogotá. They had a prop lock on it and wouldn't give us the key. The Federal Police put pressure on the local police until they finally unlocked it. Bill loaded up, readied the aircraft, fired it up, and we started taxiing out. We were dealing with their controllers who were not wanting us to take off. "Well," Bill says, "the brakes on this thing aren't working, but we are going anyway." What!? Bogotá is at 8500 feet elevation, so we were going to be landing really fast there, and with no brakes. "Do you honestly think you can get this thing to stop?" I asked. "Yeah, we'll reverse engines and work it out when we get there." That's the way Bill was: he wanted that airplane back and was willing to take a risk to do it.

We started climbing up from Santa Marta and Bill said, "I'll tell you what we should do. Instead of going to Bogotá, let's go to Gitmo. We're good to go right now." I said, "Absolutely not. We haven't told Gitmo we're coming." He said, "They'll figure it out when we get there and land." I said "Bill, we don't even have the airport info to know their frequencies." Bill would have headed to Gitmo if Carlos and I had said OK. But we didn't.

So, we landed at Bogotá and Bill managed to get the airplane stopped without brakes. We taxied over to Fast Eddie's Aeronautics (seriously that was the name), who is a contractor for the US government. They handle all approvals for entry and exit in Colombia without going through typical Colombian entry processes. I think those guys work for the CIA. We pulled into their hangar and stacked a bunch of stuff around the plane to prevent anyone from trying to steal it back.

Then the situation was tied up in court so we flew home. It took about a month and a half to finally get them to say we could take the airplane out of the country.

When we flew back down (after picking up parts to fix the brakes, which I did myself because we couldn't get anybody to fix them down there), Bill Allison and I were accompanied by Special Agents David Ferrell and Harold Young. We were afraid Colombia might force us to land at a Columbian base enroute because of how they were routing our flight. If they did, anything might happen. So, we took Carlos's wife with us as she had diplomatic protection, so if we got forced down we would have somebody with a diplomatic passport who could at least make a phone call. When we got airborne, with Bill as our pilot, they routed us straight for Santa Marta. We overflew it and headed for Guantanamo.

About the time we got to Guantanamo, our handheld GPS ran out of batteries, and we were there. They handle all approvals for entry and exit in Colombia without going through typical Colombian entry processes. I think those guys work for the CIA. We pulled into their hangar and stacked a bunch of stuff around the plane to prevent anyone from trying to steal it back. Then the situation headed to court. We left for home and returned a month later after picking up parts to fix the brakes, which I did myself because we couldn't get anybody to fix them down there. We

were flying around Cuba looking for Gitmo. It was crazy. I had the airport plate (landing info) out and was telling Bill, “The airport is over here.” He said, “No, the airport is right there.” I was scrambling to put batteries in the GPS and get it going again. He was lined up looking at the airport to land when I said, “Hey man, there's X’s on that runway!” He said, “Yeah…I wonder why they're there…” At about that time I looked at the plate and saw a note that said, “Don't land at the closed airport.” The airport had been moved! Bill did a hard roll to pull us around to line up with the other airport, and I saw another note that said “Don’t approach from this angle—there is a Cuban gun emplacement by the barbed-wire fence.” We saw the gun and Bill did a hard right. We finally landed. At least we had called ahead, so they expected us.

Les Burril (left) and Bill Allison (right)

The guys at Gitmo were glad to see us and fueled us up for the rest of the flight. We flew to Fort Pierce, near Port St. Lucie, Florida, where U.S. Customs met us. U.S. Customs people had been working with us for three years, so they knew our situation. One fellow there we knew came out and smoothed things over or it would have been a problem arriving from Colombia with falsified aircraft identification.

After a night there in a hotel we flew back to PDK in Atlanta. When we arrived, there were a bunch of news reporters there. Bill had called and told a reporter we were coming, and they rolled out the dog to get a big news story out of it. Our public affairs people had a fit as they hadn’t cleared any information release. One in particular got in my face. I told him the truth: I hadn’t called the press.

The tower had us do a flyby and when we landed, they had fire trucks spraying an arc of water over the runway to celebrate the return of the stolen King Air. The homecoming of our King Air 200 was subject of news video and articles. At the time it was a big deal.

We eventually identified, arrested, and prosecuted a bald-headed American with the last name of Kelly, who had stolen our aircraft and more than ten others. He was sent to prison for quite a few years.

