

Employee, Spouse Help Rescue Victims of High-Speed Boat Crash

It was nearly midnight on Friday evening when John “Oly” Olson and his wife Leila witnessed a boat colliding into the rocks just 100 yards from their home near Sourdough Point at Lake Pend Oreille, Idaho. Oly, who works on the Sandpoint Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests as a Recreation Technician, Lake Ranger and Avalanche Forecaster, rushed to the scene along with his wife to initiate a rescue.

One of the passengers was ejected from the boat while the driver and other two passengers were trapped in the 18-foot open-bow powerboat. The driver sustained severe injuries and did not survive the crash, but if not for their response of Oly and Leila the outcome could have been much worse.

Victoria Christiansen, acting Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service Northern Region, recognized their bravery through the Regional Forester’s Honor Award for Heroism.

In addition to dealing with the darkness that night, a rocky shore with a six-foot drop to jagged rocks, spilled fuel, sharp fiberglass shards from the boat wreckage, blood and flotsam were all obstacles Oly and Leila had to navigate around as they performed their rescue. Following the crash, the Bonner County Sheriff’s Marine Patrol performed an investigation and produced a detailed report that included the value of their quick and competent response.

There is little doubt that if they had not responded, secured the scene, notified the Sheriff’s Office and performed first aid there would have been as many as two more additional fatalities that night. Despite the risk to their own personal safety, Oly and Leila demonstrated great heroism in order to save the lives of others.

The Honor Award for Heroism was among five awards recently recognized by Christiansen. The Northern Region has established a series of special awards to recognize exceptional performance or outstanding contributions and accomplishments to improve the quality and efficiency of Forest Service administrative and resource programs.