

Boots in the Forest

JOHN KIDD

By Jaimie Olle

“It’s a good life,” says John Kidd about a career with the Forest Service. As ranger of the Boise National Forest’s Lowman Ranger District, roughly 75 miles north of Boise, Kidd manages 400,000 acres of land.

Kidd began working for the Forest Service in 1981 as a range technician on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest in eastern Idaho and Wyoming. During the previous summer, he managed a ranch near the Forest. By chance, he ran into a Forest Service range crew working on fences and water troughs, and he assisted them for a few days. The following summer, he joined their ranks.

During his 28 years on the Caribou Targhee, Kidd held positions in a variety of fields: range, wildlife, landline surveying, tree planting, fire, fuels management, and deputy fire staff. In 2009, he moved to the Boise National Forest to assume the position of Lowman District Ranger.

“The best part about this job is getting to work with a lot of different people,” explains Kidd. “I’m doing something new every day—and I get to do a little bit of everything.”

Kidd served as a Type 2 incident commander on an incident management team, particularly during fire season. He did it for over seven years and thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie that develops among team members. “It’s a very rewarding experience,” believes Kidd. “You’re out there to do the job—it’s great when you’ve got a good team and you’re working to keep people and resources safe.”

Kidd’s boots have seen the fire line from the firefighter’s perspective as well. He remembers times when he’d be cutting trees in the midst of a burn or during mop-up. Before he knew it, his feet would get hotter and hotter from standing in the heat of the ash. He’d rush to pull his boots off and cool his feet down.



John Kidd alternates between his cowboy boots and fire boots when on the job. As a district ranger, he never knows what each day will bring.

Over the years, Kidd's noticed that, where once boots saw a variety of different jobs, they're starting to become more specialized. People find their niches within the agency and more and more stick within these fields—which isn't to say that there's not a wide range of choices. Kidd cautions people from assuming that the Forest Service is a traditional timber agency—it's not.

Today you can find jobs in engineering, recreation, wildlife studies, firefighting, hydrology and so much more. Kidd firmly believes that working for the Forest Service is a great way to make a good living, spending many of your days in the field doing work about which you're passionate. People often pay to recreate in the areas where Forest Service employees get to work on a daily basis—and get paid to do so.

For Kidd, an ideal day at the office would have him in the saddle, riding through the backcountry wilderness on a sunny day. Even in his time off, Kidd enjoys riding horses, working with people and helping others, along with woodworking. He believes that if he were not a district ranger, he'd probably be a wilderness packer.

“The most important elements of being a district ranger and working for the Forest Service,” concludes Kidd, “are being able to properly take care of the ground and treating people with respect.”