

GIFFORD PINCHOT NATIONAL FOREST

2015 Year in Review



USDA



for the greatest good

2015 on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest

2015 was an exciting and busy year! The Gifford Pinchot National Forest contended with multiple fires on the forest, commemorated the 35th anniversary of the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens, began planning our forest headquarters move, and welcomed a few new members to its leadership team, all while going about our work of serving the public and caring for the land.

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest is a diverse place for plants, wildlife, and people. This report is a snapshot of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in 2015. Many accomplishments were the result of months or years of hard work. Most involved partnership and collaboration from organizations, agencies, tribes, volunteers, and individuals who are all invested in the Forest. We look forward to continuing to work together for the future of this remarkable place.

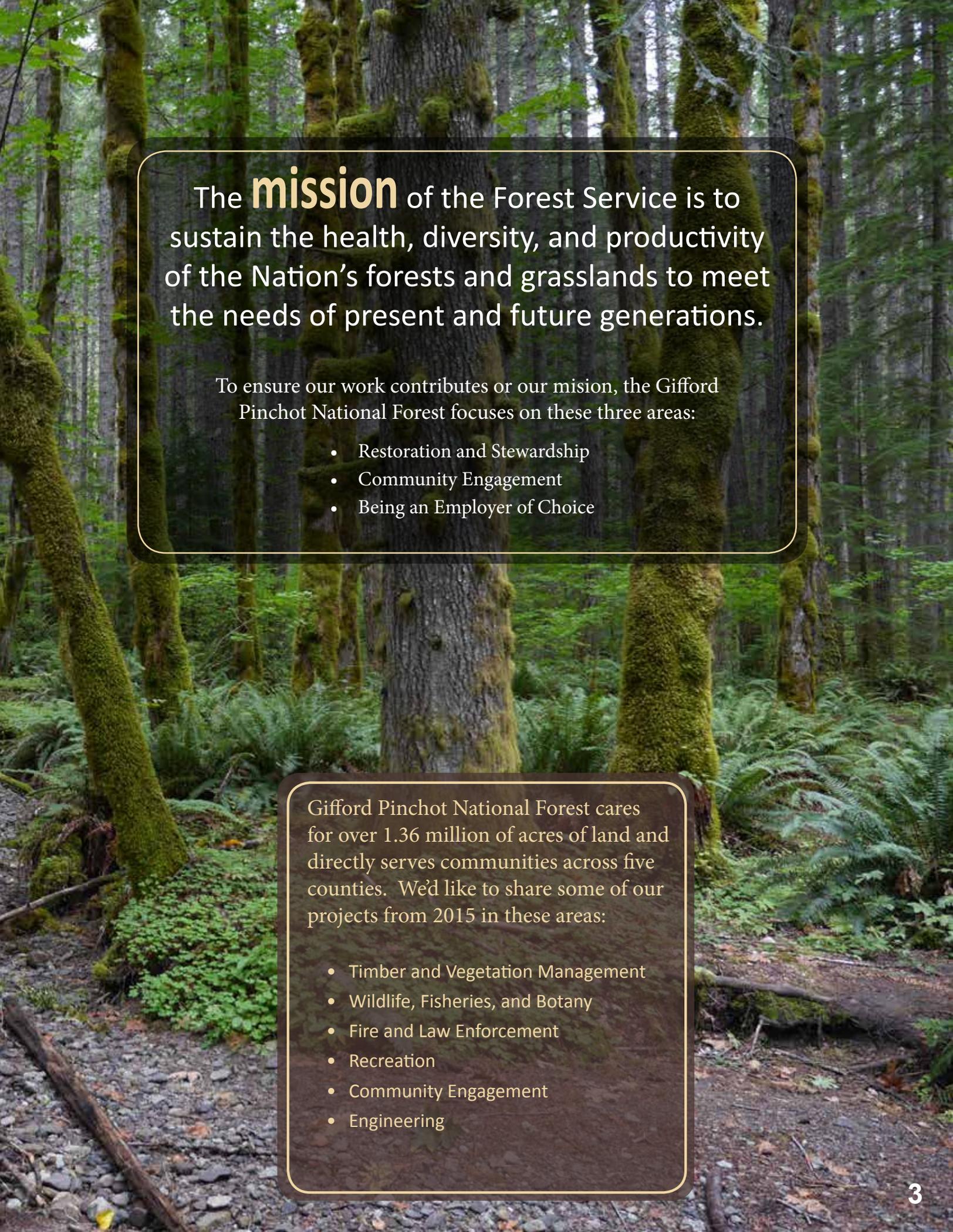
2016 will be a busy year too, full of opportunities and challenges. As I to get to know all the different places in the forest and build rela-

