

Boots in the Forest

FORESTRY TECHNICIAN

Hi, I'm Karleen Janssen, Forestry Technician on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest in Idaho.

Where do you work?

I work at the Mesa Falls Visitor Center. The Mesa Falls Scenic Byway takes you to two of the last undisturbed waterfalls in the West. Upper and Lower Mesa Falls are the last major falls in Idaho that have not been used for irrigation or hydroelectric projects. They offer spectacular views in a beautiful forest setting. The upper waterfall at the Mesa Falls Visitor Center has been developed with paths and viewing areas and is easily accessible to all. Visitors will enjoy the fur room in the visitor center and looking through the telescope on the porch to view the osprey nest.



Why do you like working at Mesa Falls?

I love the Mesa Falls area because I am a native of this area. I grew up here as a child, and visited Mesa Falls before there were any trails or improvements made here. We would slide down the muddy tracks and trails and stand on the edge of the falls as kids. I have a tender spot in my heart for this location because I feel like it is partly my home.

I also like it because I love to teach and to tell visitors about the importance of taking care of the wonderful things that we have here. We need to preserve them so they will be here for generations to come.

Why do you like working at the Visitor Center?

We get so many compliments and comments about how beautiful and well-kept the place is. I am proud of the folks who work with me here because we all work so hard to keep it clean and fresh every day. We are very proud of our site here at Mesa Falls. People say they've seen falls all over the world, but they come here and are just amazed. Of course I agree. I tell them these are the most beautiful falls in America. People are pretty happy. They come here and have a good time.

What activities do you offer at the Mesa Falls Visitor Center?

We have paved trails and a nature trail going down to the lower falls so people get plenty of walking here. We have a fur room in the visitor center, which is a real hit because visitors can touch the furs and feel the difference in textures. The animals on display are native to the area. We give programs to explain the history of the area or to talk about the different animals—their characteristics, habits, what they eat, that type of thing. In this area, we have everything from the muskrat to the lynx. We even have the wild and dangerous wolverine. They are very illusive and you rarely see them.



Karleen's leather boots are waterproof and durable. She goes through a pair every year, thanks to all of the walking she does.

Can you view wildlife in the area?

One of the things that's a real hit with folks is the telescope on the porch of the visitor center. They can look across the canyon and view an osprey nest. The parents raise chicks in that nest every year. It takes some time for the babies to get large enough so you can see their little heads coming up because the osprey nest is really quite deep. People come here year after year and one of the first things they want to see is how the osprey are doing. That telescope is a very busy spot.

“I tell people, ‘You are about to see the most beautiful falls you’ve ever seen, and if I’m not telling you the truth or you disagree come find me.’ But they never do—so I think they probably agree!”



Karleen in the fur room at the Mesa Falls Visitor Center.



Watch [this video](#) to see more about Mesa Falls and Karleen’s work at Mesa Falls.

MESA FALLS VISITOR CENTER



The [Mesa Falls Visitor Center](#) occupies the historic Big Falls Inn, built around 1915 by the Snake River Electric Light and Power Company. With its spectacular setting, the Inn was a popular spot for social gatherings in its past lives as a hotel, a cafe, and a dance hall. Later it became a way station on the Yellowstone Highway for ranchers, sportsmen, and tourists. After acquiring the inn from Montana Power in 1986, the Forest Service partnered with Harriman State Park and other generous groups to renovate the facilities and keep the site open. Big Falls Inn is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Visitors will enjoy its exhibits on the natural and cultural history of the area.