Our King Air 182Z was flown by the Forest Service for many years afterwards, with three or more patches over the bullet holes by the rear of the fuselage. I remember looking at those before I flew in it each time over the years. It was a fine airplane and worth all our efforts to return it home.

In addition to contracting many aircraft for firefighting, such the Very Large Air Tanker (DC10) above on left and the Water Scooper on right, the Forest Service owned 24 fixed-wing aircraft in 2022 according to the agency’s 2022 Aviation Annual Report. The agency uses these airplanes for a wide variety of other missions in managing public lands including forest health and wildlife surveys, law enforcement, gathering infrared data, fire detection, and transporting personnel and cargo. Typical aircraft types owned by the Forest Service are Cessna 206, Aero Commander 500, King Air 200, DeHavilland DHC-2 Beaver, Piper Super Cub, and Cessna 185.

Outlaws on the Yellowpine

By Keith Utz – Regional Forest Finance and Taxation Specialist, Retired

This article is adapted from an oral history interview of Keith conducted on November 14, 2023, by James Wall, Oral Historian for the National Museum of Forest Service History. It is part of the collection of the Museum.

I was about 28-years-old when I was promoted to District Ranger on the Yellowpine Ranger District of the Sabine National Forest in Hemphill, Texas, in 1962. It seemed like every month there was an article in the Forest Service newsletter about problems on the Yellowpine Ranger District. This included threats from the locals about what they were going to do if the Forest Service did certain things. The Ranger before me didn't stay long. He asked frantically to get out of there. The Yellowpine Ranger District had a history of incendiary fires. That was what I was walking into as a new and young Ranger.

On the way to report for duty for the first time on the Yellowpine, as I was driving the last few miles to get there, I saw smoke. The woods were on fire. Welcome to the Yellowpine! As I drove further into Hemphill, at the little town square there were people playing dominoes out front, and a cow was grazing on the courthouse lawn. I said to myself, "Well, this is really quaint."

Everyone who worked for me was older than I was, so I had to overcome the fact that I was pretty young. I made sure my employees knew I could handle it, though. I understood the main reason I was sent there was to figure out why no one could resolve their issues. My first order of business was to understand the problems so I immersed myself into the local population. Part of the population in Sabine County, Texas, was people who had been kicked out of Louisiana, just across the river. The locals in town called them "The Outlaws." They had to be careful who they said that to because there were a lot of people killed in that county.

All the pickup trucks seemed to have gun racks in their back windows with rifles or shotguns on them. There were quick-draw shootouts in the center of town. One day I was in the drug store and just before I walked out, I heard gunshots. When I got out, I saw a man on the ground and people running toward him. He was shot in the leg and survived. There were other shootouts, but I never witnessed one directly.

A Forest Service concessionaire at Red Hills Lake was murdered. He was shot at close range. You couldn't recognize him. He had a closed-casket funeral. I don't know why the murder happened. I heard it was because of a land dispute. He was a contractor for the Forest Service, not a Forest Service employee.

I tried to find out the reason for all the incendiary fires, but I wasn't getting anywhere. Finally, one fellow said to me, "I'll tell you what the deal is if you don't let it out that I was the one that told you." He said, "Most of your problem is in Sunshine Valley." Sunshine Valley was just a little valley area with houses about every quarter mile on the road. I told my Assistant Ranger, "I'm not coming to the office unless I'm needed. I'm going to be in Sunshine Valley for one week." I went up, stopped at every house, told them who I was and what I was there for. They were all surprisingly nice. I was expecting hostility, but the fact that I came there and visited them apparently shocked them because nobody with the Forest Service had ever done that.

Keith Utz at about the time he became Ranger on the Yellowpine District

I told them some of the problems we were having with incendiary fires and asked them, "Do you have any idea why this is happening?" They finally told me the problem was they thought the Forest Service was doing prescribed burns to kill the scent so their dogs couldn't track the deer. I said, "Oh, well, that's not the case. We're not doing it for that reason." I had some of

the others say the same thing. They said, “If you're going to prescribe burn, then we're going to wild burn.” It didn't make any sense, really. But that's what they said. It should be noted their incendiary fires were not set in areas where they hunted. Everyone treated me fine. I just tried to act like an old West Virginia boy. I didn't try to act like a big shot or anything.