tionships with our communities, I am confident that we will be up to the task.

As stewards on of public land we endeavor to practice the words of the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, providing the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run.

Gina Owens
Forest Supervisor



A photograph of a dense forest with moss-covered tree trunks and ferns. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the trees. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and small plants. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

The **mission** of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

To ensure our work contributes to our mission, the Gifford Pinchot National Forest focuses on these three areas:

- Restoration and Stewardship
- Community Engagement
- Being an Employer of Choice

Gifford Pinchot National Forest cares for over 1.36 million of acres of land and directly serves communities across five counties. We'd like to share some of our projects from 2015 in these areas:

- Timber and Vegetation Management
- Wildlife, Fisheries, and Botany
- Fire and Law Enforcement
- Recreation
- Community Engagement
- Engineering

TIMBER & VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Collaboration on the Gifford Pinchot

Working with the Pinchot Partners and the South Gifford Pinchot collaborative groups result in a better collective understanding of the planning process and the value of early involvement. Both groups are actively involved in forest work.

In October 2015 the Pinchot Partners, along with members of the Cowlitz Tribe and forest staff, led a tour for legislators from Washington State and the U.S. Congress. The group toured projects to demonstrate the benefits of collaboration in forest management. The tour featured a plantation thin area, an active huckleberry restoration project using stewardship authority, a legacy road de-commission site, and huckleberry pie.

Stewardship Projects Funded From Retained Receipts

One tool the Gifford Pinchot uses to achieve land management goals while meeting community needs are Stewardship Sales. Retained receipts from these timber sales fund stewardship projects across the forest. Potential projects are reviewed by forest collaborative groups, made up of community members.

In 2015, \$400,000 of retained receipts funded:

- road ditch line and culvert maintenance to strengthen watersheds
- installation of gate access to improve winter elk habitat
- erosion and sediment control to protect water quality
- removal of invasive and noxious plant species
- pruning and weeding trees to improve forest health
- reducing wildfire risk through activity fuels treatment

Timber Facts

Timber is measured in million board feet (mmbf).

Volume Harvested	41.6 mmbf
Volume Sold	38.7 mmbf
Stand Improvement (thinning of small diameter trees)	2,079 acres
Reforestation	1,240 acres

Special Forest Products Facts

Christmas Tree permits	2,693
Beargrass permits	2,561
Boughs permits & contracts	17
Firewood permits & contracts	984
Mushroom permits	1,159
Salal permits	1,415
Berry permits	656
Free-Use permits	3,341

Total Value of all
Special Forest Products \$731,843



Pale Blue-eyed Grass

Pale blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium sarmentosum*) is a lovely little plant with lilac flowers that likes to grow in meadows. However, loss of habitat has reduced its population to only 22 known sites in the world. Nine of those sites are in the Gifford Pinchot.

Forest botanists are working hard to help out pale blue-eyed grass. In 2015, the forest removed invasive weeds on 65 acres of pale blue-eyed grass habitat; continued to study whether the plant is vulnerable to hybridization with another plant, Idaho blue-eyed grass; and partnered with the University of Washington and Stevenson High School to plant 123 greenhouse grown pale blue-eyed grass.

