



# FOREST BOOTS

In a series of articles, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is recognizing employees for the important work they do and highlighting a variety of U.S. Forest Service careers.

## Grace Newell, Forest Tribal Liaison Supervisor's Office

When asked to describe her job, Grace Newell said with pride, "I serve as a bridge between the tribes and the U.S. Forest Service. And it's a two-way bridge; that's very important."

Grace is the Tribal Liaison for the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, stationed at the Supervisor's Office in Sparks, Nevada. She goes on to explain that she communicates the agency's mission to the Nevada tribes and relates their perspective to the Forest's leaders.

As a Paiute Shoshone Tribal member herself, Grace grew up on Lone Pine Reservation in the eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. Though certainly not required for the job, she said that her heritage has helped her establish positive working relationships. "It's a welcome change for the tribes. They feel comfortable having a fellow Native American as their liaison," said Grace. "However, it can also be awkward at times. I work for the agency, not vice versa."

Grace's career began with an academic scholarship to Dartmouth College, where she studied history. After graduation in 1978, she continued working for the university as the Director of its Native American Program. She recruited academic Native American students from across the western United States.

After her father passed away in 1983, Grace returned home to Lone Pine to be with her family. She took a

summer job with the Sequoia National Forest as a wildland firefighter on the Horseshoe Meadow Hotshots, the first fire crew composed primarily of tribal members. She was one of only two women in the group. "At that time, there were very few women in wildland firefighting," said Grace. "So I was breaking through barriers!"

That summer job turned into a lifelong career. "I fell in love with the Forest Service and never left!" said Grace. For many years she served in a variety of wildland fire positions in California



*From the office to the field, boots symbolize the work the U.S. Forest Service employees do caring for the land...*

Though Grace doesn't spend nearly as much time outside on her feet as she did during her wildland firefighting days, Grace still wears hiking boots to the office. "It's part of the agency's culture," she said. "Where else can you wear hiking boots to work, even for office jobs?"

and Nevada, including helitack crew, fire engine operator, rappel crew, handcrew captain, fuels specialist, and fire management officer.

"Early in my career I was advised to get a wide range of experience in order to move up in the agency," said Grace.

Nearing the mandatory firefighter retirement age of 57, Grace decided to take on a new role so that she



could keep working. "Fifty-seven just seemed too young to retire!" she said. So in 2012 she started to work in Sparks, Nevada, as the Tribal Liaison for the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest.

Grace said that her most memorable experience from her current role has been representing tribal perspectives during the development of Bi-State sage-grouse management policies. "The tribal voice really needed to be heard," she said. The policies were designed to manage sage-grouse habitat, where pinyon trees had encroached upon sagebrush ecosystems, rendering them uninhabitable for the birds. However, the tribes viewed the issue differently.

"To them, the pinyon represents the tree of life," said Grace. "It's a food source as well as a cultural center for family gatherings. To the tribes, the tree goes where it needs to. There's no such thing as encroachment." Grace's efforts helped managers reach a compromise to restore the sage-grouse's habitat while still respecting tribal views and needs.

Now 61, Grace said she is finally ready to retire and looks back on her career with satisfaction. "I feel proud of the work I've done," she said. "I think I've played a role in helping the Forest Service, the land, and the tribes."