Photo by Texas Forest Service

So, I went back and immediately got with the Sabine County Reporter newspaper. They wrote a front-page article with the headline: “Ranger Utz Explains the Benefits of Prescribed Burning.” In it I was quoted about why we did prescribed burns and how prescribed burning was beneficial to people and animals, while wildfires were detrimental. This big article started on the front page and went all the way through to the back page. It instantly stopped incendiary fires, just like that.

The Forest Service was not well liked by the rural people. We had all kinds of warnings. Men like James, one of our fire tower watchmen, would come in and say, “Ranger, you better stick to the office or they're going to kill you.” This was certainly not a very pleasant thing. For some strange reason, I didn't think it was going to happen. Setting fires was about the only thing they could do to get back at us unless they were going to shoot us.

A bill was sent to the Texas state legislature that would make all the national forest lands revert to private ownership. I began to wonder for a while how long I was going to have a job. Of course, that failed.
I later found out they weren't totally ruthless. After I got the incendiary fire situation solved, I thought I was home free. I immersed myself with the people. I became President of the Lions Club, active in the church, things you're expected to do as a Ranger. Most aspects were going pretty smoothly. I had a good Assistant Ranger, a good forester. Then the shocker: the Forest Service decided to close the open range on national forests. That was not good news. We were dealing with outlaws who were used to grazing their cattle on open range on the national forests. Because they had their cattle branded, the cattle could range freely and be three, four, or five miles away from their property. The owners would round them up when they thought it was necessary. National forest was not good grazing land because there was a lot of timber there. You couldn't have too many cattle per acre, so they would spread the cattle far and wide. I had already gotten on good terms with The Outlaws, but I thought, “This is going to screw it all up, not just for me, but for all the other Rangers.” It meant all kinds of things. We'd have to get horses. We'd have to start installing fencing and building corrals. I thought, “Oh my God, this is going to be worse than the incendiary fire problem.”

About then, on one of the adjacent districts, the husband of the secretary for the Ranger came in with a crew of men and beat up the Ranger. When the Ranger was literally run out of town, I knew this was getting serious. My Assistant Ranger's wife talked him into leaving. My wife was not too happy about us being there either.

I really wasn't too worried. I was always able to mingle with people. As long as you didn't act like you're a big head or a big shot, sometimes you can get along and do good things.

One day I came in and on my desk was a package. I guess my secretary put it there. Anyway, I thought, “What in the world is this?” I opened it up and there was a 0.38 caliber pistol. There was no note or anything. I understood it came from my supervisor.

I thought, “You know, this is ridiculous.” Something needed to be done. I found out who the top Outlaw was. His name was Bob Harper. He was blind in one eye and not too good seeing out of the other. He'd ride right down the middle of the road, and everybody got out of his way. But he still knew how to use his gun, I guess, because the rumor was that he had killed 35 people. I don't know how—that doesn't sound like that's possible—so I took it with a grain of salt. However, I had no doubt that he probably did shoot some people.

I found out through various sources that he was a top Outlaw leader but was not in Sunshine Valley. I decided, "Okay, I'm going to ride up to his place and talk to him and see if we can't work something out." I already had it in my head that I was going to tell him if they would go along with this new grazing program, I would guarantee that all the locals would have first choice on the grazing allotments. Of course, they were going to have first choice anyway, but they didn't know that. That was my game plan.

I rode up there thinking, just like with prescribed burns, all I have to do is tell them about it, educate them about it and see where they're coming from. I'd see if it would work again.

Pineywoods cattle often used for open-range grazing in the South (Photo by CowpenCreek Farm, Poplarville, MS)

As I pulled up into his driveway, got out and stood by the gate, I heard, "Put your hands up!" I thought to myself, "Is this world still sane or not?" I looked around. There was nobody I could see either behind me or around me anywhere. I thought, "Jesus, the sidewalk through there to his house was only about twenty yards long, and he's got a window open there. He's possibly killed 35 men and I'm intruding on his property. And I've been warned. But, I've got to open the gate." As I started to open the gate, again I heard, "Put your hands up!" I looked around and still didn't see anyone. I finally looked up and there in a tree over the gate was a parrot! He had a sentinel parrot! I thought, "The world is going crazy. He must really be serious if he's trained a parrot to be a sentinel, that's pretty serious." Now I understand this sounds like some wild fictitious story. If somebody told me this story, I'm not sure I would believe it, but it happened.