WILDLIFE, FISHERIES & BOTANY

Festivals for Fish

The Gifford Pinchot continually works to improve fish passage and habitat throughout the forest. But fish were also in the spotlight at fish and fishing events across the forest.

In June hundreds of kids and their families learned about fish, participated in arts and games, and grabbed their poles to reel in a catch. Forest fisheries and recreation staff partnered with local organizations at the Mount St. Helens Kids Fishing Derby at Lake Merwin, the Lewis County Kids Fishing Derby at Lake Scanewa, and the Mount Adams Fish Education Day at Goose Lake.

In September, forest staff participated in the Sturgeon Festival in Vancouver, WA. This fish festival was a huge hit among families, promoting sturgeon and their home in Columbia River ecosystems. Participants saw some forest animals up-close during reptile and birds of prey shows featuring live animals.

Mount St. Helens: 35 Years Later

Thirty five years ago on May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens erupted, spewing ash, rock, and hot gases into the air and causing mud to flow down the mountain sides. Within minutes the volcano's north flank collapsed, triggering the largest landslide in recorded history.

Today, the volcano has become a world-class outdoor laboratory for the study of volcanoes, ecosystems and forestry, as well as a major recreational and tourist destination.

2015 marked the 35th anniversary of the eruption and represents a key moment in the volcano's history. A commemoration was held at the Science and Learning Center to honor those who lost their lives, listen to stories of those that survived, and hear scientists share their amazing discoveries over the last 30 years.

Fostering Future Forest Scientists

More young women are getting involved with science each year. The Gifford Pinchot National Forest and Mount St. Helens Institute want to help young women pursue science and natural resources careers.

In August, the Institute hosted a Geo-Girls camp. Twenty middle school girls from Oregon and Washington attended the week-long camp. They were mentored by professional scientists and science educators. Forest Service employees participated by sharing about their jobs and potential career paths as these young women think about their future. The mentors taught the girls how to use many different kinds of equipment such as GPS stations and Photogrammetry Software to build 3-D models of Mount St Helens.

Improving Watersheds through Invasive Plant Removal

Gifford Pinchot National Forest Fisheries Biologist Ken Wieman knew there was an invader in Coldwater Lake. If it escaped its present home it might spread and take over dozens of places across the southern part of the forest. The culprit? Eurasian milfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), an aquatic plant, has been labeled an invasive species in half the country, and costs millions of dollars to control nationwide.

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest doesn't have a lot of Eurasian milfoil and Wieman wanted to keep it that way. Biologists met with partners from the Skamania County and Cowlitz

County Weed Control Program staff and board members to make a plan of attack.

On a sunny day in June, a dive team from the Northwest Region Office arrived to help the forest and county partners. Armed with bags, nets, canoes, and other equipment, staff went to work hand-pulling and removing all of the Eurasian milfoil possible.

Staff will continue to monitor the lake to see if any milfoil reappears, but this successful

project has helped improve aquatic habitat and inland fisheries across the Toutle River watershed.



FIRE & LAW ENFORCEMENT



Fires on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest

Fire plays a very natural role in ecosystems on parts of the Gifford Pinchot. 2015 was a hot, dry year. The winter of 2014-2015 contributed little snow and drought conditions continued through the summer. As a result, the forest had an unusually busy fire season.

When deciding how to respond to fires, the forest keeps the safety of surrounding communities and firefighters as top priorities. Steep terrain and sometimes windy conditions emphasized the importance of responding strategically while looking out for the people closest to the fires.

We relied on assistance from three interagency teams from Washington and California, but also appreciated the dedication of employees and community members. Hard work and coordination ensured public and employee safety as the forest responded to the ongoing challenges of fires.

The Mt. Adams Complex began July 3 in the Mt. Adams Wilderness on the west side of the mountain. Located in steep terrain with many already dead trees from a previous fire several years ago, the Mount Adams Complex provided a good opportunity for prudent fire suppression. Staff paid particular

care to preserving the wilderness character of the landscape while containing the fire. Heavy lift helicopters dropped water while ground crews eliminated burning or hazardous snags.

