

Boots in the Forest

SADDLE & PACK STOCK

Interviewed by Hans Bastian, Rangeland Management Specialist, Westside Ranger District

Hi, I'm Drifter, the saddle and pack stock for the Westside Ranger District on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest and Curlew National Grassland. I assist with range, wildlife, recreation, trails, and fire programs requiring backcountry travel.

How long have you been in this position?

I have been with the Forest Service since 2010 when I was 5 years old (that's 15 in horse years). I am one of seven horses on the south zone of the Forest.

What is required for your position?

I must be able to adjust to a variety of situations. I can be ridden or used to pack equipment or gear. I need to remain healthy and sound to accomplish work tasks. I must also have a good disposition, but I do admit that I get spooky when the wind is blowing.



What is a day like in your "boots"?

I live at the Bannock Guard Station, which is one of my favorite locations on the Forest. At the guard station, there is always tall mountain pasture and water. I explore the rest of the Forest roughly 30 days a season. I do allotment inspections, access non-motorized trails, assist with wildlife surveys, and have hauled equipment for fire crews. The more country I see, the more I like it. My favorite co-worker is Rocky, the other District horse who I spend most of my days with.

What were you doing when this photo was taken?

I was hauling in lumber for a single-track trail bridge. I have to be mindful of my load as I try not to damage items in transport. The more remote the location, the more important I feel in my contribution to the work assignment.

What footwear are you wearing?

My feet are not real big. I am 15 hands tall (five feet tall at the withers) and wear a 00 ("double aught") rim in the horseshoe world. I need to rotate to new shoes approximately every eight weeks during the higher work season. I like wearing shoes since I do not want to be limited in the rocky areas that I like to access.

What do you like about your job?

I like to walk fast and if appropriate trot out for longer distances. I like to get into the backcountry and then take a break and munch on some mountain grass. I



Drifter prepares to haul lumber for a trail bridge.

also like that get to travel cross-country and am not limited to designated routes. My favorite part about my job is the attention I get from all folks who meet me. I have the ability to put a smile on their faces as I allow them to give me a pat on the neck.

What career paths are in your future?

I would like to stay on the District as long as I am capable of doing the work. When I am 20 years old (that is 60 in horse years), I would like to slow down and find some pasture where a little kid would pamper me beyond reason.



Drifter's "boots" aren't like most Forest Service employees' footwear.

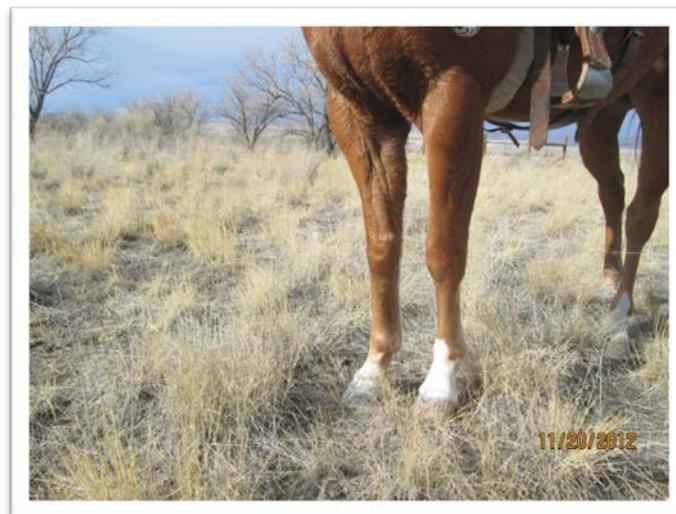
OUR FOUR-FOOTED EMPLOYEES

Saddle and pack stock have played an important role in administering the national forests for over a century. During the Forest Service's first decades, rangers had to supply their own horses and saddles. They also had to pass an exam to prove they could throw a diamond hitch and pack a horse.

Pack strings became increasingly important after 1910 when Congress provided funds for infrastructure to support fire suppression. Horses and mules were vital in the development of trails, roads, telephone lines, and lookout towers.

[Click here](#) to read profiles of horses and mules on the Ruby Mountains Ranger District in Nevada.

Interested in becoming a packer?
[Click here](#) to learn more.



"In this photo, I'm making a livestock grazing inspection. When I am out looking at grazing utilization guidelines, I can use my hooves to make quick assessments of remaining vegetation. From the bottom of my hoof to the top of the hairline is about four inches, so it helps me make a visual comparison."