I had left my gun in the car. I opened the gate and walked to the door, a little tenuously, thinking any second could be my last. I got to the door and knocked. The door opened and it was Mr. Harper's wife. I said, "Hello, is Mr. Harper in? I'm a Ranger with the U.S. Forest Service. I have a problem that I think Mr. Harper could help me work out since I know a lot of people in the area listen to him." She left for a little bit, returned, and said, "Okay, come on in." She led me to meet a small man, maybe 140 pounds, sitting at a table. He asked me to sit down with him and offered me coffee. I wasn't a coffee drinker, but I accepted and had coffee with him. He was guarded but I didn't act like anything I wasn't—just a country boy from West Virginia. I explained to Mr. Harper the Forest Service proposal to set up grazing permits and how the locals could have first choice. He bought it. I went back to the office, and that was it. From then on, it was pretty smooth sailing.

It eventually came time for my family and me to make a move. We had been on the Yellowpine District for four years. My son had a speech problem, and they didn't have a speech therapist nearby. Plus, by this time, my wife was pretty shook up, and I had already lost an Assistant Ranger. My wife wanted to go to a bigger place where they had better education facilities. So, I asked for a transfer. That was the end of that chapter. I went to the Regional Office in Atlanta in 1966.

After I was in the Regional Office for a short while, my administrative assistant on the Yellowpine, Martha Ann Beacham, called me and said, "We need your help." I said, "What in the world?" Well, the Ranger who replaced me apparently was really nasty and he was being nasty to the wrong people. The Forest Supervisor for the National Forests in Texas at the time was John Courtenay. It just so happened he was in the Regional Office for a meeting. I found him and told him what I'd heard. I never found out what, if anything, he did about the situation. About a week or two later I heard the locals had run that Ranger out of town. It was a thin edge he was living on there.

Keith Utz retired in 1986 from the Southern Regional Office in Atlanta as Regional Forest Finance and Taxation Specialist. He then worked as a consulting forester with partner Bill Balmer for 10 years. In 2002, he and his wife Carol moved to Northport, Florida, where they lived until Hurricane Ian destroyed their home in 2022. They've since resettled in Leesburg, Florida, which Keith says is the safest place in Florida from hurricanes. Carol, his wife of 44 years, has made his life complete.

EXPLORING THE CHATTOOGA RIVER

River Running's Not What It Used to Be

By Charlie Huppuch, USDA Forest Service, Retired

Many of you have had exciting and rewarding experiences during your Forest Service careers. Here is one of mine. It may not have been the wisest, but certainly one of the most exciting.

The Chattooga River is now a Federally Designated National Wild and Scenic River. It begins in the mountains of North Carolina and ends after a fifty-mile journey at Lake Tugaloo between Georgia and South Carolina. The river is one of the few remaining free-flowing rivers in the Southeast. The setting is a primitive, dense forest with undeveloped shorelines. It is characterized as rugged.

As a forester with the Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia, during the late 50s and early 60s, I caught glimpses of this wild and unknown river and wondered how it would be to canoe its untamed waters. The chance to do that finally came in 1965. As Recreation Planner for the Chattahoochee, I learned that the power company owned large segments of the Chattooga River corridor but wished to trade it to the Forest Service for lands on the Oconee National Forest to build a pump storage lake. With this in mind it seemed prudent to explore this new recreation resource that would soon be added to the Forest. Of course, this was well before the movie "Deliverance" was filmed on the river, which made the river famous.

Burt Reynolds and Ned Beatty on the Chattooga River in the 1972 movie "Deliverance."

Four stalwart Forest Service employees agreed to explore an uncharted section of the river to determine its potential for floating, fishing, and hiking opportunities. The expedition included Charlie Hensley, along with an ex-Navy SEAL, Bob Terry, and me. We suspected canoes would not survive the trip so we needed rubber rafts. Modern river rafts were unknown at that time, so we borrowed two Air Force rubber rafts, used for downed pilots at sea, from Gary Bell, Timber Staff on the Chattahoochee NF. So, with food and other supplies, the expedition drove to a rugged put-in spot on what is now Section 1 of the river.