Nearby, the Cougar Creek Fire began on the south side of Mt. Adams on August 10. Eventually growing to over 53,000 acres, the Cougar Creek Fire brought together the U. S. Forest Service, the Yakama Nation, the Washington Dept. of Natural Resources, and Klickitat County Emergency Management.

The climbing route to Mt. Adams summit was closed and visitors across the forest had to adapt to public use restrictions. Heritage and fire staff wrapped the historic Gotchen Cabin in aluminized structure wrap that helped protect the 106 year old structure from the flames.

In the northwest corner of the forest, extremely steep terrain and tree-to-tree torching spread the Alder Lake Fire over 280 acres. The Alder Lake Fire was difficult to access, with much effort put in to creating containment lines. The fire slowly subsided within the containment lines with the happy return of fall rains.

Smokey Goes to School

Firefighters and school kids generally don't hang out together but during the Cougar Creek Fire students and staff at Glenwood School shared their school with over 500 fire personnel fighting the 50,000 acre fire around Mt. Adams. Incident Management Teams often set up base camp at schools during the summer, but Incident Commander Dave Leitch couldn't recall a school ever permitting a team to stay after school starts.

Staff assigned to the fire camped on the sports fields, while support trailers, food and shower trucks, and medical, communications, and food tents spread across the parking lots.

As kids returned to school, firefighters and Smokey Bear were on hand to welcome each student back to Glenwood School, talk about how firefighters work, and offer bear hugs from Smokey.

The support of Glenwood made the work on Cougar Creek Fire a little less stressful and more efficient. The Forest relies on these strong community partnerships for effective emergency management.

The DNA of Resource Protection on the Forest

Law Enforcement officers on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest enjoyed the culmination of four years of hard work in August after four men were indicted on illegal harvesting of big leaf maples and selling the wood for use in musical instruments.

A problem across the country, poaching of maples steals from the public, damages the forest, and has strong ties to illegal drugs. The suspects were charged by the U. S. Attorney General's office with cutting and selling trees for a combined profit of \$800,000. All four pleaded guilty to their charges and are in the process of sentencing.

Although law enforcement staff had heard rumors and seen the aftermath of illegal maple harvesting a few years ago, it took two years of dedication and careful police work to gather the evidence necessary to indict the people responsible.

While Gifford Pinchot law enforcement received assistance from staff in neighboring forests, they also looked halfway around the world to create their case. Scientists from the University of Adelaide, Australia are pioneering DNA identification of trees to help fight forest poaching, an illegal industry estimated at \$30 million worldwide.

A single maple tree's DNA is unique. After analyzing extracted tree DNA, scientists can match milled lumber, downed logs, and even finished guitars to the stumps left behind in the forest. Teams of scientists and officers were able to collect big leaf maple DNA from poached areas on the forest to compare with wood from suspects.

Through a partnership of science and traditional investigation methods from law enforcement officers, Gifford Pinchot National Forest is part of this pioneering work that can help forests worldwide.



Officer Malamphy takes a sample of a big leaf maple for DNA analysis. Law enforcement investigated this case with help from USFS International Programs.

Fire Facts



Columbia Cascade Communications Center

When forest staff go out into the woods they rely on the Columbia Cascade Communications Center (WA-CCC) to help keep them connected. WA-CCC provides radio dispatch and logistical support across the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, the Mt. Hood National Forest, and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

The dispatch center is in contact with staff when they are driving in or working on the forest. Dispatch, supported by our radio shop team, helps maintain safety for staff and visitors to the public.

WA-CCC is also a key player during fires and other emergencies. They are responsible for reporting, tracking, and processing orders for aircraft, equipment, overhead, crews and other supplies needed to support people on the ground. In 2015 WA-CCC processed 4,544 incident requests across the area!



RECREATION

Leave No Trace Training on the Forest

In September the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument hosted the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoors Ethics to help promote good visitor practices on the Forest.

Activities at Mount St. Helens included workshops for hikers, campers, and hunters, as well as a volunteer clean-up of heavily impacted dispersed campsites, hauling out 5,000 lbs. of garbage!

The Leave No Trace programs brought a renewed focus to some of the problems that result from heavy recreational use of the forest. Trash, food scraps, human waste, improper fire rings, and homemade latrines mar the landscape.

By practicing Leave No Trace principles, we can enjoy our national forest responsibly and sustainably.



Creating Better Wilderness Volunteers

Justin Ewer of the Mt. Adams Ranger District and Jon Erickson of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area both share a passion for wilderness. After years of training seasonal rangers and volunteers to care for wilderness, they were struck by the amount of time it takes to become proficient with the skills needed for effective wilderness stewardship.

Recognizing that some incredible and talented people work for wilderness preservation, they realized that effectively passing on knowledge to the next generation of wilderness stewards is critical to the Forest Service mission and to wilderness itself.

“We certainly are not the first to wrestle with this question. There has been some great work done nationally, but this training came about as we asked what we could do in our region,” Ewer said.

On May 30 and 31, 2015 they led the first Region 6 Wilderness Training for Volunteers. The results surprised them. Thirty volunteers from across the region eagerly signed up to learn basic wilderness skills, wilderness monitoring, visitor contact skills, and wilderness restoration.

“Our focus was to improve the quality of training and build stronger connections regionally within the wilderness community around volunteerism,” Ewer explained. Based on the success of this year’s training, he and Erickson hope to be able to continue to offer, and expand upon, these types of trainings in the future.

Cascade Peaks Info Station

A new visitor contact station opened on the east side of Mount St. Helens on the way to Windy Ridge. The Cascades Peaks station replaces an old structure which was run down and unusable.

The station offers a place to take in amazing views and learn more about the volcano. The Mount St. Helens Institute and Discover Your Northwest operate the seasonal site, offering information, snacks, and a few souvenirs.

Boots on the Ground

Each year hundreds of thousands of people come from around the world to experience Mount St. Helens. The national volcanic monument is especially proud of its interpretive ranger program, which in 2015 brought a little more awe to the visits of over 55,000 students and members of the public who attended a ranger program.

Cowlitz Valley Ranger District engineers and recreation staff worked together to identify and evaluate 18 miles of forest roads to add to the loop riding opportunities of the Blue Lake ATV trail system. They also worked closely with the Cowlitz Basin ORV Club to install trail and traffic safety signs to open the roads to off-highway vehicles.

The trail crew at Mt. Adams Ranger District improved miles of hiking trails by repairing and completing three trail bridges: the Boundary Bridge on the Boundary Trail #1, the Chinook Falls Bridge, and the West Creek Bridge both on the Siouxon Trail #130.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Forest Headquarters Preparing to Move

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest Headquarters office will move to their new home at the Fort Vancouver Historic Site in 2016. The Forest Service and National Park Service worked together to create this unique opportunity to provide a joint presence with the National Park Service as federal land managers connecting with our public.

Rehabilitation of two buildings at the Fort Vancouver site is underway. Employees will be located in a historic infantry barracks building. A second, more modern brick building will house the Columbia Cascade Communications Center, as well as fire and fleet operations.

Beginning in March the forest visitor reception area will be co-located with the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site in the newly renovated visitor center. This will provide visitors an opportunity to visit the park and learn about the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and all it has to offer.

Volunteers

Volunteers work across the forest to make the Gifford Pinchot a better place to visit. We especially rely on our education, trails, and other partners in leading volunteer groups.

Volunteer hours contributed in 2015: 40,112

Value: \$925,383



White Pass Elementary first graders learn about the animals of the forest while listening to Cowlitz Valley Ranger District recreation technician and storyteller Steve Hoecker.