The morning was clear and the river was up and running. It looked to be pretty fast. We launched and this historical expedition was underway with no brass band to signal the occasion. Within a quarter of a mile, we were in trouble. The Air Force rafts were not made for passengers sitting on the gunnels. You had to kneel on the flimsy rubber bottom. Each rock in the rapids was felt, banging painfully into your knees as you knelt. Soon a large gash ripped the bottom on one of the borrowed rafts. The men were sunk, literally. After pulling everyone to shore, a council was held. We could not all fit in the one raft left. So how could we go on? Thinking I was well prepared for such emergencies, I pulled out a one-man Air Force raft. Perhaps the other three could squeeze into the remaining raft while I went down in the single raft. I launched the little raft and soon found myself spinning out of control in the current. There was no way to control its movements. It may have saved a downed pilot, but not on the Chattooga.

It was decided that two members of the expedition would walk out with the shredded raft and consider what they would tell Gary Bell who had recently bought it. Charlie and I were determined we should explore onward and waved goodbye, maybe for the last time. Being well prepared I pulled a pair of baseball catchers' leg guards over my shins to better absorb the pain from the rocks. We glided down the fast current in a remarkably deep and rugged gorge, sailing by beautiful flowering rhododendron and mountain laurel, and were glad to continue the voyage.

Soon we could hear the roar of the river as we approached a waterfall. No time for scouting. No place to get out. "Get Down! We're going over." And we did. The raft twirled backward as it came to the edge of the falls with a mind of its own. Over we went with wild

yells of terror. Amazingly, we both fell down into the raft and it became upright.

We were still on course and enjoyed a mile of relative calm. Soon the river was running faster again and the boulders were getting larger. Ahead the river was roaring as we came to a narrow point. Huge boulders had fallen into and blocked the river. Pulling to shore, we could see the whole river plunged into a cave made by the overtopping boulders. We had to go around, but our side of the river looked impossible to climb over the rocks carrying the raft. The other side looked possible in this deep gorge. I entered the raft while Charlie let out the rope and the raft swung out into the current, carrying me to the other shore. If I could get onshore, I could allow the raft to swing back and pick up Charlie. It almost worked. With a poor grip, I grabbed a rock on the shore, then the raft started to go out from under me. It was being pulled toward the terrible cave that swallowed the river. Charlie's rope held the raft but not me. Down I plunged, heading toward the mouth of the cave. As I was saying "Goodbye World," the churning white water took me into the cave. It felt like I was in a washing machine churning with fury. Round and around I went until I was thrown up on a ledge and wall. Amazingly, I could crawl out and watch the fury go by. Easing out toward the entrance, with my paddle still clutched in my hand, I spotted a worried Charlie who now cheered with relief. I edged my way out of the cave onto the boulders where we were reunited. After a struggle getting the raft over this huge obstacle, we re-entered the river for a comparatively mild five miles of beautiful river ending at the Russell Bridge. But wow, WHAT A RIDE!

We found the Chattooga River to certainly be a wild and scenic river well before Congress established it thus in 1974. The national forest managers felt that Section 1 of the river was too rugged and dangerous for the general public to raft. Today the river is well managed by the Forest Service, cooperators, and outfitters. The section where I found my 'deliverance' was off limits to boaters but open to fisherman and hikers who are hearty enough to walk the rugged gorge. I hoped it would remain so managed.

Afterword: For years, the upper reaches of the Chattooga River above GA/SC Highway 28—including the section floated and described by Charlie in the preceding article—was reserved for fishing and hiking; boating was prohibited based on early exploration and safety concerns. However, advances in boating technology resulted in lighter and more nimble kayaks and increased "Creek" boating as a popular recreational activity. In 2012, during Forest Plan revision and in response to challenges and advocacy by American Whitewater, the Forest Service revised its regulations to allow floating activities on National Forest System lands above GA/SC Highway 28, including the stretches floated by Charlie in 1965. May 10, 2024, was the 50th Anniversary of Congress designating the Chattooga River a Wild and Scenic River in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

We Remember....

Foster Bullock, Jr. "Kiddo" passed away on March 18, 2025, at the age of 76. He was born on June 20, 1948, to Foster Bullock, Sr. and Kathleen Bullock.

Foster was retired from the U.S. Forest Service where he made many friends. He attended school at the Riverside Indian School in Anadarko, OK. He was a huge sports fan and enjoyed watching his kids and grandkids play. He was a loving and devoted husband, father, grandfather, brother, uncle, and friend to all who knew and loved him.

Foster was preceded in death by his parents, Foster Bullock, Sr. and Kathleen Poncho Bullock; sister, Loretta Williams; brothers, Brady Bullock and Glendon Wayne Bullock. He is survived by his loving wife, Winifred Bullock "Tinki"; three children, three brothers, seven sisters, nine grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

The funeral service was held Friday, March 21, 2025, at the Alabama-Coushatta Multi-Purpose Center with Second Chief Herbert Johnson Jr. officiating. Burial was at the Reservation Cemetery.

Frank Edward "Ed" Burrell, age 70, passed away Saturday, March 29, 2025, at his residence. Ed was born on April 10, 1954, in Monticello, Georgia, to the late Frank Loyd Burrell and Nancy Lorena Edwards Burrell. He was a lifelong resident of Jasper County.

After graduating from Monticello High School in 1972, he worked for the Pope Brothers Logging Company. He then went to work for Dexter Axle in Monticello for about ten years. Before retirement, he worked as a forestry technician for the U. S. Forest Service for twenty-three years where he found his true passion--fighting wildfires. He fought wildfires nationwide from Oregon to Florida and was a volunteer fire-fighter for over twenty years with the Jasper County Fire Department.

Ed was a devoted member of the Monticello Baptist Church. He was a true "jack of all trades" and could fix almost anything. He always tried to make it to the Dairy Queen for lunch to see his buddies. He was very kind, but he didn't always let it be known. Always outspoken, he enjoyed talking politics with anyone who would listen. He loved to fish, hunt and work on the farm. He loved to joke and had a great sense of humor that the family will truly miss.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his brother, Thomas Loyd Burrell. He is survived by his niece, Mariah (Eric) Wojdacz of Monticello; nephew, Thomas Burrell of Monticello step-daughter, Magen (Maylon) Wages of Panama City, Florida; and step-grandchildren, Taylor Wages and Tyler Wages.

Dick Cox. With heavy hearts, we announce the passing of Dick Cox, who left this world at the age of 88. Born in Carrizozo, New Mexico, he grew up in Ft Stanton, and went to high school in Capitan where he met the love of his life, Donna Mae Cloud. They married shortly after high school, beginning a lifelong adventure together until her passing.

A man of extraordinary skill and dedication, Dick received the Gold Medal two times at the National Senior Olympics in archery. He was a formidable foe, an undefeated competitor in his division at both State and Nationals. His precision and passion for the sport were matched only by his deep love for the land. He devoted his career to the U.S. Forest Service, fighting wildfires, managing public lands across the United States, and even lending his expertise to conservation efforts in other countries. His

work took the family—he, Donna, and their three boys—to various locations in New Mexico and Arizona. The job took Dick and Donna to Atlanta where he retired in 1991.

After retirement, he returned to the place that always had his heart: Nogal, NM. There, on the family ranch—purchased by his eldest son from Dick's own father—he spent his days exactly as he wanted: helping on the land, cherishing time with his grandchildren and great-grandchild, and enjoying a well-earned cup of coffee with old friends at the Smokey Bear Café.

A lifelong learner, Dick had an uncanny knowledge of nearly every type of rock and plant he came across, a true steward of the land. He could often be found with a book in hand, watching rodeos, or keeping up with his favorite sports. Above all, he was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, greatgrandfather, and friend—a man whose wisdom, kindness, and strength left an indelible mark on all who knew him.

Dick is preceded in death by his beloved wife, Donna, sons Bill and John, and granddaughter Jolee Cox. He is survive d by his remaining son, David (Katrinka), daughter in law, Susan Cox Draughn, grandson John(Laura), granddaughters Calley Carter (Lee), Caitlin Rudgear (Nicholas), Avery de los Reyes (Kenny) and great grandson, Callum de los Reyes. He leaves behind a legacy of love, hard work, and quiet excellence that will be remembered for generations.

Kyle Dillard was born April 22, 1942 in Hardin County, Texas, the son of the late Bennie (Cox) and Hubert Dillard. He passed away Friday, March 21, 2025 at his residence.

Mr. Dillard was a loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He retired from the U. S. Forest Service in the engineering department. He enjoyed fishing, hunting, and watching sports, especially watching his sons and grandchildren play sports. He served in the United States Army.