Youth Opportunities on the Forest

Gifford Pinchot National Forest is benefiting from programs aimed at providing youth with employment opportunities, positive life skills, and a chance to connect with the surrounding forest. Since 2002 the Forest Youth Success and White Pass Discovery Team program have provided jobs for hundreds of high school students seeking employment during the summer months. These nationally recognized programs grew out of partnerships between local school districts, the Forest Service, and other partners.

For several summer weeks, students work with forest staff to learn about natural resources and engineering on the forest while working hard on outdoor projects. They improve trails, work along forest roads and help restore viewpoints, help out at community events, and help to remove noxious weeds.

National Get Outdoors Day

In June, staff from across the forest participated in the seventh annual National Get Outdoors Day in Vancouver, Washington. Full of free outdoor activities and family fun for the nearly 5,000 people who attend, National Get Outdoors Day aims to encourage healthy, outdoor fun for kids and adults.

Activities included climbing, archery, trout fishing, a historic fur trader encampment, and more! Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl were also on hand while participants learned about recreation opportunities in the Gifford Pinchot.



Travel Analysis Moving Forward

In 2015 the Gifford Pinchot National Forest completed our forest-wide Travel Analysis Report. As part of the Travel Management Rule, each forest across the country was required to identify the road system needed over the short and long term for safe and efficient travel while providing for administration, utilization, and protection of national forest lands.

Over the past three years, forest staff have been gathering public input from as many forest users as possible. The forest held public meetings across the region and comments were requested online and in writing. The forest also held follow-up meetings this spring to keep people informed of the progress and methodology.

Meanwhile, forest planners, engineers, biologists, and geologists evaluated roads for environmental risk, access needs, maintenance requirements, and budget expectations. When taken as a whole, the findings of the report discuss the critical issues related to road management on the forest.

Travel analysis is not a decision-making process. It is an assessment of the existing condition of the current road system.

Specifically, this report will be used to inform:

- Future plan and project-level proposed actions, purpose and need statements, and future decisions pertaining to road construction,

reconstruction, decommissioning, and maintenance;

- Road investments at Regional, Forest, and District scales;
- Delivery of National, Regional, and Forest restoration programs for multiple resources;
- Forest Service strategies to comply with regulatory requirements, including those associated with the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act.

New Bridge Brings Innovation

When it came time to replace the Layout Creek crossing, the Gifford Pinchot National Forest partnered with the Bonneville Power Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, and Ecotrust to build a new and innovative bridge using a Geosynthetic Reinforced Soil-Integrated Bridge System. This is the first implementation of the system on the U.S. Forest service road system.

Layout Creek flows into Trout Creek and then the Wind River. The old 12 foot by 8 foot arch culvert at this site was deteriorating, and created a barrier for Lower Columbia River steelhead, resident trout and other aquatic species.

Improvements benefit the Forest Service, native fish, and communities, by preventing expensive emergency repairs and the associated environmen-

tal impacts that result from culvert failures.

Advantages to using this new approach include its comparatively low cost; the ability to use simple construction techniques and materials; off-site construction of concrete bridge slabs to reduce damage to the

forest; and flexible bridge foundations that easily adjust to field conditions.

The forest's implementation of the project was so successful that the Gifford Pinchot earned the Award of Honor from the Carl Anderson Conservation Project Engineering Awards.



CONTACT US



Cowlitz Valley Ranger District

10024 US Highway 12
Randle, WA 98377
(360) 497-1100

Mount Adams Ranger District

2455 Highway 141
Trout Lake, WA 98650
(509) 395-3400



Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument

42218 NE Yale Bridge Rd.
Amboy, WA 98601
(360) 449-7800



Gifford Pinchot National Forest Information

1501 E. Evergreen Blvd.
Vancouver, WA 98661
(360) 891-5000

www.fs.usda.gov/giffordpinchot



Gifford Pinchot National Forest Vicinity



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