Survivors include his wife of 60 years, Shelby Dillard of Lufkin; sons, Steve Dillard and Brent Dillard and wife Tracy, all of Lufkin; grandchildren, Michael Dillard and wife Ashton, Kaegan Dillard and wife Deanna, Briana Dillard and Jake Scott, Raelin Moore and husband Ben; great-grandchildren, Shane Dillard, Caroline Moore, Connor Moore and Haidyn Scott; and numerous other family members. In addition to his parents, Mr. Dillard was preceded in death by his stepfather, Al Chambliss.

Mary Ann Fletcher, age 78, a retired human resources professional, died of natural causes at her home in Fairfax County, Virginia, on June 14, 2004. Mary Ann was born in Midland Michigan, to Doris and Herbert Fletcher.

During her long career with the Federal government, including the USDA Forest Service and the US Office of Personnel Management, she lived and worked in several states, including at the Ouachita National Forest Supervisor's Office in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Mary was a loving mother and wife, and an avid reader. She loved cats and was caretaker for a number of cats throughout her life.

She is survived by her husband, Darren Hutchinson, daughter, Kellie, daughter-in-law, Mei-Li, son Greg, daughter-in-law, Paula, and brothers Alan, Michael, and William. and friends all over the country. Mary Ann will be celebrated in a private ceremony. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria Virginia.

Randy Fowler, age 66, of Cleveland, passed away on Friday, March 7, 2025. Randy was born on July 28th, 1958, in Jacksonville, Florida, to Laura Fowler and her late husband Ed Fowler. Randy moved several times across Florida and Georgia while growing up, participating in Boy Scouts where he earned his Eagle Scout. The family finally landed in Satellite Beach, Florida, where Randy built beach buggies, tagged sea turtles, worked for the Satellite Beach Fire Department, and met the love of his life, Melinda "Mindy" Fowler.

Randy attended Clemson University for two years, finishing his education at the University of Florida for the last two years with a Bachelor of Science in Agronomy, or as he liked to call it "studying dirt."

Randy and Mindy were married August 7th, 1982. Randy took a job with the Soil and Water Conservation Service and later came to work for the Forest Service where he worked on several esteemed projects, including the Chattooga Watershed Project, eventually ending up at the Coweta Hydrologic Laboratory. Randy and Mindy had two boys, and Mindy was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. Randy and Mindy both showed amazing strength and perseverance, homeschooling both of their children and overcoming all obstacles placed in front of them together.

Randy Fowler loved the Lord, passionately loved his wife, his children, and the outdoors. His life was one of absolute fulfillment of purpose and an immaculate example of what it means to have a servants' heart.

He is survived by his mom, Laura Fowler, his brother, Coke Fowler, his son and daughter-in-law, Zak and Katie Fowler, his son and daughter-in-law, Taylor and Brooke Fowler, and numerous nieces and nephews and other extended family.

Owedia Gray passed away on May 23, 2025. "Weedie" served many years in the Southern Regional Office as a Budget Assistant for State and Private Forestry and for Natural Resources. She retired in 2011 and continued to live in the Atlanta area. She will be missed by her family and many Forest Service friends. Condolences may be sent to the family at 2753 Landrum Drive, SW, Atlanta, GA 30311.

Bobby Dan James passed away on April 28, 2025. Bob was born September 23, 1937 to Wilma and Eulas James in Clinton Arkansas. Bob is the older brother to Jerry James and Barbara Ann Lyles. He is the husband to the love of his life Shirley Shaw James. They have been married for 67 years. Bob is Daddy to four daughters, Grandaddy to eight grandchildren, and Great Grandaddy to 3 great grandchildren. Bob is Uncle Bob to many nieces and nephews. Bob is preceded in death by his parents, Eulas and Wilma James, his sister Barbara Ann and his daughter Shawna Sanford.

Bob's career with the United States Forest Service took his family to California, South Carolina, Arkansas, Oklahoma and, finally, Georgia. Bob loved his career with the Forest Service. He was passionate about all things to do with trees and most definitely about fighting forest fires. His love and appreciation for God's creation was unmatched. While working with the Forest Service, Bob and Shirley made many lifelong friends and enjoyed traveling all the national forests.

Bob loved serving the Lord in many capacities. Wherever they lived he was quick to get his family involved in church. His love for Jesus drove him to share the gospel with anyone and everyone he met, even at his latest hospital stay; he was sharing the gospel with his nurse. Bob loved his family and friends

deeply. Always quick with a smile and a helping hand. But his love for his family and friends could not compare to his love for his Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. On April 28, 2025, his Lord welcomed Bob into heaven no doubt saying, "Well done my good and faithful servant, WELL DONE!"

A funeral service honoring Bob's life was held on Friday, May 2, 2025, at First Baptist Cumming.

Kattie Ann Staley Jackson passed away on March 29, 2025. She was born on December 21, 1938, in Newberry County, South Carolina. She was the third youngest child of the late Jake Staley and Katie Bouknight Staley. Mrs. Jackson was educated in the public schools of Newberry County, South Carolina and graduated from Gallman High, Class of 1954. She moved to Columbia, SC, in 1960 and throughout her life she was employed with the University of South Carolina, Tampa Canron, and the U.S. Forest Service. She retired in 2007 after many years of dedicated service.

In addition to her parents, Mrs. Jackson was preceded in death by her daughters, Janice Staley, Karen Jackson, and Kathy Habersham; brothers, David Hyler and Frank Staley. Mrs. Jackson leaves to mourn her passing: two sisters, Lilie James and Frances Addison (Matthew Addison); daughters, Jacquelyn Staley Hickman, of Columbia South Carolina, Kimberly Jackson (fiancé Tookie Brown); two sons, James Douglas Jackson, Jr. and Brian Keith Jackson, both of Columbia, South Carolina; 16 grandchildren; 24 great-grandchildren; a host of nieces; nephews; great-nieces; great-nephews; many other loving relatives, and caring friends, all of whom will miss her dearly.

Barney Dale Parker, 77, of Booneville, Arkansas, passed from this life on Friday, June 13, 2025. He was born June 7, 1948, in Fort Smith, Arkansas, to the late Wilford Bryant “Barney” and Ernestine Parker.

He had a distinguished 27-year career with the US Forest Service. He was a timber marker and firefighter, among other roles early in his career, until completion of law enforcement training at which time he began working with the division of Law Enforcement and Investigations on the Ouachita National Forest.

He was a member of the First United Methodist Church in Booneville, and attended the Caulksville Cumberland Presbyterian Church. He held the honor of being a Mason of Blocker Lodge #247. He was a former board member of the South Logan County Boys and Girls Club, where he was a past board member of the year.

He is preceded in death by his parents before mentioned; sister, Chrisi Taylor; and brother, James Bryant Parker. Dale is survived by his wife of 51 years, Nikki Parker of the home; son, Clark Parker and wife Tori of Booneville; daughter Rachel Ewing and husband Heath of Magazine; grandchildren Dillon Ewing, Claire Parker, and Bryce Parker; brother Kit Parker of Booneville; and sisters Verna Jean Cunningham and husband Gary of Booneville and Mary Cooksey and husband Brian of Magazine, and other relatives and friends.

Funeral Service was held on Tuesday, June 17, 2025, at First United Methodist Church in Booneville, with burial at Oak Hill Cemetery, under the direction of Roberts Funeral Home. Honorary Pallbearers: US Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers of the Ouachita National Forest, Dr. Charles Miesner, Marvin Holland, Jr., Buddy Littlefield, and Tracy Spencer.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Booneville First United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 507, Booneville, AR 72927, or Caulksville Cumberland Presbyterian Church P.O. Box 2, Ratcliff, AR 72951.

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 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 – Retirees, spouses, and friends meet the second Wednesday of even months (Feb, Apr, Jun, Oct and Dec) at 11:30 am for social time and lunch at 12:00 noon at Jersey Lilies on Electric Rd. in Salem, VA. Contact Tom Poulin, 540-966-1058, or e-mail 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.

Photo: Left side front to back: Cricket Hasbrouck, Bill Pell, Cheryl Chatham, Jim Hasbrouck, Rich Standage, Larry Hedrick, Bubba Brewster, Paula Hedrick. Right side front to back: Nick Finzer, Al Newman, Mike Curran, Jack Courtenay, Ray Yelverton and Gloria Hammond.

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 odnpat@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. Contact: ??.

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.

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.

Photo: Gay Ippolito, Terri and John Guidry, Glenn and Anne Elms, Tim and Alma Bigler.

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

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